

MUST COPY + Return ASAP!!

"Rounders"

by

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KGB 115-120
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Third Draft

"Trust everyone, but always cut the cards."

--Benny Binion

FADE IN:

Black screen. Only the faint, ever-present rattle of clay checks, then a young but wise voice is heard:

(V.O.) MATT
Listen, this is the thing: "if you can't
spot the sucker in your first half hour
at the table, then you are the sucker."

INT. CAGE ELEVATOR - DAY OR NIGHT

The owner of the voice is MATT MCDERMOTT. He rides in the cramped and ancient elevator. Matt is almost 30, slim, comfortably dressed with a baseball cap pulled all the way down to his brow, a white turtleneck hiked all the way up to his chin. The bit of face showing in between is pasty white and expressionless.

The elevator stops and Matt pulls its rusty accordion door open. He stares at another door, a forbidding orange metal one with no handle.

An eye slit slides back and a round face is visible on the other side. The face chews.

He is Teddy KGB, a burly Russian in his early 50's. With his thicket of black curly hair he bears an uncomfortable resemblance to Vasily Alexiev.

Teddy fits an Oreo into his mouth and with a throwing of bolts and tumblers lets Matt in.

INT. 30TH STREET CARD ROOM - SAME

A bare Manhattan card room. Fluorescent tubes, once-white walls, and green felt card tables. A television shows the Yankees.

Several players monitor their cards and their Red, Green, and White checks.

Teddy KGB offers Matt an Oreo from his bag before sidling over to a sturdy built-in desk.

TEDDY KGB
Five hundred?

He moves for a rack of red and green checks.

MATT
Not today, Teddy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TEDDY KGB

No. What?

(The accent is heavy Eastern European.)

Matt removes a thick, rubber-banded roll of \$100's from his jean pocket.

MATT

Three stacks of High Society.

Teddy sticks an Oreo in his mouth and chews slowly. He looks at Matt's roll and his hand moves to a rack of black and gold checks. He puts stacks in front of Matt.

TEDDY KGB

Thirty thousand. Count it.

Matt tosses his wad as casually as he can on the desk. He counts the chips by stack height, then puts them back into their racks.

MATT

It's right.

TEDDY KGB

So, you're sitting the apple. Good.
Want a cookie?

MATT

No. Knish around?

Just then a man walks out of the bathroom. He is JOEY KNISH. Knish is fencing with 40, tall and gaunt, wearing gray gym sweats and smooth Foster Grants. Knish walks towards Matt.

(V.O.) MATT

Joey Knish is a New York legend. He's been a rounder, earning his living at cards, since he was 15 years old. Knish likes to say: if there's a degenerate who's on the scene in New York the past twenty years, he's either sat with him, bet with him, taken him, or been taken by him. So far as I know this is the truth. He's as close to a friend as there is in this place, but today I don't want to see him.

Knish takes note of the racks Matt holds.

KNISH

What're you, holding those for someone?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MATT

Yeah, I'm holding 'em for you.

KNISH

You should be, 'cause I hope you're not thinking of putting all that glimmer in play.

Matt shrugs and does not answer.

Knish looks around and motions Matt to a corner. He speaks quietly now.

KNISH

You don't wanna butt onions with these guys. They'll chew you up. Take your whole bankroll.

MATT

So you say.

KNISH

Plenty easy games. We get outta here, get some coffee, ride over to that soft seat in Queens.

MATT

I'm sitting with the top guys tonight.

KNISH

You're not ready.

MATT

Fuck you.

KNISH

What I'm telling you is, I'm not the one's gonna get fucked you sit no-limit. Watch 'em from two table's away, fine. Stand on the rail, great. But don't sit down with 'em, you can only lose.

Matt puts a cigarette in his mouth, but leaves it unlit.

KNISH

Why're you doing this?

MATT

I've got reasons.

KNISH

Teddy didn't get that house out in Deal losing to part-time players like you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

MATT

I know what I'm doing.

Knish pauses.

KNISH

You're making a run at it aren't you?
Rolling up a stake and going to Vegas.
I'm right, right?

MATT

I can beat the game.

KNISH

Maybe. Maybe this is a game can be beat,
but you know you can beat the 10-20 at
the Mayflower, and the Hi-Low at that
goulash joint on 79th Street.

MATT

Tired of that grind...

KNISH

Yeah? Okay. I unnerstand, I
unnerstand...Back to battle then.

Knish walks off and re-joins one of the games in progress.

Matt moves through the club toward the back room.

INT. BACK CARD ROOM - LATER

(V.O.) MATT

The game in question is No-Limit Texas
Hold 'Em. Minimum buy-in \$25,000. A
game like this doesn't come together
often outside the casinos. The stakes
attract rich flounders, and they in turn
attract the sharks. There are pros in
from three states for this one.

A small room dominated by a card table is crammed with the
bodies of players and a few railbirds tucked in the corners.
There is hardly room to move a chair back without hitting the
wall.

There is the constant sound of clattering checks, decks being
made, and chatter. A thick cloud of cigarette smoke hovers
above the action.

NOTE: Unless otherwise mentioned, every card players' hand
sports at least one ring, usually a gold and onyx or
twinkling diamond number, and most often worn on the pinky.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Matt, Teddy KGB, and eight other serious guys huddle around the table. Matt is the youngest by 10 years and 50 pounds. He sits with an unlit cigarette hanging from his lip.

The game is always self-dealt. On this hand Zagosh deals.

Zagosh is 50, with bad dentures and a Member's Only wardrobe.

ZAGOSH

Blinds up.

First two guys to Zagosh's left put in their checks.

(V.O.) MATT

Hold 'Em poker is the fastest, biggest action poker game currently spread. Each player is dealt two cards face down.

Cards are discreetly looked over. A few bets go in, a few hands are folded.

Teddy KGB rides along, calling the \$250 bet.

Zagosh deals a card face down into the discard pile.

ZAGOSH

Burn.

(V.O.) MATT

Then comes the flop--three community cards face up.

In the middle of the table Zagosh turns over 2-S, J-H, 4-D.

ZAGOSH

Rainbow flop, action's on you, Irving.

IRVING--Tremendous in size and dressed in traditional Hassidic garb of white shirt, black coat, yarmulke, beard. No ring.

IRVING

Bet. Five hundred.

The action goes around to TESTA. Five-foot-six, stringy hair combed over coast to coast, silk scarf around his neck.

TESTA

Gotta piece of that, Irv? That flop do you some good?

IRVING

I got something.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

TESTA

Alright, I'll give you a loose call.

He puts his chips in. The next two guys, TONY and FALOOB act.

TONY

Fold.

FALOOB

Out.

TEDDY KGB

Raise. I'm gonna raise...twenty-five hundred.

MATT

South street.

Matt throws in his cards. Zagosh does the same.

ZAGOSH

Ouch.

IRVING

Call.

Irving puts in checks.

TESTA

Fold. I don't have enough.

ZAGOSH

Pot right?

IRVING

Yeah.

TEDDY KGB

Burn and turn.

(V.O.) MATT

The fourth board card is known as the 'turn' and the final card as the 'river.'

Zagosh deals it. Cards come--one rag, no betting, and the river card is A-H.

IRVING

Twennyfive-hunerd.

Teddy pauses to eat a cookie before he pushes in a stack equal to all Irving has left.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

TEDDY KGB

Tap.

IRVING

The fuck could you have, betting all that money? Whatta you, got the Brass Brazilians?

Teddy is implacable.

IRVING

You trying to buy it? You can't fucking buy it, 'cause look what I have--spikes.

Irving turns over his pocket rockets, giving him trip' aces. He slides all his remaining checks in.

IRVING

Call...

Teddy turns over his cards--3-D, 5-S. He's made his straight. He smiles once briefly, his teeth black with Oreo, then collects the pot.

IRVING

How could you have raised on the flop? You were more than a 4 1/2 to 1 dog.

Nobody responds. Irving has been tapped out and he is already meaningless. The deal moves on to the left, Zagosh makes a new deck, and Irving leaves quietly.

TEDDY KGB

Finally, the kibitzer is gone.

ZAGOSH

You know, truth be told, I was surprised to see a guy like that in here the first place.

TESTA

That's the thing with the skull caps, the big con. Everyone thinks they're beyond reproach, but some of the biggest fucking degenerates I know wear 'em. One thing's got nothing to do with the other, Zagosh.

Zagosh riffles his checks.

ZAGOSH

Okay Moses, if you're the expert, why don't you spell 'yarmulke' for me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

TESTA

That's easy. Y-a-m--

ZAGOSH

Wrong. Absolutely wrong. So I don't want to hear anymore of your comments about my people--

TESTA

"Your people." Please, Zagosh, give it a rest. You're the only Jew I know who took Germany, plus the points.

INT. BACK CARD ROOM - LATER

A few new faces sit around the table, stacks are somewhat higher and lower.

SY is a new face--65 years old, bald but for a crown of fringe, corduroy jacket, sans-a-belt slacks.

A hand has just ended and KENNY--linebacker's build twenty long years ago--has won a medium pot.

SY moves to rake in the cards and clean the deck for an upcoming deal, but takes a few of Kenny's checks with him. Several at the table notice. There is a PAUSE...

Sy 'innocently' stacks the checks with his own.

SAVINO--crisply dressed and coiffed Paul Anka style.

SAVINO (TO HIMSELF)

Fucking cocksucker. (ALoud) Teddy, this fucking cocksucker, what's your name--Sy--just fucking kited the pot.

All action at the table stops dead.

(V.O.) MATT

The first thing you do when there's a disturbance at the table is cover your chips and watch the cards.

SY

Who?

SAVINO

You. I saw you rake the chips in and put 'em in your stack.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SY

No, no. Those? A few, by accident. I, uh, was about to give 'em to Kenny.

SAVINO

I waited to see. Once you stacked 'em, you stole 'em.

Everyone at the table pipes up in anger now. Sy turns to Matt to back his appeal.

SY

You know me, you've seen me around, I wouldn't--

Matt slides his chair away from Sy like he's rotten meat.

MATT

I don't know this guy, I'm not with 'im.

TEDDY KGB (TO SY)

Get outta here.

Sy gets ready to protest.

TEDDY KGB

No. I saw it.

Resigned, Sy starts to collect his checks.

TEDDY KGB

Leave it.

SY

What?

TEDDY KGB

I said fucking go.

(V.O.) MATT

All the soft places in New York this guy could have picked for check copping, and he had to try Teddy KGB's. For a few hundred a hand he loses his whole buy-in, and believe me, that's not all he loses. A week, two weeks from now, he'll turn up near the Meadowlands, or over in Elmhurst. He may not actually be dead, but he'll wish he was.

Sy is escorted out by a few sizeable Russian spectators.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Teddy pays Kenny his stolen checks from Sy's stack and puts the rest to the side.

SAVINO
You believe this fucking guy, walkin' in here?

TEDDY KGB
Okay, let's play some cards.

The next hand is dealt.

INT. BACK CARD ROOM - MUCH LATER

Things have condensed, there are only three players left beside Matt--Teddy, Savino, and an Asian guy named HENRY LIN. Lin is 40, wire-rimmed glasses, baseball hat.

Teddy and Henry Lin are in charge of the table based on their large stacks. Matt is doing well with \$50,000 in front of him.

(V.O.) MATT
No-limit. There's no other game in which fortunes can change so much from hand to hand. A brilliant player can get a strong hand cracked, go 'on tilt' and lose his mind along with every single chip in front of him. This is why The World Series of Poker is decided over a No-Limit Hold 'Em table. Some people, pro's even, won't play No-Limit. They can't handle the swings.

Matt deals. Blinds go up. The first two cards go out.

(V.O.) MATT
But there are others, like Doyle Brunson, who consider No-Limit the only pure game left. I guess I feel the same way. Like Papa Wallenda said, "life is on the wire, the rest is just waiting."

Angle on Matt's cards--A-C, 9-C.

LIN
Fold.

MATT
I gotta raise. Five hundred.

TEDDY KGB
's a position raise. I call it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SAVINO
Pasadena.

He folds. Knish walks into the room and watches.

The flop comes--A-S, 9-S, 8-C.

TEDDY KGB
Go 'head.

(V.O.) MATT
Here's the beauty of this game. I flop top two, and I wanna keep him in the hand. Against your average schnook, I'd just check it along and set my trap, but not against K.G.B. If I don't bet at it, he'll know I'm slow-playing a monster, and unless he catches big, he'll fold first chance he gets. No, against this guy, what I've gotta do is overbet the pot--make it look like I'm trying to buy it. Then maybe he plays back at me, and I get paid off.

Matt puts in chips.

MATT
Two thousand, Teddy. The bet's two thousand dollars.

Teddy looks at Matt, puts an Oreo in his mouth and slowly chews. Then he acts.

TEDDY KGB
I call.

(V.O.) MATT
I put Teddy on a flush draw. The only thing I don't want to see is a spade.

TEDDY KGB
Burn and turn.

The card comes, 9-H. Matt's hand is 9's full of A's.

TEDDY KGB
To the bettor...

MATT
Check's good.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

(V.O.) MATT

Here my check doesn't look suspicious.
Just looks like the board pairing scares
me a little. At this point, the only way
I'm gonna get action is if Teddy makes
his flush on the river...Now, I do wanna
see a spade.

The river card comes, Q-S.

TEDDY KGB

I'm gonna bet. Bet, fifteen thousand.

MATT

Time.

Matt pauses, as if he's deciding whether to call. He seems
anguished over whether or not he should bet.

(V.O.) MATT

I want him to think that I'm pondering a
call, but all I'm really thinking about
is the fucking Mirage.

MATT

I don't think you've got spades. I'm
gonna raise, Teddy.

Matt counts his stacks and pushes all his remaining checks
into the pot.

MATT

All in. Thirty-three thousand.

Teddy's reaction is immediate, he pushes stacks of checks in.

TEDDY KGB

You're right, I don't have spades--

(V.O.) MATT

I know before the cards are even turned
over.

Teddy turns his cards revealing his hand.

TEDDY KGB

Aces full, Matt.

Matt sits there looking stunned, like he just took a shovel
blow to the face.

Teddy rakes in the pot and the game breaks up. After a swing
like this, it's over.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Matt is immobile. He now sits alone.

Knish comes up behind him with a concilliatory pat on the shoulder.

KNISH
C'mon, get up. Walk it off.

MATT
I can't move

KNISH
We'll talk about it. I'll buy you
breakfast. Then we can go over to the
10th Street Baths and have a schvitz.

MATT
I couldn't even afford the steam.

Knish lights up a joint and talks through a lungfull of smoke.

KNISH
Tapped, huh? Didn't leave yourself any
outs?

MATT
I'm down to the felt, Knish. I lost it
all--my case money, my tuition,
everything.

Knish profers the bone. Matt shakes it off.

KNISH
Happens to everyone. Time to time
everyone goes bust. You'll be back in
the game before you know it.

MATT
I'm done, Joey. I'm out of it.

KNISH
They all say at first. Meanwhile,
anything I can do?

MATT
Kill me. Put me outta my misery.

KNISH
Not my line of work. You shouldda talked
to KGB about that while he was filleting
ya...Anyway, let me stake you. Standard
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

KNISH (cont'd)
deal, 25% of your winnings. You lose,
it's on me.

Matt looks at Knish.

MATT
I'd just throw it away....You still got
the truck?

TABLEAU--Six Months Later

EXT. KAPPOCK ST., YONKERS - PRE-DAWN

A dingy 10-ton GMC truck rumbles down the road.

INT. TRUCK CAB - SAME

Matt drives the truck, pulling on a cup of road coffee
between gears.

He looks tired in a way he didn't at the poker table and he
might've put on just a few pounds.

(V.O.) MATT
Knish originally got his nickname because
of the route he drove along the Hudson
delivering baked goods and beverages in
Westchester and the Bronx. He started
during a run of cold cards and stopped
when the cards finally warmed up. After
that he began leasing it out to rounders
looking for steady money. I'm the fourth
guy to drive this route in the past five
years.

EXT. STOP N' SIP - PRESENT

The truck pulls over to an always open gas station and
convenience store.

