

NOIR NOIR NOIR
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CHARACTERS [*Genders reversed in some of these*]

Female Narrator
Male Narrator
Mike Sledge: Private Eye
Velda Stolichnaya: Mike's PI Assistant & Girlfriend
Pat Delaney's: Mike's cop friend
Berga Torn: Hitch-hiker, gets killed early on
Lily Carver: Berga's roommate
Carl Evello: smooth mob kingpin
Michael Friday: Carl's half-sister

Sugar Smallhouse & Charlie Max: Carl Evello's goons
Carmen Trivalgo: Nick Raymondo's landlord
Dr. Max Soberin: evil doctor & criminal boss
Billy Mist: gang leader
Mousie: slinking lower-echelon stoolie
Dave: low-life bookie
Eddie Connelly: reporter
Scared Reporter
Nicky: auto mechanic
Al Affia: waterfront mobster

PLUS: Roadblock cop, additional mob goons, 2 FBI agents, mob tail with crooked teeth, super at Berga's old apartment, woman in phone-booth, woman in bar, Velda's telephone friend, & assorted people having phone conversations.

CREDITS & INTRODUCTION

[Accompanied by beginning-credit music & movements: one long group stop-motion running sequence, with stillnesses]

Female Narrator: *Noir Noir Noir!* A strange, dangerous experience in love & murder – brilliantly enacted, magnificently produced, superb entertainment!

Male Narrator: A new high in stage dynamics! Far beyond anything attempted before!

Female Narrator: Stephanie Skura, brilliant director of *The Corduroy Prayer* & *Two Huts*, now creates the excitement of the year: *Noir Noir Noir!*

Male Narrator: Born of high anxiety & low budgets!

FN: A story that dares to tell of those who defy rules of respectability!

MN: A plot that dares to go off on inexplicable tangents!

FN: About the hunters who violate laws to defy law-breakers!

MN: About the hunted, who'll stop at nothing in their lust for power!

FN: In fact all the characters continually defy & violate each other!

[Announcement-type music]

MN: And these are the remarkable players whose new conceptions of dramatic portrayal are the envy of the acting profession!

[Each character enters & deliberately assumes specific pose or movement, the assuming being as important as the move or pose]

MN: Starring Gary Shoemaker, who doomed to stardom in *Two Huts* and *Spelling Bee*, as Private Eye Mike Sledge, and Sara Deppenbrook, who dazzled audiences in *The Corduroy Prayer*, as his criminally gorgeous colleague Velda Stolichnaya.

FN: And with Alex Hanbury as sardonic police detective Pat Delaney, Emma Evey as flannel-mouthed mob shyster Charlie Max, and Holly Souchak as his obsequious side-kick Sugar Smallhouse.

MN: And with Kaetlyn Kuchta, who entranced audiences in *Two Huts*, as groundbreakingly prototypical bad girl Lily Carver! Bryanna Kifolo as Michael Friday, the woman torn between loyalty and morality. And Alyssa Newburg as Berga Torn, the woman who will swallow anything!

FN: And Jessi Haggerty-Denison, the shameless genius of *Arcadia*, as slimily arrogant Carl Evello!

MN: And Lara Schaffer, as scheming psychiatrist Dr. Soberin.

FN: And with *[rest of cast]*, playing the rest of the unsavory, confused, unstable, violent, obsessive, hard-drinking, hard-smoking, out-of-control characters who populate this one-of-a-kind entertainment spectacle!

ACT ONE

SCENE 1, On the Road with Mike & Berga

[Almost in darkness, like night-time, with occasional bright lights that don't spill or illuminate. Berga is running, breathlessly away from something. We hear her heavy breathing, live and/or prerecorded. She tries to flag passing head lights, that pass her by. Then she faces oncoming head lights, holding her hands up in 'stop' mode, averting her gaze as lights zoom toward her & veer away at the last moment]

Female Narrator: *[Heavy breathing with too many inhales & exhales throughout]*, When I was little, I used to dream I was being chased by a monster. I was inside the house, & the monster was trying to get in, & I'd run around locking all the doors to the outside before he could get to them. Once I escaped by jumping a mile high in the air, & when I was at the height of the jump, I realized I had no way of getting down!

[Sounds of car's squealing brakes]

Male Narrator: All I see is the dame standing there waving her arms like a huge puppet. I manage a sweeping curve around the babe, the car fishtails, & I almost run up the side of the cliff.

[Mike's body is the car, running & turning last minute without slowing down, almost toppling over, cursing indecipherably]

FN: From the moment he meets her, she's living on stolen time, trying to stay in the beam of the headlights.

MN: The butt falls out of my mouth, burns a hole in my pants, & I flip it out the window. Stink of burnt rubber and brake lining hanging in the air, & I'm thinking of every damn thing I ever wanted to say to a hare-brained woman so I can have my lines ready when I get my hands on her.

[She sits next to him]

Berga: Thanks, mister.

Mike: You almost wrecked my car. How stupid can you get?

[They bite the words off]

Berga: Pretty stupid.

Mike: I should've thrown you off that cliff back there.

[He fumbles for a cigarette, she reaches it before he does. Her hands are shaking. He lights hers, gets one for himself & lights that too.]

MN: I see another car behind us, & fear pulls the corners of her eyes. I get a real good look at her in those headlights. When only red dots of taillights show in front of us, she lets out her breath & leans back. Interesting face. Looks like a crazy Viking dame in a trench coat.

Mike: How'd you get up here?

Berga: What does it look like?

Mike: Like you got dumped.

Berga: I'll know better next time.

Mike: I don't care what you do as long as you don't get strained through my radiator.

Berga: Look, I'm grateful for the ride and I'm sorry I scared you. But if you don't mind, just shut up and take me somewhere or let me out.

[Speaking simultaneously]

FN: He's never heard a woman talk like this.

MN: A dame with nerve like that!

Mike: Well, it's a crappy place to be stranded -- probably woulda done the same thing. Where do you want to go?

Berga: Where're *you* going?

Mike: New York.

Berga: I'll go there.

Mike: It's a big city, kid. Name the spot.

Berga: Make it a subway station. First one you come to.

[Sounds of car getting going. They scramble forward]

MN: Roadblock ahead. Trouble: like smoke over a cake of dry ice. You can't smell it but you watch it seep around things and know something's going to crack real soon.

Mike: Trouble, officer?

FN: I take his hand, & slide it under my trench coat to touch my bare thigh. His fingers stiffen, so I hold them between my legs, nuzzle my head on his shoulder.

Cop: Woman escaped from an asylum upstate. Young, wearing a trench coat. Seen anybody like that?

MN: A real cop, this guy. I wonder how much he paid for his appointment.

Mike: Haven't seen a thing officer. And my wife's been asleep.

Cop: OK, move on. *[They do.]*

Mike: *[To Berga]* Can I have my hand back now? *[She smiles, lets go of his hand, & slides toward him on the seat]* So you're a fugitive from the nuthouse?

Berga: They forced me to go there. Took away my clothes so I'd stay.

Mike: Who?

Berga: Wish I could tell you that. I think you're someone who might understand. When people are in trouble, they want to talk -- and there are other reasons for leaking, big reasons. But you know the old saying-

Mike: What I don't know can't hurt me? *[She nods]*

MN: I don't get it. I know I should just drop her off & forget about her, but all I feel is trouble -- like smoke over dry ice seeping all over me.

FN: *[Quickly, to get this bit of plot business out of the way]* They stop at a service station; she goes to bathroom, & comes back a bit more relaxed. She gives the attendant a letter to mail but Mike doesn't see this.

MN: Just as we're rounding a curve, another car swerves out of the grass from the dark side of the road, Clatter of metal inside my head, & the explosion is soft & slow & full of sparkly particles. I hear her voice, pleading and murmuring like a wounded animal, but my eyes are glued shut. *[Sound of tires screaming on pavement]*

[Torture sounds chorus starts during above & lasts awhile, becoming the soundtrack for a stylized punching combat dance, by whole group, during which narrators speak, as below]

FN: *[Punchingly]* Men pile out of the sedan, one guy with a gun, scream of bullets, Mike's fist splits the guy's face open, then something hisses into his shoulder. He swings around to get him with his foot, just a little too late.

MN: *[Punchingly]* Something hits me across the forehead, all time & distance goes, explosions inside my head all mixed up with her screaming & my nausea & my hate for those bastards.

[Mike gets kicked over, then dragged]

MN: I try to get up, but only my mind can move. I can see the bastards' shoes & their legs & I can see her in the chair & I can see what they're doing to her. Then there's nothing but quiet. And a low swooshing sound in the distance

Mob Guy #1: That's enough.

Mob Guy #2: She's passed out but I'll bring her to. She can still talk & we still don't know anything.

Mob Guy #1: She's past it, you'd be raising the dead. Put her in the car and get rid of her.

Mob Guy #2: Him too?

Mob Guy#1: Both of them.

FN: She falls against him in the car, the caress of a corpse. Then something rams into the rear.

MN: I see the edge of the cliff a few feet away, I'm reaching for the door as the wheels dip down into the void *[home-made reverb cross-fades with waking-from-unconsciousness, Pat & Velda looking down at Mike, their voices echo-y, saying 'Mike' over & over again]*

SCENE 2, In the Hospital with Pat & Velda

[Rare well-lit scene, in the hospital. Velda is coming & going from where Mike is lying down, her body & voice seeming to echo repeatedly.]

Two Phone Conversations, one right after the other, or overlapping

[Urgent, breathless]

[Both facing front, lecture-like quality]

B: The structure is built of frames within frames and mirrors within mirrors.

A: Like fractals!

B: With grotesque close-ups & crooked angles

A: Worlds and minds askew...

[Nose-to-nose]

B: My *words* are falling off their shelves, into a wet velvet night-time void,

A: Into rainy streets with speeding vehicles coming toward.

B : They keep coming closer, & getting scarier.

[Back to Mike lying down, just coming into consciousness]

MN: Just turning my head brings waves of silent thunder inside my skull. The light hurts my eyes, but I keep them open. She's a blur, then a beautiful blur, then she's Velda. Mouth parted in a slow smile with all the happiness in the world wrapped up in it.

Velda: Glad to see you back, Mike.

Mike: I'm surprised I got here.

Velda: So are a lot of people.

FN: My hand over his says everything's OK, even though it isn't.

MN: I hold her warm soft hand for a long time and if she takes it away, I never know because when I wake again it's still there.

Phone Conversations

[Nose-to-nose]

A: We have to try to describe this.

B: OK -

A: But where to start?

B: I think we already HAVE started.

A: So how to continue?

[Spoken with stop-motion running while. holding phones]

B: My eyes aren't on the road, they're on you, for a dangerously long time.

A: I quietly slide my ass closer to yours,

B: My right hand touches your mid-upper thigh, lightly – then removes itself.

A: We speak of foreign languages, & how easy or difficult they are to learn.

B: We discuss the *word* "foreign" – how subjective and arbitrary it now sounds.

A: We both laugh, and then our eyes lock onto each other, like magnets sliding into their proper places.

B: Now our eyes are on the road again, all four of them.

A: You mean four eyes, that is, -- not four roads.

B: Yes, that's what I mean.

A: You ask me if I'm hungry. I say no. You say, me neither.

B: We say nothing for a long time, but it's not awkward, it's comfortable, like an old blanket spread across both our laps.

A: We feel no need for metaphor. We initiate nothing. We listen to the night and its smells.