(V.O.) MATT
At least the fourth guy to break the
cardinal fucking rule: always leave
yourself outs. See, in every round of
cards someone's hand is in the lead. But
there're cards in the deck that can save
you. These are your 'out' cards. You
gotta know what they are, you gotta know
where they are, you gotta know when they
disappear. And if they do disappear, if
someone else gets 'em, then there's only
one thing you can do--throw your cards in
the muck and move on to the next deal,

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

(cont'd)
 'cause you're drawing dead. Applies to a
 player's life outside of the card room
 same as it does at the table.
 Politicians know this, good lawyers
 understand it too.

Matt slides out of the cab and opens the back. He loads a
 hand truck with cases of Pepsi and Little Debbies snacks.

INT. STOP N' SIP - SAME

The store's tiny interior is crammed with low cost goods and
 bad-health foods. A lone hot dog sweats on spinning silver
 rollers.

Matt wheels in the goods.

Behind the counter a gaunt, unshaven man, MOOGIE, leans and
 reads the paper. He gestures where Matt should put the
 stuff.

Matt steps to the counter for Moogie's signature on the slip.

MOOGIE
 Lemme ask you somethin'. In a legal
 sense, can fucking Steinbrenner really
 move the Yankees? Does he have the
 fucking right to just move 'em?

Moogie signs the slip and Matt takes it back.

MATT
 How do I know?

MOOGIE
 You din't learn that yet?

MATT
 No. I think they teach about
 Steinbrenner the third year of law
 school.

Moogie shrugs and Matt wheels the hand truck out.

INT. LAW LIBRARY - NIGHT

Matt sits close with JO, his significant other. She is
 minimalist, beautiful and a bit tightly wound. Not a woman
 who'd take kindly to the suggestion she dress it up and show
 it off a little.

A large pile of files and casebooks rests on the table. It
 is clear they've been at it for a long time, and the work
 smells dull.

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CONTINUED:

They each have glowing computer screens in front of them.

MATT

I love the way your hair falls along your neck. You're so beautiful--

JO

Alright. Still have to do the work, Matt.

MATT

I'm very serious about the work.

JO

Yeah, you figure 'cause you're tight with Dean Petrovsky, you don't have to know this stuff. But you're wrong, sweetie, they grade anonymously. Now, define 'taking under false pretense...'

MATT

Listen, you just get me through the Mulligan Moot Court Competition, I'll worry about the rest.

JO

The Mulligan. Yeah, I'll help prep you. But you're the one who's gonna be answering those judges.

MATT

Fine, leave 'em to me. Team's still on for the meeting day after tomorrow, right?

JO

Yeah. You know, if we win the Mulligan, we get to face off with Columbia. And they're tough.

MATT

Tough? Well, they're rich, and they've all been bred for this shit.

Matt takes pages out of the printer and collates them.

MATT

That's it for this. Can we be done now?

Jo stretches and looks at her watch.

JO

It is pretty late. Let's go home.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MATT

I'll drop this stuff off, you go on home. Besides, I've still gotta unload the truck.

JO

Jesus, how long can you keep up this schedule? Don't you miss sleeping in the same bed as me, Matt?

Matt rubs his eyes and smiles.

MATT

Sleep's overrated.

JO

Who's talking about sleep?

Jo rubs his neck while Matt puts some files in his bag and they leave.

INT. DEAN PETROVSKY'S OFFICE - REAL LATE

A wood panelled lawyer's office that would look a lot more decorous if six men, mostly in their 60's weren't sitting around a hastily cleared desk playing cards. Their game is \$10-\$20 7-Stud.

A slight knock is heard and the door swings open. Matt enters.

(V.O.) MATT

The Judges' Game. I'd heard about it for years on the street, before I was even in law school. A rotating group of 10 or 12 judges, prosecutors, and professors. They all have money, and in my old line of work it would have been pretty sweet to have any of them owing me favors. Only problem is, no one can get in the game anymore. One rounder, Danny Linetta, sat under some pretense, but when they found out he was a pro, he couldn't cross the street without a legal hassle. Even his regular club, Vorshay's, got shut down. Place'd been open since 1907.

DEAN ABE PETROVSKY, a large bearded man, presides over the game. He waves Matt in. He speaks with a Brooklyn/Israeli accent.

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CONTINUED:

PETROVSKY

Matthew, you've got some things for me?

JUDGE EUGENE NARDELLI, New York State Supreme Court, has coloring to match his cigar ash.

JUDGE NARDELLI

Kid, he paying you for this late night shit?

MATT

Knowledge is my only reward, sir.

JUDGE NARDELLI

Let me tell ya, it ain't worth it.
Why'nt ya become a jockey. Do something useful.

JUDGE RAPPAPORT, Court of Appeals, prunish looking.

JUDGE RAPPAPORT

Kid's a little tall, isn't he Gene?

D.A. SHIELDS, a bald, hard looking guy with a deep South Shore accent.

D.A. SHIELDS

Enough with the Aqueduct recruiting spiel, bet's to you, Rappy.

PETROVSKY

Mathew is heading the defense in the Moot Court you're presiding over next week, Gene. Besides, he needs the background if he's going to clerk for one of you this summer.

A groan goes up from the table. EISEN, a big-voiced, gray older guy.

EISEN

Abe, I thought ya liked the kid, why ya gonna do that to him?

JUDGE NARDELLI

Why you want to make him a civil servant?

D.A. Shields leans over conspiratorily.

D.A. SHIELDS

Word to the wise--stay in the private sector. That Nassau defense attorney's game--they use our chips for coasters.

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CONTINUED: (2)

Their game continues. PROFESSOR GREEN, real academic type is first to fold.

Matt removes files from his bag and puts them in the corner of the office.

D.A. SHIELDS
Call.

EISEN
Call.

(V.O.) MATT
The amazing thing is, in this collection of great legal minds, there isn't a single real card player.

Matt creeps up behind Petrovsky as the bet comes to him. Before Abe can act, Matt impulsively pushes in a portion of his chips.

MATT
Raise. The Professor raises.

Matt receives some serious ruffled stares. He wears a broad smile on his face though.

(V.O.) MATT
I don't know if I'm going to bring my legal career to a crashing halt before it even starts, but I just can't help myself.

PETROVSKY (WHISPERED TO MATT)
You're sure, Mathew? I would have probably just called.

MATT
You're good.

PETROVSKY
Okay, raise it is.

The players grudgingly call the bet. The final card comes for each, face down.

JUDGE RAPPAPORT
Check to Martin and Lewis over there.

D.A. SHIELDS
Check to the raiser.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

JUDGE NARDELLI

Check.

EISEN

Czechoslovakia.

Abe goes to show Matt their last card, which Matt hardly glances at.

MATT

What's the limit?

JUDGE NARDELLI

\$20. The big bet's \$20.

MATT

Good. Twenty-dollar bet for the Professor.

D.A. SHIELDS

You've seen half the hand, how the fuck're you betting into us?

JUDGE RAPPAPORT

Always the prosecutor, eh Larry?

EISEN

You sure this is wise, Abe? It's your money the kid's betting with.

MATT

It's plenty wise, because we know what we're holding, and we know what you're holding.

JUDGE NARDELLI

The fuck you know what we all have.

MATT

A summer clerkship in your office says I do.

JUDGE NARDELLI

I don't bet with jobs like that, but let's just say I'll put you at the top of the list if you're right.

MATT

Okay. You were looking for that third three, but you forgot that Professor Green folded it on Fourth Street and you're doing your best to represent that you have it. The D.A. made his two pair,

(MORE)

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CONTINUED: (4)

MATT (cont'd)

but he knows they're no good here. Judge Rappaport was looking to squeeze out that diamond flush, but he came up short. And Mr. Eisen is futilely hoping that his Queens'll stand up. Like I said, the Dean's bet is \$20.

Looks range from amazed to disgusted as cards are thrown into the muck.

Petrovsky rakes in his unexpected pot.

EISEN

What'd you have, Abe?

PETROVSKY

Nothing but a busted straight.

Howls of indignance from the assembled crew go up.

JUDGE NARDELLI.

Alright kid, your first assignment-- pull up a seat next to me.

Matt picks up his bag.

MATT

I'd like to Judge...but I don't play cards.

Matt exits.

INT. TRUCK - LATER

Matt drives the truck and looks miserable doing so.

(V.O.) MATT

I tell ya, it's hard leaving that game. An open invitation to lay with those lambs--but I'm retired. The truth is I can always find games though. Easy games, tough games, straight games, crooked games, home games. I could turn this truck onto the Jersey Turnpike and be at the Taj in two hours. Instead I'm driving to Queens to drop it off.

EXT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Matt locks up the truck and pulls down a steel door behind it before going on his way.

INT. APARTMENT - LATER

Matt enters his fifth story walk-up. It's sparsely decorated with white walls, and IKEA furniture.

Angle on--a bookshelf with two distinct groupings. One shelf is the standard first year law casebooks. The other holds the requisite readings on poker: Yardley, King, Alvarez, Caro's "Book of Tells," Sklansky's "Theory of Poker," and the bible, the silver covered opus, "The Super System," by Doyle Brunson.

Matt tosses his keys on the table and sits down.

Jo walks out of the bedroom. She wears a professional pantsuit and is ready to leave for her day.

JO
How'd it go?

MATT
Missed you. Sick of that fucking route.

JO
You're almost done with the truck.
Mulligan Competiton, final exams, summer
internship, soon your name'll be on some
firm's letterhead.

MATT
Yeah.

JO
Don't sound so excited...Anyway, I'm
already late for work.

She leans down and gives him a peck. He pulls her down onto his lap, looking for more.

JO
Come on, Mathew. Don't tempt me.

He begins kissing at her neck and ear.

MATT
Tempt you? Could hardly keep the truck
on the road thinking 'bout you here all
alone last night.

He persists.

JO
Matt, please.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATT

C'mon, you know you can't resist.

Jo is kissing him back. They're all over each other.

JO

I don't have time, baby.

MATT

Time? I'll be quick. You won't even feel a thing.

JO

We both know that's not true.

Jo pulls herself free, gets up, straightens her outfit.

Matt goes to the kitchen sink and splashes water on his face.

MATT

I'm telling you, Jo, these long nights are killing me.

JO

They never used to.

MATT

Those nights didn't seem long. Buy in at 8:00, look up and it's morning. Next thing you know, it's dark again.

JO

Well at least the semester's almost over.

Matt hesitates for a moment.

MATT

Yeah, and you know what? I think I'm all set for the summer. After I left you at the library, I impressed Judge Nardelli. Looks like I'm in line for a clerkship.

She eyes him curiously.

JO

What do you mean?

MATT

Hear me out now. The judges were playing cards, and I read Nardelli's hand blind.

Jo stiffens.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JO

So instead of coming to bed with me, you played cards with some judge?

MATT

No, no. I wasn't even playing. I just caught his eye by seeing through their cards. Now, as long as I don't fuck up Moot Court, the job'll be mine.

JO

That's terrific, Mathew. Really. A parlor trick. You'll be a great help to him when he writes an opinion on high stakes poker.

She gathers her briefcase.

MATT

C'mon, babe, you're the one who told me I should bring my poker skills to the courtroom.

JO

Please, Matt. What I meant was you should use your head. The way you read people, project an image, weigh options. The way you can calculate odds on the spot. I told you that stuff could make you a kick ass trial lawyer. I didn't mean you should con your way into a summer job.

She grabs her bag and heads for door.

MATT

Con? I was networking.

Jo stops and speaks patiently.

JO

You don't get it. It's about knowing the law not dazzling people. They'll never take you seriously this way. You'll be no different than those ex-college athletes--secure job with the D.A.'s office, as long as they never miss a Lawyers' League game. If you get in this way, Matt, you'll always be a hustler to them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

MATT

Yeah? But I didn't even sit with them,
Jo. I didn't play.

Jo starts putting on her coat.

JO

Any other surprises this morning?

MATT

Well, no surprises, but you know Worm
gets out tomorrow.

JO

Tomorrow, beautiful.

MATT

I promised I'd be there.

JO

Worm...I can't even believe you still
know someone called 'Worm.'

MATT

The guy's like my brother, Jo.

JO

I know. I just thought we were done with
people like him.

MATT

He's like my brother.

There's an uncomfortable stillness between them before she
leaves. The door closes hard behind her..

MATT

Shit, didn't even play...

Matt stares at the door a beat before pulling out a deck. He
shuffles, and deals out a hand of Hold 'Em, face up. He
stares at the cards.

INT. DAY ROOM - DAY

A pale gray painted day room in Clinton Correctional
Facility, Dannemora, New York. Bare tables and chairs are
the room's only furniture.

A game of hearts is taking place between a few inmates. Most
of them have long hair, and are large and imposing in their
jumpsuits, even if they do have shower sandals on their feet.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

One guy, the smallest by a foot, and wearing a patchy Van Dyke on his chin is LES FRIEDMAN--also known as WORM.

One of his opponents is ROY, and Roy is not happy.

ROY

Motherfucker, that's the fourth time you've laid the Bitch of Spades on me.

WORM

Is it? No, hand before last I was stuck with Black Maria.

ROY

Yeah, but you shot the moon on that hand, so it helped you.

WORM

I'm just saying, you didn't get it four times. Anyhow, that's five hundred, I think. So...we're done here.

Worm gathers up several packs of cigarettes from each of the players.

One of the losers, DERALD, is sore.

DERALD

You ain't walking outta here wit our 'grits, Worm.

WORM

The fuck do you mean? I'll hold 'em like always, I won't smoke 'em. You get double or nothing tomorrow.

A buzzer sounds and a crew-cut GUARD enters the room.

GUARD

Friedman! The hell are you sitting here for? You're processed. Come on.

DERALD

Processed? This motherfucker's getting the jump?

Worm tries to look surprised.

ROY

Man, have some decency. You can buy all the smoke you want in half an hour...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WORM

Alright, alright. Here you go.

Worm takes an open pack from his jumpsuit pocket and shakes a few loose ones out onto the table. Yeah, they'll miss Worm.

EXT. PRISON GATE - LATER

Worm now wears street clothes--black pants and a black leather sport coat like Shaft's.

Across the street Matt leans against a Jeep Cherokee.

The moment Matt and Worm see each other the air is full of many things, joy, relief, memories, a bittersweet sadness.

They embrace.

WORM

Matt. I knew you'd be here, man. Never let me down, never.

MATT

Great to see you, Corporal...It wasn't the same with you gone. They toughen you up at all in there?

Matt puts Worm in a friendly headlock.

WORM

Nice car, looks like you're prospering.

MATT

I borrowed it.

WORM

Then get in your borrowed car and drive us far the fuck away from this place.

INT. JEEP - LATER

Matt drives, Worm rides and smokes.

WORM

...So I got three games going on a regular basis. One with the shvatzorum, one with the gringos, and one with the hacks. And the trick is, I gotta make enough in the white game to lose in the hack game. And I gotta trim enough from the brothers to keep myself in the style to which I've become accustomed, without getting the shit kicked outta me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATT

Tools?

Worm raises his hands.

MATT

Ah, solo los manos.

WORM

Painting's outta the question. Only an asshole'd be holding evidence inside. Wait'll you see whatta artist I've become.

Matt laughs.

WORM

What about you?

MATT

Forget about it. I don't mess with the railroad bible anymore.

WORM

You're shitting me.

MATT

I got cleaned out.

WORM

Mattie Mc-Dee? I don't believe it.

MATT

Yeah, it was a real blood game over at KGB's place.

WORM

Mad Russian emptied your pockets?

MATT

Didn't want to tell you while you were in there--dispirit you like that.

WORM

You know, inside there were some bad motherfuckers. But if you were hooked up with KGB nobody, not the guards, the fucking warden, or the scumbags said dick to you...

MATT

Too bad you weren't.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WORM

Yeah...

Worm plays with the radio, finds a song.

WORM

So it's just law school now, huh? What about money?

MATT

I'm driving Knish's truck.

WORM

Jesus. Well don't you worry son, the cavalry is here--

MATT

Don't even think about it. I'm not playing. I'm done.

Worm pauses, thinks about it.

WORM

Lemme tell ya about a kid I knew. This was a pretty smart kid. A little funny looking, bit of a pansy, but he had potential written all over him...Used to try his hand at flipping baseball cards 'gainst the older kids down the stairwell of this shitty Paterson housing project where he lived. One day this kid's climbing the stairs, tears and snot running all down his shirt. Not a baseball card, no Topps, no Fleer, no nothing, left in his shoebox.

Matt smiles.

MATT

Here we go...

WORM

Luckily for this particular loser, another young fella--this one wise to the ways of the street--happens upon him. For some reason this other guy--the wise, good looking, handsome one--

MATT

Sure he was.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

WORM

Feels bad for his sorry-assed neighbor and offers to teach him how to win every flip. But what does the snivelling young buck say?

MATT

I'm done. I'm not playing anymore.

WORM

Exactly. I took care of you then, I'll take care of you now. Remember? I showed you the ropes. Got you on your feet. By the end of the summer you were trading Willie Mays rookie cards for Playboys...

MATT

And the rest is history.

WORM

That's right. Now listen, I know a game-- a real berry patch just outside the city.

Matt gives Worm a glance.

MATT

Well, I'll drop you.

EXT. PRINCETON UNIVERSITY CAMPUS - EVENING

The jeep drives past idyllic ivy-covered buildings.

EXT. TIGER INN - SAME

They park in front of a building that looks like a fraternity house that would be listed in the Robb Report.

(V.O.) MATT

Tiger Inn is an Eating Club at Princeton University. One of those clubs that has been around for generations, where the sons of the well-heeled dine and socialize. This one is invitation only and the chances that guys like us would rate one are about the same as making a double belly-buster straight draw. Leave it to the Worm to not only know about the back room card game but burrow himself in.

They get out of the car.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WORM

I know a girl named Barbara. She's the hostess here. I walk in, I'm her "cousin," from outta town, new to poker...

Matt nods.

MATT

Sounds solid. Nice hook up.

WORM

Pretty damn nice, only one problem. I got this feeling?

MATT

Which feeling's that exactly?

WORM

You know the feeling. You got your table all set...

MATT

Yeah.

WORM

You got your knife and fork...

MATT

Uh-huh.

WORM

You got your sauce there, your A-1, your Luger's--

Matt reaches into his pocket and pulls out his money clip.

MATT

Only thing missing's the stake.

WORM

Exactly. A nickel should get me started.

Matt's face pinches. His roll is looking anemic. After the first \$100 he peels, there are only \$20's.

WORM

Damn, how you livin'?

MATT

A little light. I told you. Anyway, I've got \$220 for you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WORM

Shit, that's only yoleven big bets. Not even enough to establish table image.

MATT

Good, so forget this game. I'll straighten you out tomorrow in the City.

WORM

Need to get started tonight. I'm already behind.

MATT

You just got out, what's the fucking hurry?

WORM

The hurry? At least five guys been waiting on my release.

MATT

How much you owe?

WORM

Over ten. Can't even figure the juice...Two-twenty, damn. Maybe a card player could get something going with \$220...

Matt looks at Worm, then shakes his head.

MATT

I heard you asking in the car, and I hear you now, but I can't do it. I just can't do it. I've made promises--

WORM

To that girlfriend of yours?

MATT

To her, and to myself also. I think it's time--after what happened to you, after the way KGB took me down--to live it straight.

Worm shrugs.

WORM

I unnerstand. I respect that, and it's alright and I'll be fine. I'll just have to make some moves early that might play better to a later audience...Not the first time...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Matt hands Worm the money.

MATT
Premium hands, buddy.

WORM
I'll make sure of it...

Worm gives Matt a handshake and heads for the Inn.

WORM
And Matt?

MATT
Yeah?

WORM
It's great to see you, man.

Matt turns around and gets in the car.

INT. JEEP - LATER

Matt drives grimly, his eyes fixed straight ahead. The radio plays quietly.

He doesn't take his eyes off the road.

Matt's face takes on a granite expression. He jerks the wheel to the right and stands on the brake. The jeep churns gravel on the shoulder of the road.

CUT TO:

INT. TIGER INN - LATER

Matt enters the club, which resembles an intimate restaurant. Oil portraits hang on wood panelled walls, the tables are polished dark wood. Young diners sit comfortably in hunter green, hundred year old leather chairs.

Matt takes out a pack of cigarettes and slips a much folded \$100 from the lining. He puts a cigarette in his mouth, but doesn't light it.

(V.O.) MATT
In his *Confessions of a Winning Poker Player*, Jack King said: "Few players recall big pots they have won--strange as it seems--but every player can remember with remarkable accuracy the outstanding tough beats of his career." Seems true to me, 'cause walking in here I can
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

(cont'd)
hardly remember how I built my bankroll,
but I can't stop thinking of how I lost
it.

At a desk near the door, BARBARA--tall, olive complexion, far too attractive for the Ivy League--takes coats and acts as hostess.

BARBARA
You must be Matt...

MATT
Uh huh.

BARBARA
Worm said you'd be joining him. Come
with me.

She leads him through the dining room. Matt's head swivels discreetly at the rich appointment of the room.

MATT
I'm not here to play, just keep company.

BARBARA
No, no, that's no good. See, here's the
play, you're my new boyfriend looking for
a regular game.

MATT
Really. I'm not much of a card player.

BARBARA
Worm told me that's precisely what you
are. My cut's twenty-five percent.

MATT
I see.

INT. DEN - SAME

She leads him into a small, private den, which is even woodier and clubbier than the outer room.

Around a gleaming oak table sit five guys in tweed and elbow patches, and incongruously, Worm.

BARBARA
Gentlemen, this is my boyfriend, Mathew.
A ripple of greetings goes up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BARBARA

Be nice to him. Leave him enough to buy
me breakfast.

She gives Matt a warm kiss on the lips.

BARBARA

Good luck, honey.

Barbara leaves and Matt sits down. As all the guys introduce
themselves, Matt buys chips with his matchstick hundred.

MATT

Deal me in, I guess.

The dealer is Worm.

WORM

The game's Chicago.

BIRCH, milk-blond hair, bad skin, reedy voice, speaks to
Matt.

BIRCH

You know Chicago?

MATT

Remind me.

BIRCH

Stud game, high spade in the hole wins
half the pot.

Antes go in, and Worm deals the first three cards to each
player.

ANGLE ON MATT'S CARDS: Next to a J-H, he has the Ace of
Spades in the hole.

Matt gives Worm a look.

INT. DEN - LATER

Matt is starting to build a large stack of checks while Worm
is just holding on.

A hand has been dealt out to the river.

WAGNER

Are you at University, Mathew?

BIRCH

Check.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATT

No. I go to law school, in the city.
Raise fifty.

HIGGINS

Call. Columbia?

MATT

Fordham, night.

STEINY, tortoise shell glasses, curly hair.

STEINY

Call. Nights? You must be quite
industrious.

Matt smiles affably.

BIRCH

Call.

MATT

My pedigree wasn't as spotless as all
yours I guess...I'm full.

Matt turns his cards over and rakes in the pot.

As the next hands are dealt, quick cuts show the moves Matt
and Worm make.

(V.O.) MATT

Worm and I fall into our old rhythm like
Clyde Frazier and Pearl Monroe. We bring
out all the old school tricks. Stuff
that would never play in the city--
signaling, chip placing, trapping, we
even run the old best hand play. I can
probably crack the game just as quickly
straight up, but there's no risk in this
room. Now, some people might look down
on Worm's mechanics, call it immoral, but
as Canada Bill Jones said: "it's immoral
to let a sucker keep his money." Like
they teach you in One-L: *caveat emptor*,
pal.

Matt takes another pot.

(V.O.) MATT

Worm really has become an artist too.
Discard Culls, Pickup Culls, Overhand
Runups, The Double Duke--his technique is
flawless. But his judgement is a little

(MORE)

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CONTINUED: (2)

(cont'd)

off. A few times I have to fold the case hand just so it won't be obvious. Still, he plays the part of the loser to perfection...

Worm is out of chips. He stands up and puts on his jacket.

WORM

Like my uncle Murphy says: "When the last dime is gone, it's time to move on." Thanks a fucking lot guys. I'm outta here.

The guys chortle at his misfortune.

HIGGINS

Come back anytime. Your money's always good here...

Worm exits.

INT. TIGER INN MAIN ROOM - LATER

The place is cleaned up and shut down for the night. Barbara is near the door as the guys come through the dining room. The card game is over.

BIRCH

Your boyfriend's lucky in love and lucky in cards. He won every hand there at the end.

STEINY

Just the hand's he played, Birch. I'm going home, I have an 8 o'clock tomorrow.

MATT

It's not how much luck you have, it's when you have it.

The players slip on coats. Matt slips his arm around Barbara.

MATT

Only bad thing about cards is it keeps me away from you, sweetheart.

The players leave. Barbara shuts the lights and she and Matt step outside.

EXT. TIGER INN PARKING LOT - SAME

Matt has his arm around her intimately as they walk to her car. She checks the parking lot to make sure everyone is

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

gone then knocks on the roof of her car. When Matt sees it's clear he steps back from her. Worm pops up and gets out.

WORM

Cut up the green.

Matt takes out a wad of cash--mostly \$50s and \$20s. He counts it and hands Barbara hers.

MATT

Yours is \$300.

BARBARA

Thank you, boys.

WORM

When can we see you again?

BARBARA

Give it a few--

MATT

No, no. I'm done. This one was just, just because...How'd you know I'd come?

WORM

Josey Wales, The Preacher, The Man with No Name. Clint always doubles back when a friend's in need.

BARBARA

All right then boys. Matt, we leave together. I'll drop him around the corner, Worm.

Matt flips Worm the keys to the jeep. Barbara and Matt get in her car.

EXT. WEST SIDE PARKING LOT - MORNING

Matt and Worm get out of the jeep and Matt turns the keys over to an ATTENDANT. Worm reads his watch.

WORM

6:52. We made nice time. Breakfast?

MATT

Nah. I have to fucking get home--if she hasn't changed the locks on me. And I barely have time for a shower before school.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WORM

Come on, I'll pick the lock for ya. I'm thinking waffles, egg sandwich. I'm buying.

MATT

Save your money for once. I can't. I'll see you later.

WORM

At least could you straighten me out before you go?

Matt hesitates

MATT

Alright, I'll skip the shower. Come on...

They walk toward Seventh Avenue heading east.

EXT. HIGH RISE - A BIT LATER

A plush looking building in the mid-20's between Park and Madison.

WORM

Here? Real carpet joint, huh?

Matt holds up before entering through glass doors.

MATT

Listen, it may not look like Teddy's place, but this ain't the Ivy Leagues either. You can't fuck up around here. You gotta play on your belly.

WORM

Sure. 'Course, chief.

MATT

No, I'm serious. You know I got nothing against the way you help yourself. But the guys here are fast company, they'll spot every move, and you won't just get a finger up your spine.

WORM

Fine, already.

They enter the lobby and make a left down a flight of stairs.

INT. DOOR - SAME

Matt and Worm stand in front of a steel security door. A small camera films them from a corner above. A magnetic click unlocks the door and they step in.

INT. MAYFLOWER CLUB - SAME

Just inside the door a small sign identifies the club. There is a laquered reception counter with a computer terminal on it.

A young woman steps out from behind the desk. She is PETRA, late 20's, short dark hair, friendly but with an edge of reserve. Around her neck is a panic button.

PETRA

Matt McDermott. How you doin', Mattie?
The computer tried to delete you last week, but I knew you'd be back.

MATT

Well I'm not, but good to see you, Petra.
This is Les Friedman, he's like my brother.

Worm extends a hand.

WORM

Call me Worm.

PETRA

Hey.

The phone rings and Petra steps back behind the desk to answer it.

Matt and Worm take in the club. It has a pool table, a large-screened television tuned to ESPN, and several poker tables, though only one game is going on in the far corner.

WORM

What's with the necklace on her?

MATT

They're wired right in to the 9th Precinct. They got 'em on the payroll.

Petra re-joins them.

MATT

What're they playing?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PETRA

Twenty-forty forced rotation is the only game going right now.

Matt scopes the game longingly.

MATT

Is Donnie sitting 20-40 now? The game's that soft?

PETRA

Yeah, it's a real live game. Are you guys going to play?

Matt hesitates, his eyes never leaving the table.

MATT

Ahh, not me. I'm gone.

WORM

Gone? Listen to me Petra, there was a time two horses kicking couldn't drag Mattie away from an action game.

PETRA

I've seen it--

WORM

So you know what I'm talking about then. Sweet game like that. Have a seat, Matt, we'll take this room apart.

Matt gives Worm a stare.

MATT

Not gonna happen. I told you, one time thing. I'm off it, man.

WORM

Fucking shame. Alright, go runnin' home to her.

MATT

Sure, Worm, I will. Take care of 'im, Petra.

Matt takes off.

WORM

Girl's got a hold of them, I guess...

Worm looks around the place again, sizing it up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATT

Yeah, that's what it was. Entertaining Worm.

JO

He's out one night and you don't come home? You don't even call.

He stops, looks at her.

MATT

What can I say?

She looks at him, stands to leave, then pauses. She puts her arms around him.

JO

Matt, it's okay. Jesus, I was afraid you were going to tell me you were playing cards. Can you just call next time?

She embraces him. Matt's expression is blank.

MATT

Yeah.

JO

Shower quick, I'll wait for you, we'll go to the meeting together.

INT. BATHROOM - SAME

Matt walks into the bathroom and in the mirror sees himself, the unlit cigarette still in his mouth. He takes it out and puts it on the counter. He empties his pockets there too-- keys, change, his roll, fat once again with \$20's.

He undresses and steps into the shower.

Jo enters as the room grows steamy, and silently looks at the money. She leaves without a word.

INT. CAFETERIA - LATER

Matt sits at a table going over notes with the Moot Trial Team. They are Jo, GRIGGS, and KELLY. Griggs is unshaven with luggage under his eyes, Kelly straight reddish hair and plaid skirt. All are smoking copiously.

JO

The most important thing to remember is to be respectful to the judges, but not
(MORE)

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CONTINUED:

JO (cont'd)
obsequious. So Matt, when you give the
opening remarks--

KELLY
Now wait a minute, make sure to be
deferential--

MATT
Gene Nardelli won't buy "deferential."

GRIGGS
Oh, I see. It's "Gene," is it? I knew
there's a reason you're lead counsel...

Joey Knish, looking uncomfortable and out of place, walks up
behind Matt.

KNISH
I don't mean to interrupt you future
magistrates and noblemen, but I need a
word...Hey, Jo, long time.

JO
How are you, Knish?

MATT
You need to talk?

KNISH
It's important.

MATT (TO GROUP)
I'll be right back.

The group is a little annoyed.

KELLY
I'll act as lead counsel...

JO
We were about take a break anyway, Kelly,
no big deal.

GRIGGS
Coffee time...

INT. THE FLAME, 9TH AVENUE - LATER

Matt and Knish sit in a booth in a Hell's Kitchen diner.
They have a gigantic breakfast in front of them.

Knish syrups his French Toast copiously.

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CONTINUED:

KNISH

What're you thinking?

MATT

The hell're you talking about?

Knish builds a criss-cross stack of bacon on his French Toast.

KNISH

You're leaking all over the place, Mattie. You're on-tilt. How could you bring this guy, this Greek Dealer, Worm, down by the Mayflower. I mean why the hell're you still carrying him?

MATT

Carry him? Back when I was in college, Worm moved up to Boston to take care of me. A few months, he has us running the sports book out of Sal's Deli, and he's finding games. I was like the second worst fucking card player in New England, Worm always made sure the worst one was sitting to my left.

Matt drinks his coffee.

KNISH

Long time ago. As the song says, what's he done for you lately?

Knish shakes powdered sugar over his food.

MATT

Fuck lately. You weren't at Dwight Englewood Prep. We were the only two scumbags attending. My father's office was there. It said 'custodian' on the door. That's why they took me. Worm's dad did the grounds when he wasn't too fucking drunk. That's when we did 'em.

KNISH

So you've got your history.

MATT

The grounds weren't all we did. Worm put me into a scam a day on all those young aristocrats. Selling dime bags of oregano, nunchukus and fire crackers from Chinatown. Kept us in lunch money. One

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MATT (cont'd)

time we got the starting five to take a dive against Long Island Friends'.

Matt sips his coffee.

MATT

Worm got tossed out over that one. Fucking point guard cracked. Worm didn't though. I would've been out right with him if he had. So you see, Knish, his credit's twenty years good with me. The guy's like my brother...

KNISH

Yeah, I unnerstand. But you should know your brother's over there right now ruining your reputation with every lousy second he deals...

Matt puts down his coffee cup.

MATT

Shit. I told 'im. Anybody else see?

KNISH

Nobody 'saw.' I heard it, when I was buying checks. I didn't know him I woulda thought nothing of it. But I turn around and see him there with that mechanic's grip, and I know.