B: We realize it's been night-time for days, & we're running away, knowing nothing about destination, only that we're running away, running together.

[Back again to Mike lying down, regaining consciousness]

[Pat enters]

Mike: Hi, Flatfoot.

Pat: Hi. Three days ago I figured I'd have to finance a new tux to bury the corpse.

Mike: Three days?

Pat: You got it. This is Thursday.

MN: They give each other a quick look with something behind it I don't get. *[Pat & Velda give each other a two repeating quick looks, stylized]*

Pat: Can you remember what happened, Mike?

Mike: I had an accident, that's all.

Pat: That's all?

Mike: Maybe one of you can tell me what's cooking behind those actor smiles.

Pat: I wish you weren't so sick. I'm the cop and you're the one who's supposed to answer questions.

Mike: Who wants to question me?

Pat: Federal agents, among others. That accident of yours happened in New York, but now you're across state lines in Jersey. New York State Troopers are looking forward to seeing you, plus some county cops.

Mike: Suppose *you* explain.

MN: He's hiding something. Looks at his fingers, plays with his nails.

Pat: You were lucky to get out of the car alive. The door sprung when it hit the side of the drop, you were thrown clear, they found you wrapped around some bushes.

Mike: There was a dame in there.

Pat: I'm coming to that. She was dead. She's been identified.

Mike: As an escapee from a sanitarium.

Pat: Those county cops were pretty sore about you lying to them. Why did you?

Mike: I didn't like their attitude.

Pat: You realize the mess you're fooling with? The woman didn't die in the crash.

Mike: I figured.

Pat: Damn it Mike, what are you into?

Mike: I'm waiting for *you* to tell *me*.

Pat: She was under surveillance by the feds. She was part of something big I don't know about myself & in the sanitarium to get over a nervous condition before talking to a closed session of Congress. Had a police guard but got out anyway. Now the Washington boys are hopping -- looks to them like *you* got her out of there & knocked her off.

MN: I'm looking at the ceiling. A crack in the plaster zigzags across the room & disappears under the molding.

Mike: It was an accident.

Pat: To have a practically naked woman in your car? To lie your way through a police roadblock? To have her dead before your car goes through a wall? I know you Mike. If accidents happen, they go the way you want them to.

Mike: It was an accident.

Pat: Look, I want to help you, but you gotta square with me. When those Feds move in, you'll have to do better than that accident story.

Velda: [*Touching Mike's face*] It's big, Mike. Can you fill in the details?

Mike: I picked her up on the way down from Albany. Don't know a thing about her. She seemed like a nervy kid in a jam, and saner, actually, than most people you come across. I didn't like the snotty way that cop acted when he stopped us, so I went on through. We got maybe ten miles when a black sedan pulled out in front of us. I was real mad and somebody took a shot at me. It missed, but I got sapped -- and never came completely out of it. I don't know where the hell they took us, but wherever it was they tried to force something out of the dame. She never came across. Then they wanted to get rid of her and me too so they piled us in the car and gave it a shove over the cliff.

Pat: Who are “they?”

Mike: Damned if I know.

Pat: Can you identify them?

Mike: Not their faces. Maybe if I heard them talk.

MN: I don’t mean maybe at all. I can still hear every syllable those bastards spoke and their voices will live in my mind until I die. **Or they do.** *[foreboding music]*

Pat: OK, I’ll check your story. Hope it doesn’t have any holes.

Mike: I’ll do my own checking when I’m up.

Pat: Careful, you’re in enough trouble as it is.

Mike: I’ll be fine. See you, Pat. *[Pat leaves. Velda slowly leans over to kiss him]*

[Group repeated stylized kiss as below]

FN: My hands are soft on his face & his mouth is a hot hungry thing that tries to drink me down. I take my mouth away just enough so he can kiss my neck & run his lips across my shoulders.

Velda: I love you Mike. I love you even when you’re all fouled up with trouble. Now, what do you want me to do?

Mike: Nose to the ground, kid. Find out what the hell this is all about. Ordinary girl gets killed and it rings bells all the way to Washington? Must be connected with something big. Check on that sanitarium and get a line into Washington.

Velda: That won’ be easy.

Mike: They can’t keep secrets in the capitol, baby. There’s always rumors.

Velda: And what’ll *you* do?

Mike: Get the feds to believe me.

Velda: You mean it didn’t happen that way?

Mike: Uh-uh, I mean it DID, but I gotta convince them. *[Velda leaves with slow rotating moves, & similar music, accompanied by whole group doing the same]*

MN: I watch her walk away, taking in every feline motion. Something animal-like in her hips, her liquid spine, her jungle taut shoulders.

Scene 3, Mike & FBI Agents

[FBI agents gather with a stylized walk; movement gist continues into the scene as they speak & listen]

MN: Monday. A rainy, dreary Monday that’s a huge wet muffler draped over the land. I watch it through the window and feel the taste of it in my mouth. When I get to the hospital lobby, they’re standing there politely, young guys with old eyes.

[Group FBI dance: light high steps with pauses & wiggling fingers]

FN: Sharp. Junior executive types. Maybe you could pick them out of a crowd but mostly you couldn’t. No flashy clothes, no obvious gun bulges. Not too fat, not too lean.

Faces you wouldn't want to lie to. Junior executives all right, moving up the ranks in the FBI.

MN: They're real nice these boys. They take my hat & coat, ask if I feel well enough to talk, and when I say yes, suggest maybe I'd like a lawyer present.

Mike: Nope, just ask questions and I'll do what I can to answer.

FBI Agent #1: Now, Mr. Sledge, you're completely aware of the situation?

Mike: I'm aware that no situation exists.

FBI #1: Really?

Mike: Look, friend. You may be FBI, and I may be up to my ears in something you're interested in, but let's get something straight. I don't get bluffed. I'm fairly well acquainted with the law and I came here of my own free will. I didn't squawk about coming because I want to get straightened out all the way around and quick. I have things to do and I don't want any cops tagging me around. Understood?

FN: They pass a folder around, but none of them are reading it. They know the damn thing by heart.

FBI #2: I notice you've had several close brushes with the law, Mr. Sledge.

Mike: Notice the result.

FBI#2: I have. Your license can be waived if we want to press the issue.

Mike: I said I'd cooperate. Quit trying to bluff me.

FBI#1: Police upstate want you. You ran a roadblock.

Mike: Wrong, chum. I stopped for it.

FBI#1: You did lie to the officer.

Mike: I wasn't under oath.

FBI#2: The dead woman in your car.

Mike: You're getting lame. You know damn well I didn't kill her. I'm sure you've checked my apartment. If she was shot, you found my gun, & took a paraffin test on me. If she was choked you know the marks don't match my hands.

FBI#1: OK, Mr. Sledge. The details checked, we're not after you. What's your opinion on this?

Mike: The dame knew something she shouldn't have. She wouldn't talk so they bumped her. I think the sedan that cut us off was the same one that passed us right after I picked her up. It was a bad spot to try anything so they went ahead and picked a good one. It was supposed to look like an accident. Now, you mind if I ask one?

FBI#2: Go ahead.

Mike: Who was she?

FBI#3: Berga Torn. Let's say, a friend of boys on the loose.

Mike: I don't get it.

FBI#3: You're not supposed to, Mr. Sledge.

MN: A freeze clouds up his eyes. Says that's as much as he'll say -- I can go now and thanks. Thanks a lot.

[Mike puts on his hat to leave, turns around to say:]

Mike: I will, fella.

FBI#1: You will what?

Mike: Get it. Then somebody else is going to get it. *[Foreboding music]*

Scene 4, Mike & Pat

[Mike visits Pat, or phones him]

Pat: How'd it go?

Mike: Waste of time.

Pat: They were just checking facts I already gave them. I suppose *you* asked *them* some things.

Mike: Yeah. I know the kid's name. And part of her history. What's the rest?

Pat: OK, I'm giving you this because you'll fish around and find it anyway.

Mike: Go ahead.

Pat: Heard of Carl Evello? *[Mike nods]* The big boy behind the powers. Senate investigations never turn up anything on him. They want him. Berga Torn was his girl for awhile.

Mike: She had something on him?

Pat: She was supposed to. You saw them trying to get it out of her.

Mike: You figure they were Carl's men...What about that sanitarium?

Pat: Her doctor advised a rest cure. Committee hearings were tied up til she was released.

Mike: Where do I come in?

Pat: You don't. An accident got you into it, so stay out of it.

Mike: Too late, it's already started. I got patted between the eyes, a dame got bumped and my car's wrecked. I don't let anybody get away with that. I'm going to knock the crap out of somebody and if it gets up to Evello it's OK with me.

Pat: What do I have to do, appeal to your patriotism?

Mike: I don't give a damn if Congress, the President and the Supreme Court tell me to lay off. The feds can be as cagey as they like, but nothing ever happens. So they get the big shots to testify. What happened when the big bankers testified? I can show you where they committed perjury in the minutes of the hearings. You know what happened – a slap on the wrist – nothing! They're too big to do anything with. They got too much dough and too much power and if they talk too many people are going to go under. Well, the hell with them. When I get to them, you won't have much trouble from them ever again.

Pat: You have it all figured –

Mike: Uh-huh. Right down to the self-defense plea. Cold bastards -- you should've seen what they did to that kid before they killed her. They were after something and she was the key to it. *[Foreboding music]*

Pat: Stay out of it, Mike. You cross those boys, you're gonna end up in the can.

Mike: So they're too smart to need help?

Pat: They have the equipment and the manpower.

Mike: But they don't have the attitude. The feds want to put those boys behind bars. Screw that. Those lads in the sedan only respect one thing.

Pat: Say it.

Mike: A gun in their bellies splashing their guts around the room. That they respect. See you around. *[Putting on his hat to leave]*

Phone Conversation

A: Did you know that Dustin Hoffman, with a few exceptions, refused to be in a film if he had to carry a gun?

B: We're so steeped in violence. It used to be, in a movie, one guy would just slug the other and knock him out. A gunshot was a big deal. Now shooting's the new normal.

A: And killing.

B: No -- it's got to be more exciting than just killing -- cannibalism, dismemberment, blood, blood in color, blood on the walls, drinking blood --

[Group movement involving 'stake-out' moves, carefully tracing things, turning corners, deriving some of it from how cops enter a place with gun & search rooms for hiding criminals] Music: Crime Scene USA #27 Private Hell

Scene 5, Mike's place, Mike & Velda

MN: I go back to the apartment. Unless you knew they were there you'd never notice it. Little things out of place. A streak through the dust where a coat sleeve dragged, an ash tray not quite in place, the rubber seal around the refrigerator door hanging because they didn't know it was loose and had to be stuffed back by hand.

FN: AND -- a cigarette butt in the bottom of the wastebasket that's not his brand. Somebody else, beside the feds, went through the place. Did a good job, but not as good as the feds.

MN: The smoke that's trouble starts to boil up around me again. You can't see it and you can't smell it, but it's there.

Phone conversation: Movie Titles Dialog #1

[Movement: same repeated move every time a film title is spoken]

A: Raw Deal!

B: In a Reckless Moment!

A: Oh no! I'm being Railroaded!

B: Then -- Ride the Pink Horse!

A: Watch out -- There's a Road Block! And a Rogue Cop!

B: It's a Racket!

A: And you're a Pushover!

B: Oh, You're On Dangerous Ground --

A: Well, Nobody Lives Forever.

[Velda comes over to Mike's apartment. Group kiss/shoulder squeeze]

MN: She walked into the living room bringing the warmth and love for life that was like turning on the light.

[Mike & Velda are kissing during this exchange]

Mike: You look more tired than before but I love you more than ever.

Velda: So I'm tired. Underneath, I'm beautiful.

Mike: Who can dig down that deep? Except me maybe.

Velda: JUST you, honey.

FN: I never get tired of looking at him, even after he gets beat up bad. He's everything you need just when you need it, a bundle of man who can be hard or soft or terrifying, but whatever it is, it's what you want. A lush beast of the jungle, a sleek sophisticate of the city, and I'm all wrapped up in and around and through him.

Side Conversation between narrators (first time they look at or acknowledge each other)

Female Narrator: You know what?

Male Narrator: What?

FN: I can't stop writing like Mickey Spillane. He gets under your skin, and then you're hooked, your lines and sinkers all mixed up together. I'll try to escape, but I feel trapped! inside the gritty hard-boiled sexist tobacco-smoking piece of goddamn fiction I've been reading!

MN: Actually, to me it feels kind of comforting.

FN: Maybe it's a guy thing.

[Back to Velda & Mike in Mike's apartment, no longer kissing -- in different locations]

Velda: This one's too big, Mike.

Mike: Yeah?

Velda: It was planned, organizational killing – so big the city authorities backed off. It's going so high even the feds are moving carefully.

Mike: What did you pick up?

Velda: I did see your car, what's left of it.

Mike: Poor baby. Last of the original hot rods.

Velda: What are you going to do?

Mike: They're figuring us all for suckers and don't care who gets hurt. I'm going to find out what the score is, and then a lot of heads are going to roll.

Velda: One of them might be yours, Mike.

Mike: Well it won't be the first. They're worried, whoever they are. Things didn't happen like they wanted. Instead of getting a sucker to frame, they got me. That they didn't like because I'm not the average Joe.

Conversation between Narrators again

MN: "Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor. He talks as the man of his age talks... with rude wit, a lively sense of the grotesque, a disgust for sham, and a contempt for pettiness." Raymond Chandler.

FN: Oh bullshit! This is a celebration of callousness, narcissism, and brutality! The Mike Sledge character is no snickering gangster, or mistakenly-accused everyman, or brave iconoclast! He relishes violence and he's a psychopath.

MN: Psychopath?

FN: Yes! Read the book by Kevin Dutton. He measures people on a psychopathic scale: for charm, persuasiveness, manipulation, ruthlessness, lack of empathy.

MN: And?

FN: The profession that rates highest -- is CEO. Also high are jobs in media, journalism, and the clergy.

MN: Oh my god.

FN: And he says some of us would do well to 'psychopath up' a little -- learn something about success. These people aren't necessarily violent, but they're assertive, don't procrastinate, focus on the positive, are cool under pressure, don't beat themselves up, and don't take things personally.

MN: Sounds like I definitely need to psychopath up.

FN: They also have something called 'cold empathy.' Warm empathy is when you actually feel what the other one's feeling. Cold empathy is when you're very aware of what they're feeling, but you don't feel it yourself -- you use it to manipulate them to get what you want.

MN: Oh no! That sounds like my mother!

[Back to Mike and Velda at Mike's apartment]

Mike: They were up here looking around. I don't know what they're after, but I don't think *they* know either. Just because they didn't find it doesn't mean they think I haven't got it. They'll be back.

Velda: What could it be?

Mike: Whatever it is, they tried to kill two people to find out. I'm in this thing as deep as that dame was. And I'm going to find out who 'they' are and what they're after.

Velda: Makes you a target.

Mike: Kitten, it sure does and that I like. Pulls them inside shooting range.

Velda: Mike, I have news. Your gun license and P.I. license are suspended.

Mike: They want me to do it the hard way.

Velda: Us, Mike, us. I'm in this with you.

Mike: All right kid.

Velda: This thing's so big muscle won't make a dent. Being smart's the only thing that's going to move it. So where do we go from here?

Mike: Start with Berga Torn. Her sanitarium records, her life history and the history of anyone she was associated with. That's *your* job.

Velda: And you?

Mike: Carl Evello. Somehow he's involved and he's *my* job.

Velda: While you were in the hospital I saw a few people with information on Evello. Mostly speculation, but interesting themes.

Mike: Such as?

Velda: Corporate mob government intertwined very upper echelon themes. And they still think you're in the deal somehow, you're a baited hook they'll use til something bites.

Mike: And in the end the public will benefit.

Velda: But you know what? They're stealing your stuff. You taught them that trick a long time ago. *[Velda starts to leave, her rotation dance]*

MN: She watched me from across the room, her eyes half closed in speculation.

Velda: Let's teach them some new tricks, Mike.

MN: She leaves and the room gets a little darker.

Scene 6, Mike & Pat

[Live laughing sounds by performers]

FN: He sits, staring out the window at the New York living kaleidoscope. The voice of the monster outside the glass is a constant drone, but when you listen longer it becomes a sarcastic sneer that pushes millions of people into bigger trouble.

MN: A derisive laugh that thinks blood running from an open wound is funny. And I'm wondering, how many are scared about survival, about how they're going to come up with the payments the monster keeps extracting.

FN: Then I know the voice outside for what it is. Not an intangible monster – but people, that's all. Soft, pulpy people. Most of them scared.

MN: But some gorging on flesh, & so bloated with power, they shatter when they get hit, splashing their guts on the ground. Arrogant jerks. They get away with it because they have money to back them up.

FN: Like Velda said, it's not going to be easy. You don't just ask around where you can find the top boys. You're always coming closer to the second when a bullet or knife or bomb or traffic accident spears you.

MN: Looking for those soft pulpy people at the top.

Phone Conversation

A: I had a dream I was a lion tamer, but all the lions rebelled and coyotes broke into the house. I spent my time hiding in the back room or shoving the coyotes away with my bare forearms.

B:

That sounds painful. But also hopeful -- that you didn't just hide, but shoved.

A: Maybe tomorrow night I can befriend the coyotes.

B: This would make great dialog -- can I steal it for *Noir Noir Noir*?

[Mike goes over to Pat's place, they talk]

Mike: I could be useful if you quit booting me around. So I *have* shot up a few guys -- public doesn't seem to miss them. There isn't a guy in Washington smarter than I am... not one guy.

Pat: You sure think a lot of yourself.

Mike: I have to. Nobody else does. Besides, I'm still around when a lot of others have taken their last car ride.

Pat: You're gonna dive in no matter what, we might as well use your talents instead of tripping over them.

MN: There you go, just like in the old days! You and me, the light in our eyes, riding over anything that stands in our way.

Pat: I'll tell you, Mike, I don't like the way the gold-badge boys do business either. Everyone's afraid to move and it's time they get a jolt. For so damn long I've heard this racket is over our heads, I almost began believing it. Tell me what you want, and I'll feed you. If something comes of it, maybe I keep my job.

Mike: A partner! I want information. Detailed.

Pat: Long list of known criminals with mob & corporate connections. Case histories of police negligence and criminal efficiency. Pages of arrests and no convictions. Lots of corporate mismanagement: misleading investors, due diligence fraud, theft, murder, and assorted felonies. And they're just the bottom rungs of the ladder. Some names we know. A lot of them who pull strings don't have names yet.

Mike: Carl Evello?

Pat: He's got one of those investigatable incomes, but he always talks his way out of it.

Mike: Berga Torn?

Pat: Just one of many murders.

Mike: We don't think alike there, Pat.

Pat: No?

Mike: They put an elite crew of boys on her. They don't do that for everyone.

Pat: Rumor was Evello kept her for awhile, then dumped her. Senate committee thought she'd be mad enough to spill what she had on him.

Mike: Evello wouldn't be that dumb.

Pat: You never know, when it comes to dames.

Mike: Finish it.

Pat: She had something to give but wanted time to collect it, and protection after she let it out. She was scared –

Mike: Oh great, so Washington assigns her a permanent bodyguard?

Pat: She got away anyway and was killed.

Mike; And I was there when it happened. Nice of me.

Pat: That's what the Washington boys thought too. They don't know you're the guy things happen to. Some people are accident-prone, you're coincidence prone.

Mike: Where's Evello now?

Pat: In the city, his whole operation. We know who some of them are, but nobody fingers them. There's that little item called evidence beyond a reasonable doubt.

Mike: We'll get it. They need capital to operate.

Pat: And we know how they raise that capital -- squeeze it out of the little guy. An extra tax he has to pay. Or his shares tank and they win because they bet against their own investors! They run an import business that drives the DEA nuts. They got their hands in

every racket with a political cover so heavy you can't bust through it with a sledge hammer. No pun intended.

Mike: None taken. Could be nobody's tried hard enough yet.

Pat: Yeah, well how you going to work it?

Mike: First Berga Torn. Give me the last address you got for her.

Pat: *[Giving Mike a folded piece of paper]* If anything comes up, this is a two-way deal, remember?

Mike: Yeah, I remember. *[He walks out]*

Phone Conversation: Velda with Female Friend

Velda: The criminal underworld isn't as amusing as you might think.

Velda's friend: Criminals aren't ever very amusing.

Velda: It's because they're failures. Those who make real money aren't counted as criminals. It's a class distinction – not an ethical one.

Velda's friend: Here's to crime.

[A following dance, followed by moves taken from film when Mike attacks his tail: 26:50]

Music: Crime Scene #24, LA Confidential

MN: I stand in front of the building, wishing I had a Lucky to smoke, like the guy in the doorway of the apartment across the street. He hesitates, makes like he doesn't know which way to walk. I turn east, he makes up his mind, he turns east too. Halfway down the block, I cross over to make it a little easier on him. Then I go three more blocks and pull a few gimmicks that have him practically climbing up my back. Get a good look at him and I'm going to add insult to injury by saying hello when I almost catch the end of a switchblade in my ribs and know he's not Washington at all.

FN: He's young and good-looking til he smiles. Crooked rows of stained teeth make him an expensively dressed punk on a high-class job.

MN: When I get done with him, he sits down on the sidewalk, plenty alive, plenty awake, but not even a little bit active.

Mike: Tell your boss to send a man out next time.

ACT TWO

Scene 1, Mike finds Lily

[Mike goes to Brooklyn to Berga's last known residence]

MN: Something happens to Brooklyn at night. No longer a sister borough, she withdraws into herself, pulls the shades down, and begins another life. Strange, exciting, tinted with bright lights, but elusive.

FN: Mike gimmicks the super to let him into Berga's old apartment. Her bedroom closet's got shoes, dresses, a suit -- fairly new, but not from exclusive shops. Dresser

filled to the brim, envelopes with receipts, and a letter from a ship called the Cedric saying sorry there are no available berths.

MN: And a small drawer with half-used lipsticks and all the usual junk a dame collects in no time. The other bedroom gives me a surprise -- there's nothing there at all.

Mike: Whose room?

Super: Lily Carver.

Mike: Where is she?

Super: Two days ago...she moved out, real quick.

Mike: The police see her?

Super: *[Nodding]* Maybe that's why she left.

Mike: Who paid the rent?

Super: Torn handed me the dough. I told the police already, I don't know where she got it.

Mike: Any men in here to see her?

Super: Mister, there's twelve apartments in this rat-trap -- I can't keep track of who comes and goes. She was a dame splitting her quarters with another dame who paid her dough and didn't make trouble. If a guy was keeping her he didn't get his money's worth. Wanna know what I think, I say yes, she was being kept. Maybe both of them.

Mike: OK. Where's the Carver girl?