MATT

Did you give him the office?

KNISH

I walked over, because of you, but he looked right through me.

MATT

Shit.

Matt stands up and starts signalling for the check.

KNISH

Sit down...He's okay now. Most of those Georges're on the tail end of a 36-hour session and can't see straight. But if he's still there when Roman and Maurice start their game, he's gonna wish he was still inside.

MATT

I gotta go get him...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Knish adds some cream to his coffee.

KNISH
I unnerstand, I unnerstand.

Matt throws some money on the table and leaves. Knish finally starts to eat.

INT. MAYFLOWER CLUB - LATER

Worm sits at the card table shuffling a deck. A few of the tired looking shlubs from the 20-40 game are leaving, and there are a few new arrivals.

Two of them are ROMAN and MAURICE. Roman is 34, black hair, lambskin sport coat, gold on pinky, wrist and neck. Maurice, 48, curly gray hair, in a white-stonewashed denim ensemble and a gaudy diamond watch.

As they arrange themselves, organizing checks, cigarettes, cellular phones, they speak in Russian.

WORM
'Ey, in A.C. you can't speak foreign at the table.

ROMAN
What are you talking about?

MAURICE
They worry we might work together.

WORM
What's the game?

ROMAN
100-200 Stud.

WORM
Yeah? I'm gonna need more checks.

Worm signals to Petra for some more racks.

WORM
Wanna start short-handed?

MAURICE
No. We wait for a few more. More money in this way...

WORM
Now we're talkin'.

INT. MAYFLOWER CLUB - LATER

Worm sits with Roman and Maurice, as well as an assortment of 4 other players.

Worm's board shows two Jacks.

WORM
Just the Jacks...

Maurice shows two pairs, 10's and 6's. He prepares to take the pot. Worm flips over his other cards and shows a pair of 7's.

WORM (APOLOGETIC)
...And the 7's.

He smiles and rakes in the pot.

Roman and Maurice are livid.

MAURICE
Motherfucker, slow rolling me like that.
You said 'just Jacks.'

WORM
Hey, hey. It's cards speak. I figured
you read me for the 7's.

Worm adds to his stacks, which are now towering.

MAURICE
Fuck.

Maurice slams his fist on the table and throws his cards into the air.

Roman pitches his hand into the muck with similar venom.

Over by the door Matt enters, a little out of breath. He crosses the room.

(V.O.) MATT
Amarillo Slim, the greatest proposition gambler of all time, held to his father's maxim: "You can shear a sheep many times, but skin him only once." This is a lesson Worm's never bothered to learn. He's already got them stuffed and mounted over his fireplace, and he's going for more. If he thinks they're stewing now, wait till they find out how he beat them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Matt arrives at the table. He sees Maurice's and Roman's states and Worm's stacks.

MATT
Hey Roman, Maurice.

ROMAN
Matt. You here to play? We need some new blood. They're putting the fucking bracelet on me tomorrow for four months, and I'm already stuck two racks.

He follows this with heated Russian obscenities shared with Maurice.

MATT
Have a good rest. (To Worm) Cosmonaut, c'mere, get some air...

Worm shrugs and organizes his checks. He begins to get up reluctantly, and looks at his chips.

MATT
Leave it. It's fine.

They head for the door

EXT. STREET - DAY

Worm is eating a bearclaw.

MATT
Where're you at?

WORM
Pumped up eight G's. Ready to go on a run when you came along...

Matt takes in this fact.

MATT
Alright. Listen to me, you're in town five minutes, you already have a sign on your back.

WORM
That prick Knishes. Sees all the angles, never has the stones to play one.

Worm throws his bearclaw in a garbage can with disgust.

MATT
Guy hasn't had to work in 15 years, Worm.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WORM

What he does--grinding it out on his leather ass--that is work.

MATT

I thought so too. Now, I know what work is...Speaking of which, why're you even playing at all? Don't you have to at least look for a job to stay out? Or are you just gonna go back to printing those credit cards, go away again?

WORM

I wasn't printing 'em, just distributing them.

Worm wipes his hands off on his leg.

WORM

And I'm never going back. So whattaya want me to do?

MATT

Think long term for once. Be smart. Everyone in here keeps books. You get listed as a mechanic, even if you don't get the shit beaten out of you, you won't be able to get action anywhere in New York. It's bad business.

Worm shakes his head with admiration for Matt.

WORM

Fucking Mattie, always seeing the big picture...

Worm's facade wavers.

WORM

I can't do what you do, you know? Bust games straight up, or work. This is how I live. You know me, I find a mark, I take him.

MATT

I do know you. You're the guy who taught me how to play the angles. But right now you're the one with your nose open.

WORM

I got all these pressures. I feel like I'm two steps behind my life after my stretch, and I gotta catch up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

Matt puts a hand on Worm's shoulder.

MATT

I know, but slow down and learn the place. There's not enough shade in there for these kind of moves.

WORM

Yeah? There was a lot less shade in the joint...

Matt pauses and takes note of Worm's seriousness.

MATT

You wanna talk about it?

WORM

No...

MATT

Anyway, I'm not preaching to you here. It's just these guys aren't rabbits. Roman and Maurice are Russian outfit guys. Not stone killers like KGB, but nobody you want to fuck with either.

Worm is chagrined.

WORM

Shit.

MATT

It's not too late. You go in there and lose their fucking money back. You hear me? Nice and easy. Catch a run of real bad cards. Make it look good.

WORM

Yeah? And then? What do I do for the money?

Matt thinks about it for a minute.

MATT

Why don't you take a trip to the suburbs? Find a nice dentist's game or something. Go back to Fresh Meadows and play in that golf pro's game...

WORM

Yeah, yeah, good idea. Definitely.

Worm looks suitably serious.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

WORM

Lemme go in and do this. Meet me at Stromboli's, in about an hour.

MATT

I can't. I have a meeting and later I'm out to Queens and load the fucking truck.

WORM

I see...

They turn and part company.

MATT

Make it look good...

INT. ARMSTRONG'S 10TH AVENUE- LATER

Jimmy Armstrong's joint is wood panelled with a long, friendly bar. Several students and after-work types populate the place. Jo sits amongst them.

MATT

Looked all over for you.

JO

Petrovsky waited and waited, so did the group. They finally left.

MATT

Shit. Sorry. Are they pissed?

JO

Yeah, they are, Matt, but not half as pissed as I am.

MATT

Jo, I missed half a meeting--

JO

You know, I've been putting things together in my head since this morning. You with that cigarette and gangster's roll. Worm's back. Knish suddenly has important business with you.

MATT

It's not what you think.

JO

I just can't believe you fucking lied to me. Right to my face like I'm some bimbo. Old days, at least you never

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JO (cont'd)
lied. You lost everything, but you never
lied.

INT. MAYFLOWER DESK - SAME

Worm stands across the desk from Petra. She is cashing him out.

PETRA
So, it's ten grand total. I'll take back
the two we lent you, and just give you
the white meat.

WORM
You know what? Give me all ten.

PETRA
Usually credit players only leave with
their profit. Otherwise the juice
starts. Five points a week, on Mattie.

WORM
Fine, we'll owe you.

Petra hesitates, but finally complies and starts counting out \$100s.

EXT. 10TH AVENUE - SAME

Matt tries to keep pace with Jo striding down 10th Avenue.

MATT
Jo, it was hardly a real game. More like
wiffle ball.

She turns to him angrily.

JO
Can you lose rent playing wiffle ball?

MATT
That's the point, I couldn't lose.

Jo rolls her eyes.

JO
I've heard that one before. Look Matt,
I watched you lose every dime you had,
and I was still there. But I can't stay
for this.

MATT
For what?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JO

To watch you go all-in again.

MATT

Who's all-in? There're more out cards than dead cards in this deck. First time in my life I can say that.

JO

You counting me?

MATT

'Course I'm counting you. Mostly I'm counting you.

JO

Well I'm no out card, this is my life.

MATT

Our life. Exactly. How's one night of cards changing that?

JO

How it starts. One night here, skip a meeting there, next thing I know you're lying to me and rounding again.

MATT

You used to like the excitement.

JO

Things were different then.

Matt takes her by the arm, stops her.

MATT

C'mon, Jo, I'd walk through the door with winnings, you're there on the bed counting it with me. The trips, the comp rooms. You were booking us out to the World Series at Binion's in April...

JO

That was the beginning, and it was a lot of fun. But I've learned some things. I thought we both did. I guess I was wrong.

Matt starts pacing around the kitchen like a caged tiger.

MATT

You know, this morning I felt like shit for lying to you. But last night, when I
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MATT (cont'd)

sat down, I felt alive for the first time since I got broken at KGB's joint. I was James Coburn throwing knives in "The Magnificent Seven." Cool under fire. Full of controlled aggression. I'm telling you, I could feel my skin tingling and my fucking blood bubbling under the surface. My adrenalin was pumping, but looking at me, you'd never even know I cared. They were coming for me, but I was ready. I knew exactly what to do. I felt like...I felt like myself. Can't you understand that?

Jo holds up her hand to try and stop him.

JO

Understand, Matt? You just said you felt alive for the first time sitting at a fucking card table. What's that supposed to make me understand?

MATT

What I meant--

JO

Besides, I don't even like Westerns...

INT. BILLY'S TOPLESS, 6TH AVENUE - NIGHT

Worm sits in the rundown strip bar. Stringy haired dancers sway listlessly on the stage. Worm's in the process of lighting a cigarette when a man steps up to him and helps the cigarette out of his mouth.

The humorless man is GRAMA. He is only 5'8", but is nearly as wide. He must go 320, solid, in his overcoat.

GRAMA

I heard you were out.

WORM

Hey, Grama. You looking for your old job? I could use you around. Come see me next month, I'll have something for you...

GRAMA

I got some bad news, Worm, I'm out on my own now.

WORM

Yeah? Imagine that.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GRAMA

Soon as he heard your name. He was real excited by the prospect. Besides you can never have too much muscle.

WORM

So you bought me up, huh Grama?

Worm looks on the floor for his cigarette. Lights it.

GRAMA

Oh yeah. We got a damn sweet deal too. Thirty cents on the dollar. There's not a lot of faith in you out there in the business community...

WORM

So now you're a banker.

GRAMA

Not exactly. I don't have to tell you my collection methods.

Worm looks a little peaked.

WORM

I know, I know. Look, I'll speak to you real soon. I'll have it for you, like next week--

Worm tries to rise and get away, but Grama puts a meaty hand on his chest and pushes him back down.

GRAMA

I figured that. So I'll just take what you have on you.

Worm stares at Grama's impassive face.

INT. CHURCHILL'S ON 3RD AVENUE - NIGHT

A small, quiet bar-restaurant resembling an English Pub. Professor Petrovsky sits alone at a back corner table reading the newspaper. He has a glass of gin in front of him and they've left him the bottle as well.

Matt enters, spies Petrovsky, and goes over to his table.

MATT

Mind if I sit?

Petrovsky gestures at a chair.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PETROVSKY

Well, Mathew, that was a nifty trick the other night. At that point Nardelli and the D.A. were ready to cut cards for your services.

Matt sits.

PETROVSKY

Of course it was a different trick altogether, that disappearing act you pulled at your group's Mulligan meeting today.

Matt's head drops.

MATT

That's why I'm here.

Petrovsky takes a Pall Mall from his pack and lights it.

PETROVSKY

That Jo, she's a good one. She tried to cover for you. Kelly, on the other hand, she was gunning hard to replace you as lead counsel.

MATT

I guess I owe an explanation...

PETROVSKY

Not to me. I'm sure there's good reason you left. You'll have to work hard to prepare, and smooth things out with the others...

MATT

Alright, then. I understand. Thanks for your time...

Matt starts to rise, but Abe waves him down.

PETROVSKY

Stay. Take a drink, Mathew.

MATT

What are you having?

PETROVSKY

Gin, always gin.

Matt takes a glass off an adjacent table and pours himself a drink.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PETROVSKY

I know a magician's never supposed to tell his secrets, but let me ask you--

MATT

I'm no magician.

PETROVSKY

So if it's not magic, how did you know what they held?

Matt takes a sip of the warm gin and grimaces.

MATT

Combination of things. I watched as the cards came out. That's an old habit for me. Like breathing. I saw Nardelli flinch when the three hit Green.

PETROVSKY

You watched the cards?

MATT

I watched the cards *also*, but I watched the players reacting to the cards. I knew the D.A. made two pair the same way I knew Rappaport missed his flush, by following their eyes when they checked their river cards. Their faces told me everything.

PETROVSKY

So you watch the man? I never thought I had to calculate so much at cards.

MATT

Always calculate, think of it as war.

Matt takes a Pall Mall and puts it in his mouth.

MATT

Most important thing--premium hands. Game like that, everyone wants some "action," you don't give 'em any. You only start with jacks or better split, nines or better wired, three high cards to a flush. Don't draw to a straight. Tight but aggressive. And I mean aggressive. That's your style, Professor. If a bet's good enough to call, you're in there raising. First three weeks, you don't even bluff once. After that, three, four times a night, you gotta

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

MATT (cont'd)
advertise. Let 'em catch ya. That way
they'll always pay you off when you have
the nuts.

PETROVSKY
You are officially never invited to our
game again.

MATT
Don't blame ya. Put a guy like me in a
weak game like that, the cards themselves
hardly matter. A fish acts strong, he's
bluffing, acts meek, he has a hand.

Abe ashes his cigarette.

PETROVSKY
You know, Mathew, it's the same in my
avocation. In the courtroom, you'd be
surprised how often it comes down to your
ability to evaluate people.

MATT
Of course you do have to know something
about the law. I guess I should spend
some more time studying that.

Petrovsky smiles.

PETROVSKY
Let me tell you a story...For
generations, the men of my family have
been rabbis. In Israel and before that
in Europe. It was to be my calling. I
was quite a prodigy Matt, the pride of my
yeshiva. The elders said I had a forty
year old's understanding of the middrosh
when I was twelve. By the time I was
thirteen though, I knew I could never be
a rabbi.

MATT
Why not?

PETROVSKY
Because for all I understood of the
Talmud, I never saw God there.

This sends Abe reaching for his drink. Matt re-fills his
glass.

MATT
You couldn't lie to yourself.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

PETROVSKY

I tried. Because I knew people were counting on me.

Matt sips his drink.

MATT

But in the end, yours was a respectable choice.

PETROVSKY

Not to my family. My parents were destroyed by my decision. My father sent me away to New York to live with distant cousins... Eventually I found my place, my life's work.

MATT

What then?

PETROVSKY

I immersed myself fully. I studied the minutae and learned everything I could about the law. I believed it was what I was born to do.

MATT

Your parents ever get over it?

PETROVSKY

No. They never understood how I consorted with criminals. How I defended murderers, rapists, and thieves. They considered what I did dishonorable. I always hoped I might do something to change their minds, but they were inconsolable. My father wouldn't speak to me...They died before I became a teacher.

MATT

And you'd still make the same choices?

PETROVSKY

What choice, Mathew? The last thing I took from the yeshiva is this: we can't run from who we are. Our destiny chooses us.

The men sit huddled together with their thoughts and the gin.

EXT. MATT'S BUILDING - LATER

Worm is pacing the stoop, smoking nervously, when Matt arrives.

MATT
Hey, kemosabe.

WORM
What's up man? Can I come up?

MATT
Uh, sure, 'course. Tone it down though, things haven't been that smooth on the homefront...

WORM
Tone what down, motherfucker?

MATT
Great. Forget it.

They enter the building.

INT. MATT'S APARTMENT - SAME

Matt and Worm walk through the door to a quiet apartment. Jo is gone, along with the kitchen table, several appliances, and couch.

WORM
The fuck? You been robbed.

MATT
Not exactly.

WORM
She's gone, huh?

Worm starts looking around.

WORM
You don't seem surprised.

Matt shakes his head.

MATT
You won't find any note. She's not the type to leave one. I always told her she'd be a good player. She'd know when to release a hand the minute it couldn't win.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WORM
Smart girl.

MATT
Yeah, she's got plenty...

Matt sit-slumps into a kitchen chair--one of the few pieces of furniture that is his and remains.

MATT
It's my fault, 's my fault. Damn it, I knew I couldn't bluff her...

Worm sits in a chair across from Matt.

WORM
Bluff her? Shit, man, you can never trust 'em. Look at you--you domesticate yourself, take yourself out of the life. You walk the fucking line. You sacrifice for her, man, and then she's gone. It's like the saying goes, if life's a poker game, then women are the rake, man, women are the rake.

MATT
What saying is that?

WORM
I don't know, there oughtta be one.

Worm lights up a cigarette and talks through the smoke.

WORM
Know what always cheers me up when I'm feeling shitty?

MATT
What's that?

WORM
Rolled up aces over kings.

MATT
That so?

WORM
Check-raising stupid tourists, and taking fat pots off of them calling stations.

MATT
Yeah?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WORM

Stacks and towers of checks.

MATT

I see.

Worm looks around for a place to ash his cigarette, decides on the palm of his hand, then dumps it on the floor and wipes his hand on his leg.

WORM

Five hundred dollar freeze-outs all night at the Taj...Where the sand turns into gold.

Matt stands up.

MATT

Fuck it. Let's go.

WORM

Serious?

MATT

Yeah I'm serious. Let's do it.

Worms's dreams have come true.

WORM

Now we're talking.

EXT. ATLANTIC CITY EXPRESSWAY - NIGHT

Matt and Worm roll down the road in one of Hertz's finest. They pass beneath the blue overpass sign that reads "Welcome to Atlantic City, America's Favorite Playground."

Ahead of them are the towering neon monoliths along the boardwalk.

INT. TAJ MAHAL LOBBY - CASINO TIME

The bang and clatter of games of chance, the lurid lighting and gold mirrors, the bracing high-oxygen air, the burned-out dream chasers, give the place that Gomorrah of the East feel.

Matt and Worm walk past banks of slots and video poker machines toward the card room.

(V.O.) MATT

The poker room at The Mirage in Vegas is the center of the poker universe. Doyle Brunson, Chip Reese, Johnny Chan, Huck

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

(cont'd)

Seed, Phil Helmuth--the legends--consider it their office. Every couple of days a new millionaire shows up wanting to beat a world champion. Usually they go home with nothing but a story. Down here, the millionaires are scarce or they're playing craps, but there's still plenty of money for the taking. In fact, on the weekends you can't get a game in the City, because all the New York rounders are taking care of the tourists here.

INT. POKER ROOM - SAME

Matt and Worm step up to a cage in front of the poker room. Lists of games and openings are displayed by overhead projectors.

A large, smoky room holding 75 poker tables is bustling at half-capacity. The crowd's attire is that of a 'Bowling For Dollars' contestant call.

Shiny-suited Pit Bosses communicate by walkie-talkie and microphone, calling out players initials when seats are available. Horse racing is broadcast on large screens in the back of the room.

INT. POKER TABLE - SAME

Matt and Worm stop before reaching their appointed table.

WORM

You know what? You play. I'm gonna attend to certain other needs...

MATT

Good, I was starting to get worried about you. I thought maybe the boys upstate brought about some changes.

WORM

Don't even joke about that.

Worm turns up his collar and stalks off.

Matt continues to his table and sits. At the table are a few familiar faces--Zagosh, Savino, Petra--as well as a guy with a slight tick named GUBERMAN, and another called FREDDY FACE.

Matt puts down some money and the dealer gives him checks.

DEALER

Changing five hundred. Good luck, sir.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATT

Beautiful. Welcome to the Mayflower South. I come all the way to Atlantic City just to look at you mugs.

Greetings are murmured to Matt.

PETRA

Twice in one week. For someone who doesn't play, you spend a lot of time in card rooms.

DEALER

10-20 Hold 'Em. Collection. Pay your time.

All the players put two checks in front of them.

There is a delay before playing as a Pit Boss brings over a sealed plastic bag containing a box with two decks of cards in it. The dealer makes the decks.

ZAGOSH

Ponies. Why do you still mess around with the ponies? It's for suckers. Even D. Wayne's horses lose. If you gotta gamble, you come here or to the Mayflower. But to just throw your money away...you're like a regular degenerate or something.

SAVINO

This isn't gambling. No real risk of a loss here.

Zagosh and Savino post their blinds. The dealer is ready and gives the first two cards to each player.

GUBERMAN

You know Savino, I think you like to owe. No, you need to owe. It's heroin to you.

PETRA

No, not heroin, he's like those guys who pay top dollar to get their dicks tied up with twine...he can only get off when he's squeezed.

All the players laugh. Just then Knish walks over to the table and puts his hands on Matt's shoulders.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

KNISH

This is what I like to see. Matt McDermott where he belongs, sitting with the scumbags, telling jokes, dragging the occasional pot.

Bets are called around to Freddy Face. He's a middleweight with a gray pompadour and bushy moustache. He stacks his checks in a nearly despondent manner. He bets before he speaks, putting a few checks in.

FREDDY FACE

Occasional? Like my ex-wife *occasionally* went out with other men.

KNISH

Forget her, Face...Now, I was gonna actually try and make some real money tonight, but in honor of Matt's Ali-like return to the ring, I'll sit with you all for awhile.

PETRA

Don't do us any favors, Knish. They're about to go to the board to fill these seats. Call.

Zagosh smoothly puts in his checks before he gestures at the table's empty places.

ZAGOSH

If we wanted to try and take each others' rolls we could've stayed back home.

The flop comes and doesn't help anyone much. Petra bets. Everyone folds and she takes it.

A Floorman comes over to the table and sticks his hand in the air. Soon, two new players, JASON and CLAUDE, arrive and take their seats. Jason and Claude are typical convention goers wearing bad leisure suits--Claude's name tag is still on his lapel.

(V.O.) MATT

These two have no idea what they're about to walk into. Down here to have a good time, they figure 'why not give poker a try?' After all, how different can it be from the home games they've played their whole lives?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

Jason and Claude put a few hundred each on the table. The dealer counts the money, the floorman approves of her count, and she exchanges their dollars for checks.

DEALER

Five hundred. Good luck gentlemen.

(V.O.) MATT

Luck. All the luck in the world isn't gonna change things for these guys. They're simply overmatched. We're not playing together, but we're not playing against each other either. It's like the nature channel. You don't see piranhas eating each other, do you?

The tone of the table changes. The breezy chatter is put away. The casual observer would never see that the rounders even know one another, much less play together five nights a week.

DEALER

Blinds up.

Savino and Petra put in the obligatory bets.

A WAITRESS in a revealing purple and gold outfit stops by.

CLAUDE

Bourbon and water for me, and another Crown Royal for my friend here...I'll call that bet.

MATT

Raise. Raise it up.

INT. POKER TABLE - LATER

ANGLE ON: Jason and Claude, as they watch their stacks dwindle, as they're chopped up. Soon they stand with apologetic smiles on their faces.

CLAUDE

Well, that's it for me...

They leave.

ANGLE ON: The seats being filled by two new suckers, whose stacks dwindle. They leave busted.

The scene becomes a ballet of Floormen filling the seats with new players, who leave with nothing.

INT. POKER TABLE - LATER

The dealer shuffles between hands when Worm walks up, a new bounce to his step. He sits down between Knish and the Dealer.

Worm reaches across Knish and helps himself to one of Matt's stacks.

WORM

Get me started here.

KNISH (TO MATT)

Good, that's the way to build the bankroll back up.

SAVINO

Worm, good to see you. Glad you're out. Number's changed of course, new number. Lotta games this weekend, so if you're gonna call and put down some action...you're gonna need the new number.

ZAGOSH

Worm, let me ask you, are you allowed in places like this?

WORM

What're you, my fucking P.O. now, Zagosh? I didn't think you had a job.

DEALER (TO WORM)

I'm sorry, sir, you can't take chips from another player at the table...

WORM

It's alright honey, we're all friends here.

DEALER

I'm sorry, you'll have to buy your chips from me...

Worm leans back, annoyed. He doesn't take money out of his pocket, but instead pulls out a voucher.

WORM

Fuck it. Mattie, let's hit the noodle bar. I got us comped.

MATT

I could have some soup.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Matt gets up.

KNISH

Oh, look who's treating to a free meal.
Don't let that MSG fuck up your head
anymore than it is, Mattie.

Matt waves him off unconcernedly as they go.

INT. NOODLE BAR IN THE DRAGON ROOM - LATER

A seven seat "L" shaped counter tucked away inside the Asian games room. The place looks tacky even inside a casino.

Matt and Worm take two seats and hand over their voucher to the ancient Chinese chef. They point out what they want from a short menu.

WORM

The hell're you sitting with them for?
Get serious here.

MATT

I like playing with these guys.

WORM

These guys have no ambition. Content to sit around 10-20 splitting two slob's money five ways. What we need to do is move up to 50-100, find some rich suckers. A table full of 'em.

MATT

I'm not playing short stacked in a game like that. Besides, we'll walk out of here with a grand easy tonight.

WORM

A grand. Happy to make a grand. After driving three fucking hours to get here.

MATT

Look, it's your grand. I'm trying to help you best I can. Any time you get up with more than you sat down with, it's a good day on the job, Worm.

WORM

Job? Now you're starting to sound like that sanctimonious prick Knish.

They are served hot tea.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATT

Why don't you calm down.

WORM

Oh, I'm calm, real calm.

Worm sips his tea.

WORM

You shoulda seen this little skirt I just twirled.

Worm makes some whirring noises and hand gestures that describe the action. A few other diners notice. Matt laughs.

MATT

You know something, Worm? You're all elegance and grace.

Large, steaming porcelain bowls of noodle soup are put in front of Matt and Worm. They dig in, slurping noisily.

WORM

Pass that hot sauce...

Matt slides a rack of chili sauce over to Worm.

MATT

Careful with that, it'll burn a hole right through your stomach.

Worm heaps the red paste into his soup.

MATT

So Mr. Nick the Greek, how come you're kiting my checks, instead of helping your own cause?

WORM

I'm on empty, that's why.

MATT

Tapioca again? How much was the hooker?

He takes a loud slurp.

WORM

Please, Matt, 'relaxation therapist.'
But that's not where it went.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MATT

Roman and Maurice? I told you to give back, but come on, you could've kept something for your time.

Worm discards his spoon and picks the bowl up, drinking the broth.

WORM

That's not where it went either. Ran into fucking Grama today.

MATT

Yeah?

WORM

He wasn't seeking employment.

Matt pauses.

MATT

Who does he work for?

Worm pauses, looks away.

WORM

He's, uh, he's on his own now, buying debt. He relieved me of all my holdings.

MATT

That cocksucker. Turncoat bastard. So now you owe him the ten.

WORM

Not by his math.

MATT

How fucking much, Worm?

WORM

He's says I owed fifteen. With the juice, I guess it's near double that now...

Worm drinks some more soup.

MATT

Why didn't you tell me it was that bad? Let me pay towards it when I could've--

Worm drops his bowl in front of him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

WORM

It's my problem...Jesus Christ, I'm gonna have you pay what I owe? I'll have you help me, like we used to. It's why we're here. But I'm no leech.

MATT

Alright, alright. Of course I'll help. I am helping...But Grama, shit. Maybe we can talk to him. Get you some time off the juice.

Worm shakes his head. He wipes his hands on his pants.

WORM

I doubt it. You don't know how he feels about me, man. I wasn't the most understanding boss.

Matt gives him a pat on the back.

MATT

Fuck him, we'll figure something out. Let's go.

They stand up.

WORM

Could you leave the tip?

Matt gives him a look.

INT. NED DOYLE BLDG. - MORNING

Matt, pasty faced, unshaven, runs down the hall trying to straighten his tie. A sheaf of loose papers is stuffed under his arm.

INT. MOOT COURTROOM - SAME

Resemblant of a classroom converted into a courtroom. Judge Nardelli sits on panel with Petrovsky and a middle-aged female judge--JUDGE MCKINNON.

Behind facing desks are Jo, Griggs, and Kelly, and the OPPOSING TRIAL TEAM.

The judges look impatient. The door at the back of the room swings open and Matt enters.

PETROVSKY

Perhaps we can begin now?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Matt puts his papers on the team desk and sits down.

MATT

Sorry, I'm late.

JO

You ready?

Matt tries to have a conversation with his eyes. Jo gives him nothing.

NARDELLI

Come to order in the matter of Slater versus New York State Higher Education Services. The facts have been stipulated, the briefs have been read. Lead counsel for Plaintiff, ah Mr. McDermott, please proceed with oral arguments now. If that's convenient for you.

Matt stands up, he looks rattled, unprepared.

MATT

Yes sir, your honor. If it may please the court...

Matt goes silent. He is frozen...until Kelly jumps up.

KELLY

I'll take over now, if that pleases the court.

NARDELLI

Somebody getting on with it would please us a great deal...

Nardelli shoots Petrovsky a look. Petrovsky shrugs. Matt sits down.

EXT. STEPS NED DOYLE BLDG. - LATER

The Fordham team walks out of the building. Matt looks haggard, shellshocked. Griggs whacks him across the back.

GRIGGS

Well that was impressive. Usually, you have to actually speak when you give an opening statement.

MATT

Guys, what can I say? I was less prepared than I thought--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

KELLY

That's fucking great McDermott, and we all suffer. I needed this on my resume.

MATT

I'm sorry.

Matt stops walking. They continue on, except Jo.

MATT

Jo, we need to talk about this. You moved pretty fast here.

JO

You make it sound like it was my decision.

MATT

Wasn't mine. I come home and you're gone. How could you give up on me so quick?

JO

Matt, I learned it from you. You always told me this was the rule. Rule number one: 'Throw away your cards the moment you know they can't win.' Fold the fucking hand.

MATT

Well, this is us we're talking about, not some losing hand a' cards.

She takes this in.

JO

Yeah, Matt, I know exactly what we're talking about.

MATT

So this is the last of it?

JO

That's right, Matt, this is where I get off.

MATT

Jo, you're overreacting. It's not like I'm out running around on you. Look, I want to make things right with you.

She half-smiles, trying not to break.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

JO

You know, most of my friends wonder, at least sometimes, if their husband or boyfriend cheats on them. I never had to worry about that, with you the only other woman was poker.

MATT

Babe, I--

JO

I'd say good luck, Matt. But I know it's not about luck in your game.

She leaves him standing there.

INT. MATT'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Matt sits on the floor in front of his small television set and VCR, which now rests on a cardboard box.

He watches a dealer, and two men at a poker table with large stacks of checks in front of them. A large crowd surrounds the table following the action.

ANGLE ON THE TELEVISION: One of the men is a diminutive Asian named JOHNNY CHAN who sits with his lucky orange in front of him, the other is a young New Yorker, ERIC SEIDEL.

Chan waits in agony, seemingly wrestling with a decision. He checks to Seidel. Seidel only hesitates a moment before he bets everything he has.

Chan acts immediately, matching the bet and turning over his cards. He had a high straight with his first five cards. He had the nuts all along. He raises his arms in victory--he's just won the World Series of Poker.

Matt rewinds the tape, the images moving jerkily in reverse.

He is ready to watch the moment again when the door buzzer sounds.

INT. MATT'S DOORWAY - SAME

Matt speaks into the intercom.

MATT

Yeah?

Petra's voice is heard from downstairs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PETRA

Matt? It's Petra. Can I come up?

Matt buzzes her in and cracks the door, before going back to the television.

INT. MATT'S APARTMENT - SAME

Petra enters to find him engrossed in the video. She surveys the sparse decor.

PETRA

Haven't seen the place in awhile...Looks about the same.

MATT

Shh, look, this is it. This is the move...

Petra surveys the scene.

MATT

Look at the patience. The control. Forget that he's inscrutable, that's a given. He knows his man well enough to check it all the way and risk winning nothing with those cards. It's like he's got the script. He owns him.

PETRA

'88 World Series huh?

MATT

Yeah '88. Chan flops the nut straight, and has the discipline to wait him out. He knows Seidel's gonna bluff at it.

ANGLE ON T.V.: The young man makes the fateful bet.

PETRA

Look at poor Seidel. Kid doesn't know what hit him.

They watch Chan flip his cards. Matt shakes his head at Seidel's defeat. He freezes the frame on the carnage.

PETRA

We all know what that feels like.

MATT

Yeah, it feels like a locomotive running through your guts. Like a shot to the balls. All the air runs out of you. The
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATT (cont'd)
blood rushes to your head. You feel
nauseated. You're reeling.

PETRA
For me, it's like being dumped in public.

MATT
Nah, it's worse...

ANGLE ON: The television, where Johnny Chan is awarded stacks
of cash money, over \$700,000 worth, for his efforts.