MN: The look he gives me is quick and worried.

Super: She didn't leave no address.

Mike: You know, when you step in front of the law, charges can be pressed.

Super: Aw, look, mister. She wanted her mail sent, but don't want anybody to know where she is. I'll give you the address, just don't let my wife know.

FN: The number's on Atlantic Avenue. Third floor over a second-hand store and there's nothing to guide you in but the smell. I punch the button three times, stand in the dark & hear nothing ringing, so I ease myself into the smell. It's not just an odor. It's something that moves, warm and fluid, coming down the stairs, tumbling over slowly, merging with other smells until it leaks out into the street.

MN: Third floor. *[Do this instead of saying it if there's a door]* I rap on the door and wait. I do it again and springs creak inside. *[A quiet little voice says:]*

Lily: Yes?

Mike: Carver?

Lily: *[tired-sounding]* Yes.

Mike: I'd like to speak to you. I'm pushing my card under the door.

Lily: Never mind. Just come in.

[Mike enters and Lily's lying back, dressed in a bathrobe, with a gun pointed at him. She looks him over slowly.]

Mike: Expecting someone else?

Lily: I don't know. What do you have to say?

Mike: Whatever it takes to make you point that heater someplace else.

Lily: You can't talk that loud or that long, friend.

Mike: You're sure not good company, kid. The name's Mike Sledge. I was with Berga Torn when she got knocked off. They tried to kill me too.

Lily: [*Aims gun right at Mike's eyes*] More.

Mike: She was hitching, I picked her up, got edged off the road and brained by a pack of hoods. I was there with my head dented in when they worked her over, and I was in the car they pushed over a cliff -- a handy sucker to cover the real cause of her death, only it didn't happen that way.

Lily: How *did* it happen?

Mike: I was thrown clear. I'll show you the scars.

Lily: Never mind. You loaded?

Mike: Cops lifted my load and P.I. ticket.

Lily: Why?

Mike: They knew I'd bust into this thing and want to keep me out.

Lily: How'd you find me?

Mike: I picked up a thread, anyone could do it.

Lily: Suppose I don't believe you.

MN: I suck in a lungful of smoke, drop the butt to the floor, & let it lie there until you can smell the stink of burned wool in the room.

Mike: Kid, I'm sick of answering questions and I'm sick of having guns pointed at me. If you don't stow that thing I'm gonna beat the hell out of you. What'll it be?

FN: He doesn't scare me. I let the gun rest in my lap. I'm just tired.

Lily: All right. Sit down.

Mike: What's the story with you and Berga.

Lily: We worked at the same place & shared an apartment. The place closed & I lost my job. A friend of hers got me a job at a nightclub.

Mike: Did she work there too?

Lily: She was doing... a lot of things. Seemed to have a pretty good income. Then she started to change.

Mike: How?

Lily: She was scared. Twice she bought boat tickets to Europe but couldn't get the ship she wanted. After a while, she hardly left the house. Then the police came.

Mike: What did they want?

Lily: They asked questions. To me too. Things I didn't know about. I noticed someone following me home that night. Been that way ever since. I don't know if they've found me here yet.

Mike: Cops?

Lily: Berga wouldn't tell them anything. Then federal men came and took her away. Then THOSE men came. Said I'm dead if I talk to anyone.

Mike: [*Goes to sit next to Lily, caresses her face.*] You won't die. What did they want to know about Berga?

Lily: Don't know. They made me tell everything I knew, then went through her things.

Mike: They find anything?

Lily: Don't think so. They were mad about it.

Mike: Did they hurt you?

Lily: I've been hurt worse. What should I do? I'm scared.

Mike: Got any place to go?

Lily: No.

Mike: Get dressed, I'll wait.

Lily: Those men – they'll find me. I'm going to die, aren't I?

Mike: We'll make it tough for them to find you. *They're* afraid of things too. They think you know something they don't, and they're not going to kill any leads til they get what they want.

[Lily has dressed, and takes Mike's hand. Maybe she just puts on a coat on top of her bathrobe]

Lily: Where are we going Mike?

Mike: My place.

[They almost kiss, then don't]

MN: I stopped it there.

FN: Or maybe she stopped it.

MN: The word is out. Pack of conniving slobs with the world in their hands, & the power & money to buck a government. Well, before morning there won't be one of them who doesn't have a funny feeling in his gut. The word is out and they know me -- they'll be a little sweaty and not so sure of themselves any more.

[Velda calls Mike from their office]

Velda: You coming over?

Mike: Later. Did you make out on that info?

Velda: Somewhat. You want it now?

Mike: *Right* now, kitten. I'll meet you at the office in an hour.

Velda: All right, Mike.

MN: Lily makes breakfast, her crazy eyes vacillating between excitement and fear and hunger. She's all dressed up with no place to go.

FN: A beautiful doll with funny eyes that say she's been around too long and seen too many things. *[Lily does a flux dance during this, while Mike watches]*

Scene 2, Mike & Velda at Their Office

[Velda & Mike meet at the office. Velda's doing exercises while they talk. Mike follows her with his eyes.]

Velda: Got some names for you to check on. I was at the Texan Bar talking to Eddie Connelly, he's a reporter on the police beat. Eddie pointed out Billy Mist, sitting at the bar. Billy saw me looking at him and got the wrong impression. Came over and handed me the slimiest proposition I've heard in awhile. What I told him no lady should repeat.

MN: Billy Mist, the jerk with the haircut held down with a pound of grease. Tough guy with big money & heavy connections.

Mike: And you say I'm the one looking for trouble.

Velda: Bad?

Mike: His puny ego can't take a slam at his manhood.

Velda: Worried?

Mike: *[Lifting her, kissing her]* Yeah. *[Puts her down]* Let's not get off track though.

FN: My laugh was a silent thing but I knew he felt the same way I did.

Mike: What about the other names?

Velda: Nicholas Raymond. Old flame of Berga's. Killed falling out of a speeding cab. I got his last address & landlord: Carmen Trivalgo.

Mike: Interesting. And?

Velda: Guy named Leopold Kawolski. Ex-fighter, broke his hand & had to quit. Seen protecting Berga Torn. Then got hit by a truck. An accident, supposedly. They all knew Berga Torn. They all died just like you almost died – traffic accidents.

Mike: Yeah, it would have to seem like an accident....What about Berga's sanitarium record?

Velda: She went to Dr. Martin Soberin for an exam, he diagnosed her as hyper-nervous and prescribed a four-week rest cure. She paid in advance.

MN: If ever there was a mess this was it. Everything out of place and out of focus. The ends didn't even try to meet. Meet? Hell, they were snarled up so completely nothing made any sense.

Velda: Then there's the congressman, Bruce Ryan -- seen with Berga at a couple of rallies.

Mike: This keeps getting worse.

Velda: What did Pat have to say about her?

Mike: Pretty ordinary kid, born in Pittsburgh, Swedish father, Italian mother. Made a couple trips to Europe, last one was Italy. Jobs she held didn't pay the kind of money she spent, but that's easy to arrange for a babe like that.

Velda: Is Evello the connection?

Mike: Yeah, Pat'll give you the address.

Velda: He's mine then?

Mike: Til I get around to him. And kitten, carry that little heater of yours. The shoulder rig, nobody'll notice.

Velda: What's the angle?

Mike: Find out who his friends are.

Scene 3, Guys Like Mousie, & Chewing the Whole Lump

[Mike goes to meet with Mousie Basso. Whole group does a slinking dance. Chanting: 'Guys like Mousie' over & over again]

MN: Guys like Mousie you see around when there's not too much light, and never see when the heat's on.

FN: Guys like Mousie you see in the papers when the cops pull in their dragnet and there are no holes in the wall for them to crawl into. In the faces of guys like Mousie you can read your popularity with the wrong people by the way they shy away or hang onto you.

MN: From Mousie's face, I knew I was hot. When he saw me he would've been out the door if I hadn't reached inside my coat for a smoke. He got white & slunk over to me when I gave him the nod.

[This whole time, Mousie is trying unsuccessfully to light a cigarette with a very shaky hand]

Mike: Hello Mousie.

Mousie: Mr. Sledge, you and me ain't got a thing to talk about. I –

Mike: Maybe I like your company, Mousie.

Mousie: You ain't good company to be seen with.

Mike: I thought we were friends, kid.

Mousie: So you did me a favor. Doesn't make us that kind of buddies. I like being small potatoes. Small potatoes don't get dumped.

Mike: Unless somebody sees em talking to big potatoes.

Mousie: *[Hands shaking]* Look, I ain't giving or selling.

Mike: What did you hear, Mousie?

Mousie: You went and got everybody hopped up! If it's true you got something on the wheels, you better clam. Charlie Max and Sugar – *[he pauses mouth open]*

Mike: Say it Mousie.

Mousie: They're spending advance money along the Stem. Anyone else, even the mayor, they wouldn't even blink, but you -- they get hopped up. Money starts passing hands, two of the hottest rods in town combing the joints looking for you. You say you're gonna do something, you do it and always there's somebody dead and it ain't you. Usually I'd bet on *your* side, only this time it's different.

Mike: It's not different, Mousie. Their office boys'll try to check me off but I'll swat them like flies. I'm going to the top. The slime who pull the strings in their nice suits -- I want them and I'm going to get them. *[Mousie has been slinking away and is gone by now]*

[Mike calls Pat]

Mike: They're looking for me. Two boys: Charlie Max and Sugar Smallhouse.

Pat: They have reps.

Mike: What kind?

Pat: Max is the one to watch. They're killers, but Smallhouse likes to do it slow.

Mike: What else?

Pat: Charlie Max is an ex-cop. He'll have a preference for a hip holster.

Mike: Thanks. Now tell me whose whistle they jump to.

Pat: Carl Evello. Now you tell *me* where you got this information.

Mike: Mousie.

Pat: Guys like Mousie, so pathetic, he needs to figure out where his loyalties are.

Phone Conversation

A: *[Ranting, frustrated]* Poor people will vote against their own interests because they dream of being rich & crazily identify with the rich. It's our screwed-up value system that equates rich with good, & *that* goes back to Calvinism & Christianity. And I'm not even mentioning our complete lack of understanding about fragility as strength!

B: OK, OK, calm down.

A: I HATE when people tell me to calm down!

MN: They're organized. They have big money in back of them. They have political connections. They know what to expect from the cops & what to expect from the vast machine that squats on the Potomac. But they don't know what to expect from me.

FN: One guy told them – a punk with crooked yellow teeth who had a gun on him and lost it. The fear they hand out so freely they'll taste themselves. Before long, they'll have to chew the whole lump and swallow it.

[Two people coordinated fight movement & words: one manhandling another]

I hand it to you, you take it. Just like that. You got it?

You get it, you chew it. The whole lump. Got it?

Good. Now start chewing.

Nice & slow. That's it. You're going to chew -- & chew -- & chew – til you chew the whole goddamn lump. And then you're gonna swallow it. You got it? Good. The whole goddamn lump.

You yellow-toothed punk, you crooked lump, you had a gun, you had a gun on me, and you lost it. You & your goddamn crooked yellow teeth. You lost your gun & you lost your teeth. And if I'm still alive, you'll have to chew it. You'll have to chew the whole goddamn lump. You got it? Good. Now chew it, nice & slow. And swallow. You got it? The whole goddamn lump. You punk, you goddamn crooked goddamn yellow-toothed lump. You crooked god-damn punk.

Scene 4, Mike visits Scared Reporter & Carmen Trivalgo

[Mike visits very scared reporter at his apartment, knocks on door]

Scared Reporter: Yeah? What do you want? *[Whispering]* Make it sound like you're forcing your way in –

MN: He was forty-nine years old but looked seventy. One side of his face had a scar from the corner of his eye to his ear and down to his mouth.

Mike: I want in!

Scared Reporter: What's the big idea? Who do you think you are? *[Whispering]* Make it sound good.

Mike: *[Whispering]* What's on your mind?

Scared Reporter: *[Whispering]* You were with her the night she died. She knew she was going to get killed. She must have told you –

Mike: *[Whispering]* Told me what?

Sc.Reptr: *[Whispering]* If you knew, you'd be afraid like she was afraid. You better go.

FN: He didn't retire because he wanted to. He wrote an expose about previously undisclosed investigations into civilian brutality by the military in the Vietnam war. Turns out they were deliberate policies dictated at the highest levels.

[Whispering]

Mike: What do you know about Ray Kawolski, Berga's bodyguard?

Scared Reporter: Hit by a truck. It wasn't an accident. He was pushed.

Mike: How do you know?

Scared Reporter: I went to the funeral. Killers don't drive the same truck for ten years, aren't married with five kids and don't break down & cry after their first accident.

Mike: Thanks. Who else should I look into?

Scared Reporter: Dr. Martin Soberin. Central Park West & 84th St.

Mike: Thanks *[Yelling loudly]* You change your mind and want to talk, get in touch with my secretary, she'll call me. *[He leaves]*

MN: I call Nicholas Raymond's old address. Something about his story isn't right. How did he fall out of a speeding cab? His landlord, Carmen Trivalgo, is scared to talk, but a few warm-up threats loosen him up. *[Sound of Italian opera recording in background]*

Trivalgo: *[Italian accent if possible]* Oh yes, Mr. Nick-o-las Raymondo, I remember, fine man, always paid his bills and tipped like a gentleman. Very sad man, always is sad. He's an engineer, a scientist, very smart, very bright, very sad.

Mike: Where did he get his money?

Trivalgo: Oh, I wonder that too, this is a mystery.

Mike: He was murdered. Why was he murdered?

Trivalgo: I don't know, I don't know.

Mike: What was he so sad about?

Trivalgo: For the way the world is. You see, very sad. He says to me, I'm very intelligent, Trivalgo, but I'm very stupid. I'm very rich, I'm very poor. I have a little secret and this is very important – and it's not important at all. Hm!

Mike: What did he mean by that?

Trivalgo: Well, when I asked, he says, it's a riddle! Without an answer. I think he's making the joke. But – when he's dead, I know it's not the joke. Somewhere, somewhere, he has a secret.

Mike: How do you know that?

Trivalgo: Well, I just feel it, but I don't know, I don't know.

Mike: Lovely music. Thanks.

FN: You'd think there'd be more –

MN: More what?

FN: Well, more – ideas, visceral material, details -

MN: I'm hearing plenty of details, kid.

FN: Oh, there's Mickey again – creeping back in. How do we get away from him?

MN: Maybe it's good we're learning this now, so we can figure out our verbal strategy.

FN: Yeah...Ready?

MN: I guess so.

[Mike walks by a woman in a phone booth]

Woman in phone booth: I been out here three times already and this guy keeps writing me off. I gotta make a living too... Aw, send somebody else. How much can a gal take?.... Well, look – I tell you, I'm not coming out here again. He can get somebody else – there's other gals around here.

Phone Conversation

A: You meet a lot of guys. Did you ever see this one?

B: What kind of a crack is that? So I hang around the roost once in awhile. Does that make me an information bureau?

[Mike walks by two people sitting in the street, talking to themselves]

- *[Beginning with quick exhale & vocal inhale – then rhythmic exhale with rhythmic 'words', & rhyming, sounding Irish]*

not once, but twice
on flaming ice
she flies on brine
on brine of ice *[intermittently punctuated by quick exhale & vocal inhale]*
& thrice she lies
on flaming ice
not once, but twice
and thrice she flies
she lies & writhes
on flames of ice
not nice, she lies
she's wise, she's wise. {last line repeated several times}

Scene 5, Mike's Place: Lily, Voicemail, & New Car with Nicky & Ligeti

[Mike goes home, talks briefly with Lily]

Mike: You didn't have to wait up.

Lily: I couldn't sleep.

Mike: Anybody call?

Lily: Two. I didn't answer. Someone was here.

Mike: Who?

Lily: They knocked. They tried the door. I'm scared Mike.

[Mike picks up a voicemail]

A: You have one unheard message.

Voice on phone: *[Spoken by live performer. Self-consciously soft & well-mannered]*
Good evening, Mr. Sledge. You might wonder who this is, but it doesn't matter. I merely want to call your attention to the new car in front of your building as you venture out tomorrow morning. We're sorry about your other car, Mr. Sledge. Such a pity, Mr. Sledge. If you hadn't stopped to pick up Ms. Torn, none of these unpleasant interruptions in your life would have occurred. Should you choose to accept the car, Mr. Sledge, use it to go on a long vacation. Say three or four months. You never met Ms. Berga Torn, this whole unfortunate incident dissolves, and your life goes on *even more serenely than before.* *[Foreboding music]* Good-bye, Mr. Sledge. *[Click]*

Conversation *[Performers' conversation intercut with Narrators' descriptions of plot & A & B's words. Simultaneous group movement: spine tossing into stillnesses develops into arms & legs. Music: Ligeti Etudes, #6]*

MN: A gleaming maroon convertible sits like a dewdrop in the morning sunlight. My mechanic Nicky, is already there drooling over it.

Nicky: That Mike! He wrecks one car and goes out and buys another, just like that! Some job -- twin pipes in back... Wow.

A: These etudes celebrate the genre's perversity, then they repurpose it –

Nicky: Va va voom!

B: into wild, unheard-of art. Exaggerating their most unpromising attributes: obsession, endless repetition, mathematical coldness.

Nicky: Oohh, shines like a million. Even the keys are in!

A: This lamenting, descending, chromatic idea, it becomes obsessive and destructive, and it takes over.

Nicky: I think I'll go around the block, and come back before he wakes up. Why not? Pow!

B: It starts with something beautiful and becomes horrible and all-consuming.

Mike: Nick!

Nick: Huh?

Mike: Don't touch anything!

A: Ever louder, ever more complicated toward the end –

Nicky: I didn't touch it, I didn't touch anything.

Mike: Turning that key is the last you'd ever do.

Nicky: Huh?

B: He makes you pound out one devastating chord after another. You're mentally wiped out and then you have to create this visceral, destructive force!

Mike: Open the hood. She's gimmicked, Nicky. Right around the starter, see anything?

A: He's obsessed with chaos theory, fractals, infinite complexities – things that begin simple and then, with one little instability, suddenly become incredibly complex and wild.

Nicky: Yeah. Six sticks wired to the ignition.

Mike: That's the one they expected us to find. Now look underneath.

B: This one's the most fiendish of them all – another chromatic nightmare!

Nicky: There she is.

FN: A detonation cap protruding from one end of a section of pipe.

Mike: That's it – the sweet little kiss-off. Rigged to the speedometer.

Nicky: A few miles from now, contact is made and you'd be dust. Va va voom.

A: He writes some very nasty things for the pianist to do.

B: Despicable right from the beginning.

Mike: Can you find out who souped her up?

A: While the scales are coming down, you're creeping farther up into the stratosphere --

Nicky: A cinch. I know the place in Queens. I'll ask a few questions.

B: So you have this sense of falling and rising at the same time!

A: Very wicked-sounding, very disturbing.

Mike: Va va voom?

Nicky: Va va voom!

Scene 6: Mike meets Michael, Carl Evello's Party

MN: Next stop: Carl Evello's. The garage alone would look respectable as a wing of the Taj Mahal. I meet his half-sister on my way into a party going on inside.

Michael Friday: Looking for Carl?

Mike: That's right.

Michael: Maybe I can help you out. The butler will tell you he isn't in, so let's not ask him, OK?

Mike: OK.

Michael:[*Sticking out her hand*] Michael Friday.

Mike: [*Taking her hand*] Mike Sledge.

Michael: Two Mikes.

Mike: Looks like it. You'll have to change your name.

Michael: Uh-uh. You do it.

Mike: Usually I'm the one to tell, not get told.

Michael: This isn't usually, Mike.

FN: This is the way it should be. Friendly and uncomplicated.

MN: The kind of beauty that takes your hand as if you're lovers who've known each other a lifetime, picking up a conversation as if the last had merely been interrupted.

[Carl Evello's talking on the phone]

Carl: How do I know what he knows? All I know is he's here and he's snooping around... All right, I'll be polite...I'll call you back. *[He walks away]*

MN: He's nothing special. You could figure him for a businessman, average-looking Joe starting to come out at the middle but careful to dress right so it doesn't show.

FN: One of the guys with him pulls strings in a waterfront racket. The other one's racket is just as dirty -- selling influence in Washington, shaking hands with presidents, bankers, ex-cons, lobbyists -- getting rich off the proceeds of his introductions.

[Mike walks over to Carl and one or two other guys, including Al Affia]

Carl: Sledge, Mike Sledge. Well of course. Private detective, aren't you?

Mike: I was.

Carl: I'd like you to meet my business associate, Al Affia. *[Al sticks out his hand, Mike doesn't shake it]*

Mike: This isn't a social visit. I want to talk with you.

Carl: So sad. Hardly anybody comes to see me socially anymore. Let's have a private talk then. *[Mike & Carl walk away]*

MN: The house was what I expected: a few million bucks properly framed and hung.

FN: Carl's eyes were the kind I'd seen many times before, hard little diamonds nestling in their soft cushions of fat.

Carl: Leave it to my sister to find someone unusual for an escort.

Mike: As unusual as putting torpedoes in gifts?

Carl: *[laughs]* I'll admit that was a little crude. We keep underestimating you. Frankly, I'm curious about what's on your mind. What is it you want, Mr. Sledge?

Mike: I want to know about Berga Torn.

Carl: *[Brief pause]* I understand she died.

Mike: Was killed.

Carl: And your interest in it?

Mike: Let's not waste time. You can talk to me now or we can do it the hard way.

Carl: You know how lucky you are? If that drop off the cliff didn't kill you, the torpedo should've. Look, I like the way you handle yourself. Why don't we make a deal? What's it worth to you to turn your considerable talents back to the gutter you crawled out of?

Mike: My fee will always be too steep for you. I want to know about your connection with the dame. No crap. I'm not the law, but plenty of times there were guys who wished the law was after them instead of me.

Carl: Oh, Mr. Sledge, no need to get nasty. I already told the police everything I know, not that it's terribly important. Berga Torn was a girl I liked. For a while I kept her, you might say.

Mike: Why'd you break it off?

Carl: She was getting in my hair. You have a reputation with women, you know what it's like.

Mike: I didn't know you checked up on me that close, Carl.

FN: The eyes go hard again.

Carl: OK Mr. Sledge. It's been nice talking to you, Mr. Sledge. You sure put up a big stink for a lot of small talk, Mr. Sledge.

Mike: *[On his way out]* I wasn't after talk. I wanted to see your face, so I'd never forget it. Someday I'm going to watch it turn blue or maybe bleed to death.

MN: On my way out with Michael, I see a car coming up the driveway. Congressman Bruce Ryan gets out, then gives his arm to – Velda! She smiles politely in our direction before going up the path.