Matt shuts off the television.

MATT
Fuck it, you didn't come here to talk
about this. What's going on?

PETRA
Tomorrow's a week.

MATT
A week of what?

PETRA
The first two thousand you owe the
Mayflower.

Matt goes and fills himself a glass of water from the
kitchenette across the room.

MATT
Worm.

PETRA
Strangest thing, he'd just won eight
grand, why go on the line behind another
two?

Matt keeps his surprise in check. He's as inscrutable as
Chan.

MATT
So he beats Roman and Maurice for about
eight then?

Petra thinks for a moment.

PETRA
Yeah. He comes back in after you leave.
Sits for like twenty more minutes. And
cashes out for the full amount. Maurice
hasn't been back since, I think he's been
playing 'cross the street. But Worm's
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

PETRA (cont'd)

been around plenty. He's run you up just under seven grand.

Matt's expression is as mild as if he just heard the weather is partly cloudy.

MATT

Do me a favor, put him on his own.

PETRA

Yeah?

MATT

Cut him off.

Matt takes out his roll and counts off a thousand, which leaves him with a few hundred.

MATT

You know I just started coming around again. But here's a thou towards it.

Matt hands her the money and she pockets it.

PETRA

Thanks for making it easy, Matt. I'm sorry to be back over here for this reason.

MATT

Don't worry about it.

Petra steps up close to him.

PETRA

But I like being here, it's good to see you.

They share a look. She leans closer, puts her hand on his chest. They kiss.

PETRA

I could stay...

Matt brushes her hair away from her face, then steps back.

MATT

No. I'll see you this week, Petra.

She hesitates. Matt moves her toward the door and she reluctantly leaves. Matt closes the door behind her.

MATT

Fucking Worm.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

He thinks for a moment and puts on his jacket.

INT. PATERSON GYMNASIUM - NIGHT

The rhythmic sound of a basketball being dribbled. The squeak of shoes and thump of the ball hitting iron.

Worm is alone in a mostly darkened gym, shooting around.

He is interrupted by the creaking sound of a cantilever window opening. Worm ducks beneath the bleachers.

Matt climbs in the window above the bleachers and walks down to the gym floor.

MATT

I know you're here.

Worm steps out from the bleachers.

WORM

Hey, Mattie.

MATT

Good thing Grama doesn't know you as well as I do.

Worm sends a bounce pass to Matt.

WORM

Horse? Fifty bucks a letter?

MATT

When I win, you gonna pay me with my fucking money?

On the word "money," Matt sends back a brisk chest pass to Worm.

WORM

Easy.

Worm throws a chest pass back with much good form.

WORM

Step, and snap the thumbs down.

He holds his form for a long moment.

Matt imitates the form, but intentionally sends the ball into the opposite corner of the gym.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WORM

Alright. We'll work on the accuracy.

Matt kicks the bleachers.

MATT

Would you stop fucking around, for five minutes, for once in your goddamned life. You stupid, selfish, prick.

WORM

Jesus, Mattie, you sound like my old man.

MATT

Yeah, I ought to kick the crap out of you like he did...Ah fuckit. Dumb ass.

Matt sits down on the bleachers, anger subsiding. Worm joins him.

WORM

Hey Mattie, 'member the first time we found this place?

MATT

Yeah, must've been about 16. We broke in when Tommy Manzy was looking to pound you into oblivion.

WORM

Yeah, what was he pissed about?

Matt looks at him.

MATT

You fucked his mother.

Worm reflects. He smiles.

WORM

Good looking older woman.

Worm pulls out a butt and lights up.

MATT

She was that, but you spent a year dodging that sick fuck. Till he pissed off Lostrito and that garbage can fell on his head from thirty floors up.

WORM

Crazy times. We were wild then.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MATT

What's changed? You were hiding out because of your trouble then. And that's what you're still doing.

WORM

I remember hiding out plenty, but not behind solo fuck ups. I seem to remember a runnin' buddy.

MATT

Yeah, run we did, my friend. But when we got caught back then, the worst that could happen was you catch a beating or get expelled. Now, now you're fixing to go down hard. And it almost seems like you want to.

WORM

I'm turning things around. Don't you worry, no garbage can's gonna hit me.

MATT

Yeah, you're getting out of the way and it's gonna land on me.

Worm blows out a cloud of smoke.

WORM

Listen, I'm sorry about that money. Really. I needed it to get some things going.

MATT

And?

WORM

Well, I won't lie to you, there've been some reversals.

MATT

Reversals, huh. How much is left?

WORM

Nine hundred. I caught a frozen wave of cards like you read about.

MATT

You gotta be kidding me. I think I'm getting you outta hock, and I find out I'm seven grand in.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

WORM

Hey, I was feeling lucky. Playing blackjack over at the Horseshoe Club in Brooklyn.

MATT

That place is a mitt joint, schmuck...

WORM

I thought I could neutralize 'em.

MATT

No you're neutralized. Goddamn it Worm, I know you've been through it, but I have too. You've really jammed me up here. Seven grand. I can't go any deeper, you're off the tit. Unwelcome at the Mayflower.

WORM

If that's how it's gotta be--

MATT

That's not all. You gotta talk to Grama, work something out--

WORM

No way. I'm not talking to that Judas son of a bitch.

Matt thinks for a second.

MATT

You see any other way?

WORM

Shit.

MATT

Let's get out of here.

The head for the fire door, shutting out the light when they reach it.

MATT

Time being, it's best you stay with me.

WORM

What, and give up the lease on my townhouse?

MATT

You got any other choices?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

WORM

Think Manzy's mom is still around?

They exit.

INT. LEXINGTON AVE. APARTMENT BLDG. - DAY

Matt and Worm stand in a gray hallway and knock. The sounds of several deadbolts being thrown, and then the door opens. They step inside.

INT. RAILROAD APT. - SAME

SHERRY, has let them in. She is late 20's, too much foundation, and wearing a polyester camisole. GINA, petite Asian, also in a camisole, sits on a sofa, talks into a phone and ignores them.

SHERRY

Hi, boys.

MATT

Hello.

SHERRY

You cops? You look like cops.

WORM

We're not cops.

SHERRY

You want a twirl then?

MATT

No. Grama here?

SHERRY

Oh.

MATT

Yeah. Tell him Matt and Worm need a minute.

She vanishes into the recesses of the apartment.

WORM

This is not good. I feel like I been remanded again. You sure--

Matt cuts him off with a look at the girl on the couch.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATT

Don't say much. Don't let 'im read your mail.

WORM

I hear you.

Sherry calls out to them, and they walk down a dimly lit hall toward Grama's office. They pass several closed doors, behind which muffled sounds of paid passion can be heard.

INT. GRAMA'S OFFICE - SAME

The room is dingy and devoid of charm. Several phones and scraps of paper on a desk, and a tatty chair.

The space is populated, though, by two enthusiastic PIT BULLS that leap around Matt and Worm to their great discomfort.

GRAMA

Hey, Matt. Hey, Worm, it's good you came. Real smart thinking.

WORM

Thanks for the endorsement, Grama.

MATT

Grama, it's been a long time.

GRAMA (TO WORM)

So, you brought him along to help carry all my money?

MATT

There's no money today.

Grama takes a stance in front of the door. It is now uncomfortably close in the room. The sound of the dogs panting and slobbering can be heard..

GRAMA

No money? There has to be some money.

Worm tensely lights a cigarette.

WORM

None.

GRAMA

You owe thirty. I'll take half in five days.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATT

Five grand. In a week. You keep the juice going.

Grama is distracted by one of the pit bulls chewing on the corner of the chair.

GRAMA

Shh, shh. Quiet. You have to catch them in the act.

Matt and Worm are confused as Grama creeps up behind the dog. He pounces on the pit bull, wrestling it to the floor on it's back. Grama puts his face into the dog's muzzle and speaks sternly and all too intimately.

GRAMA

No. Bad dog. Baaad dog.

WORM

Jesus Christ.

Grama gets off the cowed animal, who slinks away.

GRAMA

You can't let 'em get away with it, or they think they run the place...Anyway, where were we.

Matt speaks his terms again, with considerably less confidence.

MATT

Five grand. One week. The juice--

GRAMA

No, no. This isn't The Money Store. We aren't negotiating here. I tell you how it works.

Worm can't take his eyes off the dog.

WORM

Look, I just got out.

GRAMA

Worm, I know you been out long enough to play strong in plenty of games.

WORM

I'm not playing that way anymore. I'm living clean.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

GRAMA

Oh, you're living clean.

Grama laughs at this. It is unnerving to see him laugh.

GRAMA

Five days. Half. Else I'll have to start breaking things.

WORM

We don't have to listen to this, Mattie.

Grama bristles at this.

MATT

Shut the fuck up, Worm. Half in five days, if that's the way it's gotta be.

GRAMA

Too late for him to shut up. Too fucking late.

MATT

Come on, Grama, he's good for it.

GRAMA

If you're saying he's good for it Matt, it's on you too.

MATT

Then it's on me too.

Grama scrutinizes them.

GRAMA

In that case, you can leave.

Grama opens the door and lets them out.

EXT. MADISON SQUARE PARK, 25TH STREET - DAY

Matt and Worm sit on a bench. Worm is slumped in a dejected heap.

MATT

Jesus.

Worm stomps his foot at a pigeon that is pecking around them. It flies off.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WORM

Finally out, and now this. We're done-- fifteen grand in five days. I can't believe I'm going out like this.

Matt looks at his friend.

MATT

We're not done yet. Fifteen grand? I've gone on rushes that big before.

WORM

Come on, Mattie. Maybe under optimum conditions. Maybe. But how much you have on you?

MATT

About three-fifty.

WORM

That put's us at around twelve hundred. What do you think we can do with that? Fucking Lotto?

MATT

No, we do what we do.

WORM

Like in Princeton?

MATT

Nah. We can't sit together. That's too risky in the City. We do it like we used to--you find the games, you scout the games. I sit and mop 'em up.

Worm is hesitant to even hope.

WORM

You'd still do that for me?

MATT

I have to fucking do it. I'm hanging on the hook right next to you.

Matt pops an unlit cigarette into his mouth.

MATT

We have five days. There's the 30-60 at the Mayflower. The Greeks. The 4 a.m. game in Woodside. You find some more.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WORM

You sure you're ready for this?

MATT

Lead me to it.

INT. UNION HALL, WEST 14TH STREET- DAY

ANGLE ON: A crest reading International Brotherhood of Teamsters and Chauffers Local 237.

Matt sits at a large round table with several Teamsters, both regular members--truckers in their working clothes, and union officials in suits.

LAROSSA

I'll bet the full amount.

MATT

Full amount, huh? Let me look at you.

Matt stares closely into Larossa's face, Larossa meets the stare.

MATT

No, I don't think you made it, Larossa, raise.

Matt pushes in his checks. Larossa waits a tense moment, then folds his hand.

Matt rakes in the pot.

CUT TO:

INT. MAYFLOWER CLUB - LATER

Matt sits with some usual suspects and some new faces in the 30-60 Hold 'Em.

The board reads 7-S, 5-D, 9-C, 3-H.

ANGLE ON: Matt's hole cards are 6-S, 8-D.

Matt appears hesitant despite his nut straight.

MATT

Check it.

SHARGEL

I'll bet sixty.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATT

Let's see what you have. Raise.

SHARGEL

Trying to put a move on me, Matt? But I'm not going anywhere. Call.

The river card comes K-C.

SHARGEL

Sixty.

Matt looks at the board as if he suddenly realizes there's a possible straight out there.

MATT

Could you have? You play 4-6? I don't think so. Raise.

SHARGEL

Call.

Shargel flips over his cards and shows his straight to the seven.

SHARGEL

I made my straight. Sometimes it's the little one's that do you the most good, Mattie...

Matt turns his 6-8 over.

MATT

Sorry, Gerry, you caught the dumb end of it this time. To the nine.

Matt rakes in the pot.

CUT TO:

INT. GUS'S SMOKE SHOP, WOODSIDE AVENUE - 4:00 A.M.

The 4:00 a.m. game goes on in the otherwise closed-for-business smoke shop. Nine of the ten players puff on cigars. Matt has the dead cigarette in his mouth. He looks miserable sucking in all the cigar smoke.

The game is 7-Stud Hi-Lo Eight or Better.

Eisenberg bets holds up his double corona with admiration.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EISENBERG

As I was saying, look at the Cameroon wrapper on this baby, nice and oily.

Sunshine, a bright eyed young lady brandishes her cigar.

SUNSHINE

I prefer my robusto. Hints of pepper and spice, a nice, nutty finish. I'll call. What do you got?

Matt looks fed up as the cards are turned over.

Matt's hand is an Ace-5 straight.

MATT

I got a wheel. It has earthy tones. A smooth draw, and a good enough kick to win me the Hi and the Low.

Matt rakes it in.

CUT TO:

INT. BACK OF NEPTUNE DINER, ASTORIA BLVD. - DAY

The din of Greek being shouted and plates banging. Matt is beginning to look exhausted.

The players are Mediterranean looking, drinking espresso and smoking cigarettes. They practice sophistry by criticizing each other's play.

Matt turns over his cards.

MATT

Trip Aces.

ZIZZO

I only have a pair. Jacks.

Matt accesses the pot.

TAKI (YELLING)

What did you think he had, Zizzo? Does he look like a man beaten by jacks?

CRONOS (YELLING)

Jacks are a monster compared to the crap you play, Taki.

TAKI (YELLING)

Fuck you. Fuck you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CRONOS (YELLING)
Fuck you. Fuck you.

ZIZZO (MEEK)
I liked the jacks.

TAKI (YELLING)
Fine, forget it. Deal. Deal. Deal.

Matt shakes his head and shuffles the cards.

CUT TO:

EXT. FRESH MEADOWS GOLF CLUB, LAKEVILLE ROAD - DAY

Rain drenches the lavish golf course.

INT. PRO SHOP - SAME

Matt sits playing poker with colorfully dressed golf pros, caddies, and a few members. He is looking worn, with a growth of beard.

They play Pot Limit 7-Stud Deuces Wild.

Worm is across the room, putting golf balls on the carpet.

JOHNNY GOLD
The hell, it's only money. I bet.

Matt looks at the cards on the table and at Gold.

MATT
Then let's get some more in there. Make it five hundred.

Gold puts his checks in with flicks of his wrist.

JOHNNY GOLD
Yeah? Alright. I raise. Size of the pot.

Worm halts his putting and looks over attentively. A few grand is in the center.

WEITZ
You sure on that, Goldie? Might want to leave some over for your daughter's riding lessons.

Matt waffles. He mucks his cards.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATT

Take it down.

Gold turns over his cards. He has nothing.

JOHNNY GOLD

Lookit that, I bluffed out the ringer.

Gold and Weitz high five and Gold takes the money.

Matt shrugs it off, but Worm steps up and pulls Matt away from the table.

WORM

C'mon. Let's go.

Matt is annoyed, but too tired to argue. They head for the door.

JOHNNY GOLD

What do I always say? Anybody,
anytime...

INT. LONG ISLAND RAILROAD, PORT WASHINGTON LINE - DAY

Matt and Worm sit slumped down in their seats.

WORM

The fuck's the matter with you?

MATT

I didn't have it.

WORM

You didn't have it? Since when do you
gotta have it to beat a puke like that
out of a pot? A grade schooler wouldda
played back at him.

MATT

I was prepared to wait him out.
Eventually he'd have bluffed at the wrong
pot, and I'd have had him.

WORM

We don't have the time. You gotta make
moves.

MATT

The move was folding. You can't lose
what you don't put in the middle.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WORM

Fuck that. We needed that pot. Where are we at?

MATT

I'm too tired to count it.

Matt hands over the bankroll to Worm, who counts it with the crispness of a bank teller.

WORM

Seventy-three hundred. Pot you just gave that v-neck sweater would've put us near ten grand. Look at you, one fifty-six hour session, and you need a nap.

MATT

Fuck that. Can't sleep. We don't have the time.

WORM

Yeah, yeah. I know what you need.

INT. BARBER SHOP, PENN STATION - LATER

Matt and Worm lay back in barber chairs with hot towels covering their faces. They are attended to by two silent BARBERS.

MATT

I feel like I'm gonna get whacked sitting here like this.

Barbers take the towels off of their faces and start putting on shave cream. The barbers brandish gleaming straight edge razors and go to work. Matt and Worm talk while barely moving their mouths now, trying to get a word in between strokes.