Mike: What's Ryan doing here?

Michael: Before Bruce was elected, he was Carl's lawyer. Something's wrong isn't it?

Mike: Frankly, Friday, it stinks. Carl had a girl once. She's dead now and he may be involved in her murder.

Michael: And you?

Mike: When I get interested in people like your brother they usually wind up dead.

Michael: Oh. *[Some business here with both of them lighting cigarettes]* I guess I've known awhile. He used to try and fool me but now he doesn't bother. The people he associates with... he generally has something they want.

Mike: Ever hear of Berga Torn?

Michael: Oh yeah. Carl had a crush on her for awhile. One night they had an argument and after that I didn't see her around. Somebody new came along.

Mike: If you think of any more answers, Michael, don't hesitate to get in touch. *[They kiss]*

FN: The bubbling warmth was what I expected. Fire & cushiony softness & vibrancy made a living bed of his mouth. I leaned in, barely touched it & came away before there was too much hunger. All the way home I could taste it. The warmth & wetness & tantalizing flavor.

Phone Conversation: Michael Friday & Carl Evello

Michael: What about all those screenwriters who never got credit because they were blacklisted, or their reputation wrecked as 'commies' or radicals.

Carl: The only security in America is in stardom.

Michael: Ohhh...

Carl: Face it, Michael -- even in what's supposed to be the non-commercial art world!

Michael: *[Groans]*

Scene 7, Mike gets grabbed by Two Thugs & has Poetic Phonecall with Velda

[Mike goes to his office, gets grabbed in the lobby by two thugs & forced into his car]

Thug #1: I don't have to warn you about nothing, do I?

MN: The muzzle of the gun is a cold circle against my skin.

Mike: I know the score.

Thug #2: You only think you do.

[During narration, Mike manipulates the situation so driver slams on breaks, thug in back seat pitches over Mike's shoulder, Mike gets his throat as driver's gun goes off in other thug's chin. Driver goes for Mike, who gets his gun hand & snaps it back, so gun blasts a bullet in his eye. Simulate a version of this physically. After killing them, Mike sits the two dead thugs together.]

MN: Any other time I would've seen them. Any other time it would've been dark outside & light inside and my eyes wouldn't have been blanked out. Any other time I would've had a rod on me and it wouldn't have happened so easy. But this was now and not some other time.

FN: You don't say much at a time like this. You wait and keep hoping for a break. Thinking they wouldn't pop you in broad daylight, but you don't move because you know they will. This is New York. Something exciting happening every minute. After a while you get used to it. A gunshot, a backfire, who can tell the difference or who cares. A drunk, a dead man, they both look the same.

FN: Time seems to drag by when it's only a matter of seconds.

MN: Time, it seems so realistic. But it's a perpetual, elaborate hoax.

FN: The purpose of art is to stop time: Bob Dylan.

Poetic phone dialog Mike & Velda

Mike: My screams pierced the night, but nobody moved. Just sacks of grain, long-emptied, billowing.

Velda: But each day, we come a little closer. And each night, we retreat a little farther away.

Mike: Well, can I carry that for you? Can I help?

Velda: And so we walk, or rather crawl, bits of earth & rock on our bare bellies.

Mike: Scrape them off! Change into a clean shirt!

Velda: Your idea of freedom is different than mine.

Mike: Just delete! Pretend it never was! Expunge! Expunge!

Scene 8, Mike Goes Home, Phonecalls with Pat & Michael

[Mike goes to his apartment to find Lily gone]

MN: There's no chain on the door and no Lily either. I walk through the place to be sure, hoping I'm wrong when I'm right.

[Mike calls Pat]

Mike: Lily Carver. You know her?

Pat: Carver? Damn, Mike.

Mike: I had her here and she's gone.

Pat: Did you know she'd been investigated?

Mike: That's why I pulled her out of Brooklyn. The goons got her out of here somehow.

Pat: A stoolie broke the news she was fingered for a kill.

Mike: Damn. *[Hangs up]*

MN: I stand there, and listen to the sounds outside the window. The city. It laughs back at me but it's the kind of laugh that doesn't sound too sure of itself anymore.

Phone Conversation: Dream about Richard Nixon.

A: Richard Nixon was in my dream last night! He was struggling with self-confidence, but trying to act real casual and comfortable-like.

B: I always remember reading about his problems opening those aspirin bottles where you have to line up the arrows. His aids would find unopened bottles on his desk, with tooth marks.

[Phone rings. Michael Friday calling]

Michael: Mike?

Mike: Speaking.

Michael: Michael Friday.

Mike: Hi, where are you?

Michael: Downtown. I'd like to see you again.

Mike: Really?

Michael: Really.

Mike: Just say where and when.

Michael: One of Carl's friends is giving a party tonight. I'm supposed to be there and... could we go together? We don't have to stay very long.

Mike: OK, I'll meet you at the Astor lobby at ten. How's that?

Michael: Fine, Mike.

Scene 9, Mike Finds Charlie & Sugar, & Waxes Poetic

FN: Nine-fifteen. He walks into Harvey Pullen's place in the thirties. She doesn't move her mouth at all. Sometimes the things they pick up in stir pay off.

Woman in bar: Sledge, ain't ya?

Mike: Uh-huh.

Woman: Long John's place. They're setting you up.

Mike: Why you?

Woman: Take a look. Those creeps gave me the business a long time ago. I coulda had a career.

Mike: What else?

Woman: The little guy's a snowbird and he's hopped.

Mike: Cops?

Woman: Nobody. Just them. The gang in the dump ain't wise yet.

MN: The redhead had a sawbuck in her lap when I left.

Mike: *[walking to Harvey Pullen's place]* Link armor, my friends. Here is the width and the length – right here! Perpetual luck that props its tangible appliance -- like so -- in stimulating variance. So big. So insistent.

FN: Oh my god, he's getting poetic!

MN: Wrong, chum. He's been poetic the whole time, just in a different style.

Mike: A craven volume, an inevitable pulp, a squishy population of retrospective froth!

FN: Listen to HIM!

Mike: Can you not hear the approaching evolution – the card game that never ends, finally ending? Neighbor -- I have no place to go – nowhere but the sea, and that's rising.

MN: Oh, so now you want my help? How many times did I offer it, but you were too good, too self-sufficient?

Mike: I've changed, I've grown, I'm more humble.

FN: Yeah, right. *[Pause. Then to MN]* We say everything, even the words in parentheses.

MN: We speak our own thoughts, & the thoughts of all the characters.

FN: What we're seeing & feeling & touching & remembering – and what the characters are seeing, & feeling, & touching, & remembering.

MN: We lay the ribbon out flat, & guide it along the floor.

FN: Oh, let's bring in more characters – just for the one scene.

MN: But no more than ten. The guy who wrote the book said he never saw a successful scene with more than ten people.

FN: *[Groan of disgust]*

[Mike goes to Long John's bar]

MN: Carl's boys are pros playing it cute.

FN: They may be playing it cute but they aren't play it right.

[Sugar Smallhouse is in the corner with his back to the door. Charlie Max is in back watching the entrance. Mike approaches Sugar while Charlie's off-guard lighting a cigarette: both hands round his middle from the back, jerks hard & fast with locked thumbs, snapping his breastbone. Sugar collapses. Charlie reaches for his gun, somebody sees the gun & screams, woman beside him tries to get away, pushes too hard, & Charlie's chair catches him behind the knees. Mike runs over to him, kicks Charlie with his foot, or knee, as Charlie raises his gun. Charlie shoots himself in the face. Mike walks away, goes to meet Michael Friday at the Astor.]

Phone Conversation

A: This is one of the sleaziest, stupidest, most brutal detectives in American literature!

B: Well, I wrote it fast because I had contempt for it. Things were in the air at the time, and I put them in.

A: Everyone's under surveillance, everything's a secret -- this is one paranoid play.

B: And the whole femme fatale thing -- incredible *that* hasn't died.

Scene 10, Mike & Velda go to a Party

MN: There's nothing slim about her. She's sleek, like a well-fed, muscular cat. *[Group movement here, dancing with self moves]*

[Half-jokingly]

Mike: Waiting long?

Michael: Longer than I usually wait for anyone.

Mike: Hope I'm worth it.

Michael: You aren't.

Mike: But you can't help yourself.

Michael: How do you know?

Mike: I don't, I'm just bragging.

FN: *[As they make out in the cab, stylized, then draw apart]* It seems to come slowly, the way sleep does when you're too tired, the gradual coming together of two people. Slow, then faster, then blur of surrender.

[Mike & Michael at the party. Group stylized party moves, small shifting groupings. Michael and Mike go separate ways at the party. Velda's there: Al Affia is holding her hand, Billy Mist is coming onto her & Carl Evello's watching]

[All freeze]

Mike: Nobody introduced me to the lady.

Carl Evello: Sledge, I believe it is. Yes, Mike Sledge. This is Miss Lewis. Candy Lewis.

Mike: Hello Candy.

Velda: Hello, Mike.

Phone conversation: Movie Titles Dialog #2

[Velda leaves to talk with another man]

Well, Nobody Lives Forever.
What a Nightmare!
And how Notorious!
He's called The Night Runner, for good reason.
Let's wait til Nightfall,
When there'll be some interesting Night Moves.
The Night Holds Terror,
The Night Has A Thousand Eyes,
Especially when it's Night And The City.

[Mike & Velda pass each other close by for a whispered conversation in the middle]

Velda: *[Whispering]* Mike! Meet me on the corner in an hour. The drug store.

Just a Nickel Ride,
With the Night Editor,
Down Nightmare Alley,
A cruel Nocturne,
On Dangerous Ground,
With Odds Against Tomorrow,
Just something Out of the Past,
With our friends in the Outfit.

[Michael & Mike leave, but not together. Their last words to each other are spoken during a freeze; then they leave in different directions]

Michael: You're a killer, Mike. And I know nothing will ever touch you. But I'm afraid for my brother. I'm afraid his smart lawyers and.... enabling politicians aren't going to be able to stop you.

Mike: When it happens, I don't want you around. You're a nice kid, but you're in your brother's world. I could go crazy nuts about you, but I still wouldn't trust you.

Michael: Will I see you again?

Mike: Maybe. *[He goes to the corner drugstore to meet Velda]*

Scene 10, Mike & Velda's last meeting

Velda: You get around, Mike.

Mike: I could say the same to you. How come you tangled with Mist?

Velda: Tell you later about that. At the party I overheard Carl telling his friends about someone checking up on Nicholas Raymond -- they got very wired about it. Does this point to whatever it is you're after?

Mike: There was something Nicholas Raymondo had & the girl knew about it. Something very valuable.

Velda: Yeah, but is it worth Raymondo's life, or Berga's, or Kawolski's, or...mine?

Mike: Or Lily Carver's? Berga's roommate. They tried to get her too *[he's walking in another direction, away from Velda]*.

Velda: *[More to herself than to him]* “They.” What a word. And who are “they”? They are the web-like nameless ones who destroy for the great *whatsit*. Everyone, everywhere, is so involved in the fruitless search – for what?

Mike: Did Al Affia get the news about Raymondo?

Velda: Yeah, probably from Billy. Who, by the way, gave me the key to his apartment and said go ahead up and wait for him there.

Mike: Let’s go -- *[taking the key]* This is hot!

Velda: You go, Mike. I made a duplicate. Al Affia invited me over to his place *before* I go to Billy’s.

Mike: *[Angrily]* No!

Velda: Don’t worry, I’m bringing chloral, it’ll knock him out.

Mike: He’s no tourist. The guy’s been around.

Velda: He’s still a man.

Mike: He’s cagey.

MN: Sometimes you have to do things you don’t want to. You hate yourself for it but you still have to do it.

Mike: Where’s his place?

Velda: 47th between Eighth and Ninth. 826. CH 6 – 0976. Just in case... Good hunting, Mike. *[She leaves]*

ACT THREE

Scene 1, Mike visits Billy Mist’s place, then Al Affia’s

[Whole group’s doing movement inspired by going thru a suspect’s apartment when you know they might come back at any moment]

MN: In Billy Mist’s place, I find a photo album with him in every one. Him and Berga, some with Carl and Berga. My greasy little friend is one hell of an egotist from the looks of the thumb marks on the pages. I call Pat to see if he has anything to say to me.

[In middle of conversation]

Pat: You didn’t leave them in any condition to talk.

Mike: Yeah, well I don’t like to be gunned for. Poor feds, I’ll try not to break up their next play. Any news on Carver?

Pat: No. But we have two freshly killed blondes, more or less. One’s been in the river three days, the other shot by her lover just tonight. Interested?

Mike: Quit joking. I’ll call if anything comes up. Otherwise, see you in the morning.

FN: He hits the hallway just as Billy Mist gets out of the elevator with a beefy guy beside him.

MN: There’s nothing I want to talk to him about, so I take the stairs & get out in one piece.

FN: Halfway down the block, an elusive little thing flashes across his mind and he tries to catch it. Something in the apartment he should’ve noticed. Can’t bring it into focus and it passes out of sight.

[Velda runs across, barely visible in the low light]

MN: Taxi swings by. Velda's in the back next to someone I can't make out. I can't stop it, can't chase it, don't like it. I need to know what's up, so I go to the address she gave me for Affia.

FN: Drops of blood and pools of vomit all over the floor, and a broken milk bottle. I don't see Al but I can see what happened.

[Do an abstract movement version of this?]

MN: Velda gave him the chloral treatment and he passed out, but then he must've spilled it out of his system and went for her. He would've killed her but -- she got him with the milk bottle. Then...she probably did a search & left for Billy's. But -- Al snapped out of it and got word to Billy.

Mike: *[Calling Pat on phone]* They got Velda! She went up to Billy Mist's and walked into a trap. Get a squad & get her out of there -- they may be working her over. Call me back as soon as you get word.

MN: I do some snooping while I wait. I see blueprints of dock layouts. And ships' plans, one in particular --- The Cedric, blown up in detail.

[Phone rings]

Mike: Yeah?

Pat: Mist was in bed alone. No Velda. He was pissed off about the cops being there but let them search. *[Mike hangs up. Phone keeps starting to ring again but he doesn't pick up]*

Scene 2, Mike sleeps at home, as Images Whirl

MN: I'm thinking things that scare me.

FN: The Cedric. It's starting to hang together now.

MN: They could do a lot of things to Velda, but won't kill her til they're sure. I go home and sleep. Shouldn't waste time but can't be half out on my feet either.

FN: Images and outcomes whirl through his mind as he sleeps.

Gibberish Characters Maybe Simultaneous:

- 1) Militaristic, ordering people around.
- 2) Indignant, outraged, accusing the other, defending self.
- 3) Bemoaning fate, explaining woes.
- 4) Consoling
- 5) Gratitude for consolations

MN: Moving toward an inscrutable ending that wakes me up.

- 4) Gibberish Narrators wrapping it all up & guiding performers into undulating masses.

[Mike & Velda phone conversation, lying on their backs]

Mike: I think you dosed off.

Velda: I did... I dreamed you & I were sitting together, talking & watching a film. I was describing to you how our conversation, & the film we were watching were interactive -- the film actually responding to the content of our conversation. There was a palpable feeling that you & I, our words, & the film were all part of an intertwined reality.

Mike: Oh yeah?

MN: There's frozen shrimp in the freezer. I cook and eat the whole box.

FN: Amazing! He's eating! He usually just drinks and smokes.

Scene 3, Mike talks with Eddie & with Dave, brutalizes Trivalgo, & gets poetic with Velda

[Mike gets a call from Eddie Connelly, Velda's reporter friend on the police beat]

Mike: Got something?

Eddie: Might have -- on Nick Raymond.

Mike: What?

Eddie: He retailed imported tobacco through a company in Italy. Had his name changed from Raymondo to Raymond. Made a few trips there every year. One of his old customers said he didn't look like much, but spent part of the year in Vegas and dropped a wad of cabbage at the tables. Quite a ladies' man too.

Mike: OK, Eddie. Thanks.

Eddie: Got a story?

Mike: Not yet. I'll tell you when.

FN: *[Captured video becomes a breathing abstract painting]* Seven thirty-two. The gray overcast brings a premature dusk to the city, a gloomy wet shroud that descends and pours itself into your clothes. The kind of night when the city withdraws into itself, leaving sidewalks empty and people inside store-fronts staring aimlessly into the wet.

[Mike calls Dave, a low-life bookie-type connected with the mob]

Mike: They saying things along the row, Dave?

Dave: Piling up, big boy. Everybody got it.

Mike: I got what they want -- tell it in the right places.

Dave: Look, I'll do a lot of things, but those guys you don't mess with. I got a big mouth when I get hurt.

Mike: It'll set, Dave. This is big. They got Velda.

Dave: You're trading?

Mike: I'm willing.

Dave: OK, I'll spin it. Don't bother calling me again, OK?

Mike: OK. *[Hangs up]*

[Mike goes to Carmen Trivalgo's apt. Mike knocks, Carmen opens door, Mike shoves him]

Trivalgo: What is the meaning of this?

[Mike smacks Trivalgo in the mouth, sends him falling backward; his body gets 'loose & jelly-like']

Mike: Turn around and look at me. *[He does]* I'm going to ask you things and you answer them right this time. I catch you in a lie -- I'll mangle you so bad you won't crawl out of this dump for a month.

Trivalgo: *[His knees as watery as his eyes, can't stand up & slumps crookedly]* No... don't...

Mike: His right name was Raymondo. You knew that, didn't you? And you knew a lot more too. Where'd he get his dough?

[Trivalgo spreads his hand to indicate he doesn't know, Mike slaps his jaw]

Trivalgo: He had the business. From abroad, he -

Mike: *[maybe strangling him like in other movie trailer]* Yeah, I know about that. Doesn't explain the kind of money he spent.

Trivalgo: He had the money, said there'd be more soon. Said he had something to sell, something valuable, something small. Information, he says, very valuable. I thought he was making the boast, but no, he was serious. He would never tell me more than that.

[Mike approaches again] It's true, I swear! He would always talk like this when he was high. I tell you, this money was no good, I knew it -

Mike: How?

Trivalgo: Before he died, there were men -

Mike: Did Raymondo know he was being followed? *[Trivalgo shakes his head no]*. You didn't tell him? You're a crummy little bastard, Trivalgo. There's a lot of dead people around because of you. You could've sounded off.

Trivalgo: No -- you do not understand what they do to people - *[Mike tosses his whole body away in a crumpled heap, where he lays with eyes wide open]*

FN: He was a bug caught in a web trying to hide from the spider & he backed into a hornet's nest.

MN: Whoever has Velda will think hard before doing anything to her. I'm the one guy who doesn't give a damn and that's why I'm the one they're afraid of.

FN: Because the trail of dead people hasn't stopped yet.

[Phone conversation Mike & Velda, in a dream]

Velda: I'm listening to the night and its smells -- we don't need metaphors.

Mike: But it's been night-time for days, & we've been running away the whole time, with no destination.

Velda: Wait, where are you? I thought you were right behind me, but when I turn around, you aren't there.

Mike: I see things in your eyes - things I thought didn't exist. Things that scare me. Things I want.

Velda: Oh stop it! You'll get your breakfast, just give me a moment. Stop licking my lips with your tongue!

Mike: I can't help it, I'm seriously salivating.

Velda: Please - let me finish. I was describing my grandmother's room.

Mike: Pitted prune? Did you say pitted prune?

Velda: I was squealing like a baby squirrel caught on a branch, bleachy, blasphemous, belching.

Mike: You mean flung, raspy, miniature?

Velda: Yes, exactly! And immersed in the folds of memory.

Mike: Murmuring like a corpse, a living corpse?

Velda: Yes! Because this is NOT a normal day!

Mike: No!

Velda: This is a beginning day, a day of preparation for something new.

Mike: The day I'm going to save you. The day I'm going to save the world.

Scene 4, Pat & Mike, Mike & Michael, another visit to Affia

[Pat and Mike are on the phone]

Pat: You conned me Mike. The biggest staff that ever worked one case is looking for an answer, and you come up with it ready to trade off for something.

Mike: Velda. The bastards have Velda. She suckered Affia into a trap that didn't work and got caught in one herself.

Pat: And who created that particular mess? Let's have what you got, Mike.

Mike: It's a ploy, I don't have it yet – not where I can touch it. I need more details. What have *you* got?

Pat: Berga didn't escape from the sanitarium -- it was planned. She had a guest that day, a woman, phony name and address. Inmates overheard her saying, "They're after you. They were at the house today, there'll be a car waiting at the main gate." The feds were also at the main gate. Berga must have seen the feds and not the other car, got scared and started hitching.

Mike: I think Berga DID spot the other car, and realized they had it in for her. Nicholas Raymond is where the answer is, Pat.

Pat: The guy who ran an import business as a cover for the mob, to turn into cash.

Mike: He found something else to turn into even more cash: information.

Pat: What do you mean? Where?

FN: The picture was almost perfect now.

MN: Trouble was, I couldn't figure out who drew it.

Mike: I'm going to go find out.

{Mike calls Michael Friday}

Mike: Michael, meet me at the Texan bar on Fifty-Sixth St. Fast as you can.

MN: I know it'll be a good hour before she fixes herself up and gets over there -- just the amount of time I need. I drop in at Al Affia's again.

[Mike goes back to Al Affia's place. Al's lying there dead]

FN: Somebody had broken him into pieces with a whisky bottle. He wasn't killed plain either. He was killed fancy. And he died slow.

MN: What I came for is gone – blueprints of that ship, the Cedric.

[He goes to meet Michael Friday at the Texan Bar]

FN: He's a lusty beautiful man with a mouth that makes you hungry when he smiles at you. There's humor in his eyes, with wonder & curiosity in the little lines that radiate from the corners of his lips.

Michael: But he's my brother.

Mike: He's part of a chain of killers that trade in terror and blood. You can stay on his side or mine, kid -- your choice. Al Affia is dead: the latest, but not the last. So where do you stand?

Michael: *[Pause]* With you, Mike.

Mike: OK. I need information. Berga Torn: Why was Carl involved with her?

Michael: I don't know why. In public he acted like he was fond of her. When we were alone he said awful things about her.

Mike: Before he started seeing Berga, was there a time when he seemed very excited about something?

Michael: Yes, there was...a time. He wouldn't talk with me but was always on the phone.

Mike: Can you find his phone bills from that time, call lists?

Michael: I might --

Mike: Bring them to Pat, here's his address *[hands her a piece of paper]* Remember, these guys aren't as big as they think they are.

Michael: Kiss me again. Just in case.

FN: Wetness glistens on firm lips -- parted slightly. Fire there gets hotter as I come closer, I see his mouth open more, tip of his tongue impatiently waiting. Then impatience breaks and it meets me before the lips do.