WORM

Seventy-three. We have two days to double it.

MATT

We'll get close. Look, I'm sure if we're a little short Grama will--

WORM

I know a game...Up in Binghamton. An all-nighter with twelve to sixteen guys. Two tables running. Municipal workers. It's on after they cash their paychecks.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATT

You sure about this? We drive up there
we kill five hours each way...

WORM

There's fifteen, twenty grand in the
room. We only need half that.

The barbers begin wiping off the residual shave cream.

Matt sits up refreshed.

MATT

Lead me to it.

EXT. PARKING LOT OF KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS HALL - NIGHT

Matt and Worm pilot their rental off a rural road into the
parking lot. There are a dozen cars there, all State
Trooper brown and whites.

Worm parks the car amongst the others and they climb out.

MATT

Municipal workers, huh?

WORM

They work for the city.

MATT

They work for the state, you idiot. I
don't like this at all.

WORM

You see any other outs?

Matt considers it.

MATT

Shit, how am I even supposed to get in
this game?

WORM

Easy. This guard, Pete Nye, I must've
lost ten grand to him over eighteen
months. The guy thought I was tuna fish.
His nephew plays here. Ask for Sean Nye.

Matt checks his watch.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATT

I figure about eight hours. So be back here by seven, seven thirty in the morning.

WORM

The hell am I gonna do in this town for eight hours? All they have is car washes and liquor stores. I thought I'd come in, sit for awhile.

MATT

No, Worm. Look around you. We'd have to be nuts to walk in there together. I already have half a mind to leave.

WORM

C'mon, I'll play it straight up.

MATT

Fine then. You play and I'll be back in eight hours.

Worm lights a cigarette.

WORM

Alright, alright. I'll find a bowling alley or something...

Worm gets back in the car.

Matt walks toward the Hall and puts an unlit cigarette in his mouth.

INT. KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS HALL - SAME

The place has cheap wood panelling, a vinyl covered bar kept by a BARTENDER, deer heads on the wall, and naughahyde chairs surrounding two poker tables. Large bodies of off-duty TROOPERS fill the chairs. Some are in uniform, some are in plaid flannel shirts. They all have mustaches.

Matt's arrival gains some attention.

BARTENDER

Help you?

MATT

Looking for Sean Nye.

BARTENDER

That's him over there.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The Bartender points to a man with red hair, crew-cut. Matt walks over to him.

MATT

Sean Nye? Your Uncle Pete said to ask for you if I was ever up near here.

SEAN NYE

You one of his 'students'?

MATT

No. I wasn't inside.

SEAN NYE

You must know him from hunting then...

MATT

Yeah. He beat me for about a grand over the lodge.

SEAN NYE

Well, that's the buy-in here. We play 20-40 Stud, grab a seat.

Matt takes his place in the game.

INT. POKER TABLE - LATER

Matt has solid stacks in front of him. A hand is being dealt.

(V.O.) MATT

Generally, the rule is: the nicer the guy, the poorer the card player. These guys, despite being cops, are real sweethearts. I'm right on schedule, up forty-two hundred. The morning can't get here soon enough.

ANGLE ON: The door. A large patrolman, BEAR, walks into the hall with his arm around Worm.

A hail of greetings go up to Bear.

BEAR

Hey, fellas. Met this guy down the Tavern. Says he likes to play a little cards.

Worm is offered a chair by a small officer, VITTER. Some of the others at the table are WHITLEY and OSBOURNE.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VITTER

Came to the right place.

Sean Nye offers his hand.

SEAN NYE

Sean Nye. You met Bear. This is Vitter,
Whitley, and Osbourne. This guy's name
is Matt.

Matt and Worm shake hands.

WORM

I'm Les.

VITTER

Deal Les a hand, Whitley.

Cards go out.

INT. POKER TABLE - LATER

Matt's stacks are healthy. Worm is appropriately behind.
Worm deals the hand.

ANGLE ON: Matt's cards, which are a King showing and two
Kings underneath.

Osbourne, showing Ace of hearts bets.

OSBOURNE

I like what I have. The bet is twenty.

Matt looks at his cards.

MATT

I believe him. Fold.

All eyes are on the next cards dealt, but Matt glares at
Worm.

INT. POKER TABLE - LATER STILL

Matt reluctantly posts his ante as the deal comes to Worm
again.

Cards go out.

ANGLE ON: Matt's cards, which are Ace on board with 7's
wired underneath.

Since Matt's high with an Ace showing, he must act first.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATT

Check 'em.

Hands are checked around, so Matt doesn't have the opportunity to fold.

Worm deals the next card to each player. Upon reaching Matt, he deals him a 7, but two cards jut out obviously from the bottom of the deck.

ANGLE ON: Worm's hand hurries to square the cards, but it's too late.

VITTER

Hold on there a fucking second.

Heads raise up around the table and all attention is on Vitter.

VITTER

Put the deck down.

WORM

What?

VITTER

Put down the damned deck.

Worm obeys.

The game at the second table halts and everyone cranes for a look at what's going on. Even the bartender stops pouring.

SEAN NYE

Trouble, Stu?

VITTER

Looks like we got ourselves a road gang here.

At this, the troopers from the other game get up and surround the table.

All eyes bore into Matt and Worm. Matt's cards are practically glowing neon.

A towering officer from the other table steps in to adjudicate. He is SEARGENT DETWEILER.

DETWEILER

Hell's going on, Stu?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

VITTER

This son of a bitch is base dealing and caught a hanger, Sarge.

WORM

Base dealing? Hanger? The fuck're you talking about.

DETWEILER

He's saying you're dealing from the bottom of the deck.

SEAN NYE

What'd he give him?

VITTER

Seven of hearts.

DETWEILER

You boys professionals? You "working"?

MATT

No, I--

DETWEILER

Don't answer. Cards speak for now. Long as that seven didn't help you, we'll listen to what you have to say. Turn his cards, Whitley.

Whitley moves to flip Matt's undercards. Matt looks ill, as if he just wants to dissappear.

The cards are turned--two black 7s. He's got trips.

DETWEILER

One last thing.

Detweiler leans across the table and picks up the deck. He holds it up, showing the bottom card to all in the room: Ace of diamonds.

The room is completely silent for a moment.

WORM

Guess you'll be readin' us our rights then?

VITTER

Yeah.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

A chair scrapes against the floor, and the tables are upset as Matt and Worm are jerked from their seats. Matt's cigarette falls from his mouth.

Huge, meaty blows rain down on them. Fists and feet thrown by underpaid, but well-trained men who don't receive much respect for the job they do.

Just as it seems to have subsided, a new wave of punches descends. Everyone gets a piece of them.

As Matt and Worm lay on the floor bleeding, several hands rifle their pockets taking every loose dollar they have.

EXT. PARKING LOT - MORNING

Matt stirs on the ground. The lot is empty but for their rental car. He groans as he comes to a sitting position.

MATT

Jesus.

He crawls over to Worm and gently tries to bring him around.

MATT

Worm? Worm? Les, you alright?

Finally Worm comes to.

WORM

Matt...

MATT

Yeah?

WORM

You should've played the kings.

Matt leans back.

MATT

You're an asshole.

WORM

I know, I know.

They half-heartedly pat at their pockets.

MATT

Everything. They took it all.

Worm clutches at his shoe. He pulls out a few \$100's.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WORM

Three hundred. That's all I've got.

Matt takes out his cigarettes. He has his folded \$100. Matt spits out a mouthful of blood. His eyes are blackened.

Worm puts a cigarette between his cracked lips and lights it with a swollen hand.

WORM

I can't believe I caught a fucking hanger...That never happens.

Matt tries to stand, but sways back to a sitting position.

MATT

Man, these guys were thorough. Anything broken on you?

Worm passes his cigarette to Matt and probes around his face with his fingers.

WORM

Maybe my nose.

MATT

What were you fucking thinking in there?
I had 'em.

WORM

I was trying to give you an edge.

MATT

Great, now what're we gonna do for money?

WORM

I said I'm sorry. I took my shot, and missed. Happens.

MATT

Happens all the time around you, Worm.

WORM

Happens to you too, Mattie. You're the one took that big fall before I came out. You had about three fucking dollars in your pocket when I saw you--

MATT

Fuck you. That's different--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

WORM

It's always different for you, huh. Your shot is somehow fucking noble, mine's not worth shit. You think you're the only one with ambitions.

MATT

Yeah? What's your ambition?

WORM

You know...

MATT

No, I don't. You fucking tell me.

WORM

...Ah, I don't fucking know...I don't think like that.

MATT

You don't think.

WORM

Exactly. I just try and get by. That's all I can do now. You weren't in there with me...The noise, the constant fucking noise. Iron doors banging. You never sleep, you only wait till morning. We're just different now man. You're looking down the road. Always figuring. Calculating the odds, playing your man. You're going pro. Sitting in the Mirage, rubbing elbows with Johnny fucking Chan--

MATT

Listen, Worm--

WORM

You think you can beat the game, straight up. I know it can't be done. I know the only way is if you have an edge. That's my way.

Matt flicks the cigarette butt in Worm's direction, and hauls himself to his feet.

MATT

Okay, what's our edge now? We owe fifteen grand in a day. How do we play this, Ace?

Worm gets up.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

WORM

This? This you know. We fold the fucking hand.

MATT

Whattaya mean?

WORM

Get the fuck outta Dodge. Steer wide of New York. Plenty of places guys like us can quietly earn a living. Be back on our feet in no time.

MATT

Guys like us? I'm not living like that. Go back to New York, talk to Grama, find someone to stake me--

WORM

Talk to Grama? Well it's not just Grama.

MATT

What're you talking about? You said Grama was on his own.

WORM

Well, truth is Teddy KGB bankrolled that cock-diesel psycho.

Matt looks surprised, but only for a moment.

MATT

KGB. So you've fucked us right up the ass, Worm.

WORM

Yeah, now you see what I mean. Highway time.

Matt spits out some blood.

MATT

I'd rather face it now. If they're gonna do me worse than this, I want to see it coming.

Worm reflects on this.

WORM

Time to go Greyhound, Mattie. You with me?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

MATT

No, I'm not, Worm. Not this time. But you go on ahead, I'll go back and clean this up.

WORM

Suit yourself. You never fucking learn...

Worm zips his jacket.

MATT

You wanna know what I've learned? At the table, in the real game, friends can't help ya. It all comes down to what you're holding and what you've got inside yourself. I might not be holding much now, but I know what I've got inside, and I know what I can do with it. I don't know what's gonna happen to me, but at least I've got that.

Worm nods.

WORM

At least you're rounding again. You should thank me for that.

MATT

Yeah Worm, I'm real grateful.

INT. LEXINGTON AVE. APT. HALLWAY - DAY

Matt walks down the hall.

(V.O.) MATT

Fold or hang tough. Call or raise the bet. These are decisions you make at the table. Sometimes the odds are stacked so clear there's only one way to play it. Other times, like holding a small pair against two over cards, it's six to five, or even money, either way. Then it's all about feel, what's in your guts.

ANGLE ON: His fist knocking on a door. It swings open revealing Grama's broad face.

GRAMA

Look at you.

MATT

Yeah, look at me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

GRAMA
Come in.

MATT
Nah.

GRAMA
Where's your friend?

MATT
Oh, he's gone.

GRAMA
So you've got the money?

MATT
A little short.

GRAMA
How short?

MATT
The whole way.

GRAMA
Must be some kinda story.

MATT
I don't figure you want to hear it.

GRAMA
Where's your friend?

MATT
He's really gone.

GRAMA
Then I don't want to hear it.

MATT
You see I can't pay.

GRAMA
I see you're banged up pretty good.

MATT
Yeah.

GRAMA
Never should have vouched for that
scumbag.

Matt shrugs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MATT

Maybe not.

GRAMA

You're leaving me no outs here.

MATT

Why?

GRAMA

Can't trust you two aren't playing me.

MATT

I'm not the one working with a partner.

GRAMA

You wanna take it up with him, go ahead.
Otherwise, you have a day and a half, or
this'll feel like a Swedish massage.

Grama closes the door.

EXT. HIGH RISE - NIGHT

Matt leans against the building that houses the Mayflower Club. Knish walks out the door of the building and lights a cigarette as he joins Matt.

MATT

Thanks for meeting me out here, didn't
want to go inside like this.

As Knish draws close he sees Matt's condition.

KNISH

You look like Duane Bobick after one
round with Norton. Fuck happened to you?

Matt shrugs.

MATT

Worm.

KNISH

That motherfucker. When're you gonna
listen?

MATT

I'm listening.

KNISH

Cops get involved?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATT

Yeah, they did.

Knish ashes his cigarette.

KNISH

Whattaya need? Five hundred, a grand?

MATT

I need fifteen thousand dollars.

KNISH

Fifteen?...I need a blowjob from Christy Turlington. Get the fuck outta here, fifteen thousand dollars...

Matt takes it in.

MATT

Seriously, Joey, what can you do for me? Five hundred isn't even gonna get me started.

KNISH

Goddamn it, Matt, if five hundred won't help, what's two grand gonna do? Kinda trouble you in?

MATT

The worst kind, with the worst guy.

KNISH

KGB...

Matt nods his head.

KNISH

Didn't I tell you never let these guys get a hold of you?

MATT

You told me a lot of things.

KNISH

You ignored most of it--

MATT

That's not true...

KNISH

I tell you to play within your means, you risk your whole bankroll. I tell you you're not ready for prime-time, you sit
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

KNISH (cont'd)

with the best. I tell you not to over-extend yourself--to re-build--you go into hock for more. I was giving you a living, Matt, showing you the playbook I put together off my own beats. That wasn't enough for you.

MATT

Look, Knish, this time I don't need you to tell me how I fucked up. Every part of me hurts...I know I fucked up. What I need this time is whatever money you can give me.

KNISH

See, that's the thing, this time there is no money. I give you two grand, what's that buy you? A day? No, I give it to you, I'm wasting it.

MATT

That's fucking great.

KNISH

You did it to yourself, Matt. You had to put it all on the line for some Vegas pipe dream. I tell you you gotta go it alone, you go ahead and take on freight.

MATT

Sure, Knish, I took some risks. You? You see all the fucking angles, but you never have the stones to play one--

KNISH

'Stones,' you little punk? I'm not playing for the thrill a' fucking victory here. What am I, eighteen years old? I owe rent, an alimony, child support. I play for money. I never missed a payment, asshole. My kids eat. I have stones enough not to chase cards, action, or fucking pipe dreams of winning the World Series on ESPN. This is my profession. Is it lonely? Is it fucking bleak? Sometimes.

Knish flicks away his cigarette butt.

KNISH

Back when I was twenty at St. John's, when I was a kid, I had dreams. I was third team All-America in The Sporting News. The Captain the basketball team.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

KNISH (cont'd)

Then I pop my knee and the fucking coach comes in and cuts me. How's that for a bad beat? Just like that, the coach loosed the dead weight. What'd I have then? I had nothing. I scraped and clawed, and found how to live off cards. Did it make me cold? The fuck do I know? Do I wonder what it'd be like to push it all in? Yeah, but I can't afford to...

MATT

So now you're loosing the dead weight, huh?

KNISH

It's not like that, Matt. All the degenerates in this place, you're the one I can talk to. The only one I see myself in. You want me to call some people, try and get you some time, I will. Place to stay, or the truck, no problem. But about the money, I gotta do this. I gotta say no.

MATT

Fine. I unnerstand.

They begin to part, but Matt stops.

MATT

Hey, Knish?

KNISH

What?

MATT

I did put it all on the line. That's true. And you know what? It wasn't a bad beat. I wasn't unlucky. I was outplayed that time. But I know I'm good enough to sit at that table. It's no pipe dream. I'm not chasing anything. I know all about obligations. I know about the scraping and the clawing...but I also know there's more for me than just getting by.

Knish lights another cigarette.

KNISH

I don't doubt your talent Matt...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

MATT

Listen, I never told anyone this. One night, seven, eight months ago, real late at the Taj, I see Helmuth walk in and sit \$300-\$600. The guy's tall as a tree, lanky. Loose. The room half-stops and puts an eye on him, and he's just beating up the table. Leaning on guys, needling, non-stop chatter...Soon, after forty-five minutes, the craps tables are dead because all the high rollers are in watching, and some are playing with him. They're giving away their money so they can say the played with a World Champion. You know what I did?

KNISH

What?

MATT

I sat down the table.

KNISH

No. You'd need fifty, sixty grand to play right in that game.

MATT

Well I had six. But I had to know.

KNISH

What happened?

MATT

I hung in for an hour. Folded mostly. But I made a score.

KNISH

Wired aces or kings?

MATT

Neither. Late position, Helmuth in the big blind, and I look down to find eight nine suited. I had to raise, to try and win it right there. Phil puts me on a steal, and re-raises. I decide, just decide, that I'm gonna forget about the money, and just fucking out-play him the hand. "Reraise."

KNISH

Re-raise? You played right back at 'im, huh?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

MATT

Flop comes King, King, Jack. You know, almost the worst possible flop for me. He bets right out, tryin' to bull me like all those fucking tourists he's been beating. But I have a feeling, I just know, he doesn't have a real hand. I hesitate for like two seconds and again, "Re-raise." Helmuth looks at me. Makes a move toward his checks, looks back at his cards, one more time at me...then he throws his hand into the muck. I took it down. "Y'have it?" he asks me. "Sorry Phil, I don't remember." I got up and walked straight to the cashier. I sat with the best in the world, Knish, and I won.

KNISH

You put a fucking move on Helmuth, you son of a bitch...So that's why you made the run at that No-Limit game...

MATT

That's right. And I'll do it again if I can live long enough.

Knish nods as he absorbs what Matt says.

KNISH

Well then I'm rooting for you, Matt.

MATT

Yeah...See you around, Knish.

Matt walks away.

INT. PETROVSKY'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Abe sits behind his desk reading papers. He wears reading spectacles on the end of his nose. A single lamp illuminates the office. The sound of a knock, and Matt enters.

MATT

Hello, Professor.

Abe pushes his spectacles up and peers at Matt.

PETROVSKY

Are you in pain, Mathew?

MATT

It's not that bad.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

PETROVSKY

It looks fairly bad. Have you seen a doctor?

MATT

No. No need...

PETROVSKY

There's something else you need, perhaps?

Abe leans over and opens his desk drawer. There is the telltale clink of glass. He sits up with a bottle of gin and two mugs. He pours two drinks.

MATT

Thanks.

Matt leaves his mug untouched.

PETROVSKY

Should I consider you Withdrawn from my class?

MATT

I guess so.

PETROVSKY

Is this temporary, will you be back next semester?

MATT

I think we both know I'm no lawyer...

Petrovsky drinks.

PETROVSKY

I hope my story didn't discourage you--

MATT

No, it inspired me. I was already on my way.

PETROVSKY

But now you're here. Are you in trouble?

MATT

Yeah, I am. Not with the law, I owe.

PETROVSKY

A gambling debt?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MATT

Yeah, but not mine. I vouched for the wrong guy, and now it's on me.

PETROVSKY

You know, Mathew, perhaps I can use my contacts, make it go away for you.

Matt thinks hard on this for a moment, as if he's calculating odds.

MATT

I appreciate that, Professor, I really do. But living in this world, I can't do it like that.

PETROVSKY

I understand. So, what will it take for you to be free of this?

MATT

I need fifteen thousand. Tonight.

Petrovsky breathes deeply.

PETROVSKY

So much? I'm not a wealthy man, Mathew.

MATT

I know. Kills me to ask. But it's the only play I have. Can you help me, Professor? Anything at all?

Petrovsky puts the top back on the gin bottle. He reflects and weighs.

PETROVSKY

I hate seeing you like this, Matt, and I want to help you. But fifteen thousand dollars...If it must be tonight, then ten is the best I can do.

MATT

Will you do that for me?

Matt is tense. Abe finally nods.

PETROVSKY

When my mother let me leave the Yeshiva it almost broke her, but she knew the life I had to lead. To do that for another is a mitzvah, and for that, I owe. So take the money and get yourself

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

PETROVSKY (cont'd)
out of this trouble, Mathew. I know you
can.

Petrovsky locates a checkbook in the blizzard of papers on
his desk. He writes out a check and hands it to Matt.

MATT
I promise--

PETROVSKY
--Now listen, there's an all-night check
cashing place on 47th and 10th, northeast
corner. Speak to Moishe there, he'll
cash my check no questions...

Matt gets up.

INT. CAGE ELEVATOR - NIGHT

Matt stands in the coffin-like space of the 30th Street
elevator.

(V.O.) MATT
I've often seen these people, these
squares, at the table. Short-stacked and
long odds against, all their outs gone,
one last card in the deck that can help
them. I used to wonder how they could
let themselves get into such bad shape,
and how the hell they thought they could
turn it around.

He pulls back the accordion door.

The eye slat opens and Teddy's wide face fills it. The face
chews.

The door is opened and Matt steps in.

INT. 30TH STREET CARD ROOM - SAME

Teddy, wearing a colorful Coogi sweater the size of a carpet,
smiles at Matt.

(V.O.) MATT
Just standing here makes me queasy. The
gray walls. The fucking mopes at the
tables. The musty smell. I feel like
Buckner walking back into Shea, but what
choice do I have?...

TEDDY RGB
So you have my money?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATT

I owe you that money tomorrow, right?

TEDDY KGB

Da.

MATT

So until then it's mine?

TEDDY KGB

Yes, for the next eight hours it's yours.
But if you don't have it all by then,
then you are mine.

Matt looks him in the eye.

MATT

If it's like that, I have ten grand...and
I'm looking for a game.

TEDDY KGB

What?

MATT

You heard me.

TEDDY KGB

So you've learned nothing from that last
shellacking I gave you.

MATT

I've learned plenty.

Teddy commences thinking for a moment, and puts an Oreo in
his mouth.

TEDDY KGB

So we'll play. Heads up. We both start
with a couple a racks. Blinds twenty-
five and fifty. We play till one of us
has it all.

MATT

Freeze out, huh? Your game, your place--
it's a sucker play.

Matt stares at KGB.

MATT

Let's do it.

INT. BACK CARD ROOM - LATER

Matt and Teddy sit face to face across the card table. They each have eight thousand in \$100 checks and two thousand in quarters in front of them. A few railbirds are around the table watching.

Blinds go in and Teddy deals them each two cards down.

ANGLE ON: Matt's cards. It's one of those things, he's actually got Kings.

MATT

Raise, Teddy. Thousand straight.

Teddy laughs.

TEDDY KGB

Very aggressive. 'New day,' and you won't be 'pushed around'. But I re-raise. Five thousand.

Teddy sits there, his mouth not moving.

(V.O.) MATT

Doyle Brunson says, "The key to No-Limit is to put a man to a decision for all his chips." Teddy's just done it. He's representing Aces, the only hand better than my Cowboys. I can't call, and give him a chance to catch. I can only fold if I believe him, or...

Matt stares at Teddy while playing with his checks.

MATT

Re-raise. All in.

Teddy gives Matt a withering stare. He takes an Oreo out and unscrews it. He considers the cream filling and...folds. He was trying to buy it.

TEDDY KGB

Take it down.

He slides another deck to Matt. Matt rakes in the pot.

INT. BACK CARD ROOM - SAME

The board is out and some checks are in the middle.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

(V.O.) MATT

In a heads-up match the size of your stack is almost as important as the quality of your cards. I chopped one of his legs out in the first hand, now all I have to do is lean on him until he falls over.

MATT

Tap. I bet your stack.

Matt puts in his bet.

TEDDY KGB

I have to call, I'm already committed

Matt flips over his cards.

MATT

Jacks up.

Teddy pushes his cards into the muck.

TEDDY KGB

They're good.

Teddy sits there. His rack is empty.

TEDDY KGB

Good hand. Catching that Jack on the turn, you got lucky there...

MATT

Yeah, I'm lucky.

Matt starts stacking checks and putting them in their lucite racks. He has all four in front of him now

TEDDY KGB

So that's it then. Just like a young guy, coming in here for a quickie. I feel so unsatisfied...

MATT

Real sorry.

TEDDY KGB

You must feel proud and good. Strong enough to beat the world.

MATT

I feel fine.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

TEDDY KGB
Me too. I feel okay.

MATT
Good. I'll just cash out then. Pay ya
and leave.

Matt stands up and puts on his jacket.

TEDDY KGB
'Course maybe we should check with one
other guy, see how he feels.

MATT
Who's that?

TEDDY KGB
(Calls out)
Grama.

Grama walks into the room.

MATT
I thought I smelled him.

GRAMA
I'll take what's mine.

Matt slides three racks to Grama.

TEDDY KGB
'Course you could let it ride, Matt.
Take your chances. You'll let that
happen, won't you Grama?

Grama shrugs.

GRAMA
Sure, partner. He's still got till
morning to make good.

MATT
No thanks. I'll just keep the five left
over.

TEDDY KGB
Fine. This is a fucking joke anyway.
After all I'm paying you with your
money...

MATT
What'd you mean?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

TEDDY KGB

Your money. I'm still up twenty grand
from the last time I stuck it in you...

Matt stops. A few railbirds comment in Russian and laugh out loud in English.

(V.O.) MATT

They're trying to goad me. Trying to own me. But this isn't a gunfight. It's not about pride, or ego, it's only about money. I can leave now, even with Grama and KGB, and halfway to paying Petrovsky back. Only a sucker would stay and trade body blows...I told Worm, you can't lose what you don't put in the middle. You can't win much either. The decision is clear...

Matt pulls the racks back toward himself.

MATT

Deal 'em.

TEDDY KGB (YELLS)

Checks.

A Russian hurries in with new racks and sets them next to KGB.

MATT

Double the blinds?

TEDDY KGB

Yeah. Table stakes.

MATT

Feel free to re-load at any time.

Teddy glares at Matt.

INT. BACK CARD ROOM - LATER STILL

ANGLE ON: Matt's stack. Fortunes have changed, and he's only got five grand left. Teddy's got towers. Empty racks litter the table. Grama paces with menace.

The flop is out--A-C, 3-D, 5-S.

The pot is a few grand.

ANGLE ON: Matt's cards--A-H, 5-D.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TEDDY KGB

You must be kicking yourself for not walking out when you could. Bad judgement, but don't you worry son, it'll all be over soon. Bet's to you.

Matt puts his hand on his stack.

(V.O.) MATT

Like a fighter when it's too late to win on the scorecards, I'm looking for that one haymaker that'll turn things around. Thing is, the harder you try for that one punch, the more it slips away. But I have a hand, and it's time to bet it all right now.

Matt is about to act when Teddy puts an Oreo in his mouth and slowly chews. Matt stares at Teddy's mouth. HE PAUSES.

ANGLE ON: Teddy's mouth as he slowly chews.

Matt removes his hand from his stack.

MATT

I'm gonna check.

TEDDY KGB

No check here. I tap you.

Teddy pushes in a massive stack. Matt sits there staring at Teddy. Matt turns over his hole cards.

MATT

I'm gonna lay these down. Top two.
'Cause I know you played 2-4. And I'm not drawin' against a made hand.

Teddy tries to keep his face blank. He takes the pot, but he's startled, and some disappointment or maybe even fear peek through.

TEDDY KGB

(To Grama)

Lays down a monster. Shouldda paid me off on that...(To Matt) The fuck did you lay that down?

Teddy stares at Matt. He looks at his stacks, he looks at his hands, he smooths his clothes. He looks at his bag of Oreos, and throws it across the room furiously. It explodes against the wall in a burst of chocolate crumbs.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

MATT

Not hungry, Teddy?

TEDDY KGB

Son of a bitch. Let's play some cards.

INT. BACK CARD ROOM - LATER

The room is now thick with cigarette smoke. The outer room's games have ceased and railbirds are leaning in heavily on the duel going on.

Matt has climbed back. He's got thirty grand in front of him, Teddy has about the same.

GRAMA

Quit fuckin' around Teddy, finish it.

TEDDY KGB

Hangin' around, hangin' around. Like a fucking leech. Can't get rid of 'im.

Blinds are in. Two cards each go out, face down.

MATT

Not going anywhere. Double the blind, two hundred.

TEDDY KGB

Fine, I call.

Teddy burns a card and deals the flop--6-D, 7-S, 10-H. It's Matt's turn to act.

MATT

Check it.

Matt slams his hand on the table.

(V.O.) MATT

Most guys would've gone on chewing slowly till they were dead broke. Teddy spots his own tell after one hand, he's that good. But no one's immune to getting a little rattled.

TEDDY KGB

Two grand.

Teddy flicks his bet in a bit too carelessly. Matt takes a moment.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATT

Call the two thousand, and don't splash the pot.

Matt bets his chips with care.

TEDDY KGB

You're on a draw, Matt? Go 'way, this one's no good for you. And in my club, I'll splash the pot whenever the fuck I please.

Teddy burns a card and deals a 2-C.

MATT

Okay, okay. Still checking to the boss.

TEDDY KGB

That's right, big poppa bets the pot.

He pushes in the \$4400 in checks.

Matt looks at Teddy. He rubs his neck and cuts his checks with anguish. He slowly counts the same amounts and puts it in.

MATT

I gotta call, or I won't respect myself come morning.

Teddy burns a card.

TEDDY KGB

Respect's all you'll have left in the morning. Last card comin'.

Teddy deals the river--Ace of Spades.

Matt stares at the ace, in pain. He seems tortured by that card, but trying to hide it.

MATT (DEFEATED)

Check.

TEDDY KGB

It hurts, doesn't it? You can't believe what fell...All your dreams dashed. Hopes down the fucking drain. Your fate, standin' right behind me.

Teddy pushes in everything he has.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

TEDDY KGB

That Ace couldn't have helped you. I bet it all.

Matt hesitates, stands up.

MATT

You're right, it didn't help me.

Matt pushes in all his checks too. Teddy is dumbstruck as Matt flips his cards, 8-S, 9-S.

MATT

I flopped the nut straight.

Teddy flings his cards in and backhands the empty lucite racks off the table. A buzz of Russian goes up from the railbirds. The others groan in disbelief.

TEDDY KGB

Mutherfucker. Mutherfucker. That's it.

GRAMA

That's it? The fuck do you mean that's it? Take 'im down, Teddy.

Teddy shakes his head.

TEDDY KGB

No more. Not this time. Son of a bitch checked it all the way. Trapped me.

Grama falls into a chair looking beaten.

MATT

Feeling satisfied now, Teddy? 'Cause I could go on busting you up all night.

The room grows tense. KGB, Grama, the heavyweight Russians bristle as Matt has clearly overstepped...Then, Teddy shakes his head, and limply signals one of his men.

TEDDY KGB

He beat me, straight up. Pay him...pay the man his money.

Matt's slumps forward toward all the checks as he realizes what he's done.

EXT. 62ND AND COLUMBUS - MORNING

Matt walks down the street, his unlit cigarette hanging from his mouth. His clothes are now days old, he looks exhausted, disshevelled, but at peace.

(V.O.) MATT

Turned my ten grand into just over sixty.
I paid Grama his fifteen, the Mayflower
got six, and after the ten going back to
the Professor, I'm back where I started--
with three stacks of High Society.

EXT. FORDHAM UNIVERSITY - DAY

Jo stands on the steps of the Law School Building. She's smoking a cigarette. Matt walks up to her, a bag over his shoulder.

JO

You look like hell.

MATT

Should've seen me yesterday, Jo.

JO

Are you alright?

MATT

Yeah, I'm okay. You?

She pauses, doesn't know where to start.

JO

I'm how I am.

She gestures to the bag.

JO

So you're outta here, huh?

Matt nods and pulls a thick, sealed envelope from his jacket.

MATT

Nothing left for me here...Listen, this
has to go to Petrovsky. He's still
asleep, and I can't wait. Can I count on
you?

JO

You could always count on me, Matt.

This hits him hard.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MATT

Thanks.

Matt turns to leave, then stops. He turns back around and pulls her to him. They hold each other tight for a moment. Matt wipes a tear from her eye.

MATT

Take care, Jo.

JO

I'll try. And Matt, call me...if you ever need a lawyer.

MATT

I will and I will.

He kisses her once and goes. Jo watches him walk away.

JO

Hey.

Matt looks back over his shoulder.

JO

Premium hands.

He smiles.

EXT. COLUMBUS AVENUE - SAME

Matt hails a cab and gets in.

INT. CAB - SAME

MATT

To the airport.

CABBIE

Where you headed?

MATT

I'm going to Vegas.

Matt pulls the door shut and the cab begins to move.

FADE OUT.