MN: We hold each other for a moment, then let each other go. *[They both leave]* The rain takes me back again, puts its arms around me. I become part of the night, part of the wet, part of the noise and life of the city that I hear laughing at me -- a low dull sneering rumble.

Scene 5, Picture Gets Clearer, Mike Grabbed by Evello & His Boys

[Group movement interlude: theme of trying to put a puzzle together, pieces not quite fitting; gradual clarity ensues somehow]

FN: I drift through the night, my mind days away.

MN: Looking at a picture through the rain, knowing what's going on but not quite making out details. I see Berga, coming home on a ship from a family visit to Italy. She meets a guy on that ship. A guy named Nick with a small export business, who could pass unnoticed, who the mob therefore finds useful. Nick likes women and he likes Berga, because Berga, unlike him, is special.

FN: He thinks of a way he & Berga can escape together. Instead of delivering his cargo, he trades it for something more valuable -- information, that he gets from his mob connections in Europe. Information that can be stored in a very small object. Something he can take on the ship, that won't be noticed. Way more valuable, more rare, than narcotics. Something he and Berga can trade for a lot of money and use to run away somewhere together.

MN: They found Nick, but didn't kill him for awhile, because the secret would die with him. After he was gone, they must've figured Berga had it. Then she died. And that put it on me. I see Berga's face, the terror in it, and hear her voice talking about trouble, and leaks, and consequences. With minute details falling into place. I race to my office.

FN: In the mail, there it is. An envelope with the name Arco -- the service station Mike stopped at with Berga. Inside she wrote one line: "The way to a man's heart --" her initials underneath. He knows what she meant, and he's crumpling the paper, so he doesn't hear the door opening behind him.

MN: Without looking, I know he has a gun and I know there are more of them. And I know the voices. The ones I said I'd never forget.

Voice of Evello: Interesting letter, Mr. Sledge. We took a look at it. Couldn't quite make it out.

[Mike screams with hatred & crouches as the bullets spit over his head. He's still screaming as he tears at the guy's eyes, a gun butt pounding the back of Mike's skull. Mike lashes out with his foot at another guy's guts -- guy reacts with pain. There's the 'horrible choked scream of anguish' another one lets out while on the floor. It diminishes to a whimper, then disappears in the blackness as Mike blacks out. He hears a voice in the distance swearing hoarsely. Then silence.]

Conversational Interludes during Unconsciousness

A: *[Ranting, frustrated]* With all the talk about school shootings, why doesn't anyone mention the screwed-up value system at the core of all of it? A society that prizes winning the game, & wealth, over all else is gonna create some angry frustrated people. And some of them are going to be violent. And not get any support from cultural values. And feel like losers. And want to shoot everybody around them & kill themselves. No matter what the mental health system does or doesn't do, or what the gun laws are like.

B: OK, OK, calm down.

A: I HATE when people tell me to calm down!

Phone Conversation: Velda with female friend

Velda: Real men don't fight MOOTWA! That's what he said!

Friend: What the hell is MOOTWA?

Velda: Military operations other than war. What did those generals think -- that people are still fighting with uniforms and special colors, charging forth in lines on horses with swords drawn?

Friend: Then there are the justifications for killing civilians --

Velda: Euphemistic distancing --

Friend: As in collateral damage. What a weasel-worded answer.

Velda: Mai Lai was not an aberration of stressed-out soldiers screwing up -- those soldiers were following deliberate policies dictated at the highest level.

Friend: At best, it gets revealed after 60 years. At worst, never.

Velda: Maybe it's time some of this stuff gets leaked. *[Music]*

A: (Angry, frustrated, sputtering) This is inability to distinguish between achievement and morality!

B: Okay, okay, calm down.

A: I HATE when people tell me to calm down!

Velda: Maybe it's time some of this stuff gets leaked.

Friend: *[Overlapping repetition with Velda]* Maybe it's time some of this stuff gets leaked.

Velda: Maybe it's time some of this stuff gets leaked.

Friend: Maybe it's time some of this stuff gets leaked.

[Mike wakes up spread-eagled and tied, face down]

MN: I had to be a damn hero, I had to let Velda walk into that trap, I could've played it right with Pat, but no, I had to do it myself, I had to take them all on at once, knowing what they're like, I had to pass out advice and forget to give it to myself.

[Evello with two of his goons: Foreman and Duke.]

Foreman: He awake?

Duke: Yeah, he's coming out of it.

[Evello approaches Mike]

Carl Evello: Good evening, Mr. Sledge. Lie still. Why torment yourself? We're going to ask you some questions, and to adequately prepare you, we're going to soften you up. Just a wee bit, Mr. Sledge, just to ensure you're amenable to answering our questions. Think about it, Mr. Sledge, what did Berga mean with those cryptic words she wrote you? What did she tell you, Mr. Sledge? *[Shoots him up with sodium pentathol]* Here, this'll help you sleep, and while you sleep, you'll speak the truth, and you'll provide the answer, and you'll provide all the information we require, Mr. Sledge. Perhaps sentiment will succeed, Mr. Sledge, where greed failed. You can save your intrepid lady friend, Mr. Sledge, your friend Velda, simply by answering our questions. Pleasant dreams, Mr. Sledge.

[Mike mumbles in a stupor. Evello stays with him awhile, waiting for useful info.]

Duke: *[Approaches Mike]* Any luck?

Carl: *[Shakes head no. They leave Mike alone & go to next room. Mike half-echoes narrators' words, piecing together clues that are assembling.]*

MN: The picture's coming into focus. I see Berga, and Nicholas Raymond, getting pushed out of a speeding cab. Then they worked hard on Berga, tried to scare her, then conned her with Evello trying to get close enough to see what she knew.

FN: Raymond planned it well, planting the secret with Berga. But they could see she was in on it, and she knew she was dead as soon as she let go of what she knew.

MN: Maybe she saw her way out with that Congressional hearing putting the squeeze on Evello. Maybe she thought with him away, she'd have a chance.

FN: A couple more details are looking for a place to crawl into, and I'm just about to shove them there when I hear someone coming back in the room.

MN: I manage to loosen my hands from the ropes, then put them back in to make them look still tied down.

Evello: So, you're back among the living.

Mike: I got it figured.

Evello: Yeah?

Mike: Yeah.

Evello: OK, let's have it.

Mike: Will you let Velda go?

Evello: Sure – take my word, free as a bird. You want to talk?

Mike: *[Speaks low volume & indecipherably]* I don't want to talk too loud. *[Carl leans down to listen. Mike grabs his throat and strangles him as Evello slides to his knees, trying to grab Mike's wrists for a few seconds and then going limp. His head falls back, his mouth opens, and he makes a slight wheezing sound. Mike positions Evello, who's not yet dead, face down exactly like he was]*

[Mike speaks in Carl's voice] Come on, Foreman. He talked. He's yours.

[Foreman comes in and drives a knife into Evello, thinking it's Mike]

FN: The boy is good. He doesn't drive it in. He puts it in position and pushes.

[Carl's body trembles, Foreman steps away, sees his mistake, Mike swings hard into the side of Foreman's neck and he collapses to the floor. Then Mike goes and dives at Duke in the supposed next room just as he's reaching for his gun. Mike's fingers rip into Duke's face, then he smashes him with his knees and whole body, as a scream bubbles out of Duke's mouth that stops abruptly when Mike's fist twists his jaw, and he tosses him onto the floor. Mike then drags Duke toward the other two and tangles his arms around Foreman, who's still holding the knife.]

MN: That'll look nice and pretty when the cops arrive.

Scene 6, Mike & Pat almost Figure it Out

[Mike meets with Pat]

Pat: Evello's sister came to us with a phone list. The thing's opening wide, all the way to the top. Makes me sick.

Mike: Talk details Pat.

Pat: Somebody leaked highly classified government intelligence. It documents flagrant violation of international law. Among other things. Not to mention mob collaboration and police corruption. It somehow got into the wrong hands, prettiest blackmail opportunity in history. Everyone wants it. Upper-level feds want it. Mob considers it a big bundle of cash. BIG bundle.

Mike: Talk names Pat. Billy Mist?

Pat: Can't be located. But we know he's competing with Evello for control.

Mike: What else?

Pat: Still a rumor, but scaring hell out of everyone: Drone warfare technology -- the software. Some evil genius might've figured out how to over-ride it and control ALL the drones, turn them against their own countries. *[Foreboding music]*

FN: Yeah, that was only a matter of time.
MN: Look in the mirror and you can see the future.
FN: *[Intrigued]* What do you mean by that?

Mike: Can it be transferred with a small object, the size of a key?
Pat: It's all still a guess at this point.

Phone Conversations about drones

A: You can't justify this by having some smart government lawyer say, 'All's fair in love and war.'

B: Killing people is a job for soldiers, not spies.

A: And you can't kill your way out of a war on terror. You prolong it.

B: Well, why's the president being so hands-on?

A: Either he's blood-thirsty or he wants to have a restraining influence: which is it though?

A: These are flagrant violations of international law!

B: What's going to happen when China uses the same policy in Tibet? Or Russia in Chechnya? Or some hothead in a Montreal airport?

A: Who cares where the bases are. What's important is the kill lists – and who writes them – we're assassinating people in countries we're not at war with.

B: Government assassinations are nothing new. Just that it's always been secret.

A: You can just google drones & Saudi Arabia and find out where the bases are. The so-called leak was information that's already available.

Mike: Where's Michael?

Pat: Said she was on her way to your place to see you.

Mike: I wasn't home. No police guard?

Pat: I tried but she said no. One of the feds tailed her anyway but lost her when she got in a cab.

Mike: Sloppy.

Pat: Lay off. Everyone's up to their ears in this thing.

Mike: She must've found something important to tell me – which puts her in danger. Now they might have *her* too. Damn! Do you have the picture yet, Pat?

Pat: Let's play it out, kid.

Mike: Nick Raymond tangles with Berga on board the Cedric while he's carrying for the mob, and falls for her. He decides to keep the package for his sweetie and himself to run away together.

Pat: Yeah --

Mike: Then he finds a better way to store the dough, gets his hands on leaked classified info that could take down a government. Who knows how he gets it – mob connections in Europe, maybe China -- but once he does, he's sitting pretty. Literally on top of the world.

Pat: Perfect place for a target.

Mike: So the mob bumps him, figuring by this time he would've passed the secret to Berga. Nick *did* get word to her in case something happened. She knew it was big, &

hired a bodyguard, Kawolski. Big boys didn't want *him* getting there first, so *he* had an accident too.

Pat: What about Evello?

Mike: Made a play for Berga but wasn't smart enough to fool her. She got wise. Thought she could get Evello creamed before that Senate committee, then get the stuff on her own hook later.

Pat: But she got scared, went to pieces.

Mike: You mentioned a woman who came to see her in the sanitarium.

Pat: Yeah, we still can't make her.

Mike: I know where the info is.

Pat: Damn it Mike, where?

Mike: The good ship Cedric.

Pat: Why the hell would they hide something on a ship?

Mike: Maybe because nobody'd expect it. Maybe nostalgia for antique modes of transportation.

Pat: What else you got?

Mike: Velda's the bait. Berga passed the clue to me before she died. They expect me to make it out, and when I do, I'll use it to ransom Velda. I can feel the damn thing crawling around in my head and can't lay my finger on it.

Pat: You say it's on the Cedric.

Mike: Find the ship, and which stateroom Raymond used. Give Edie Connelly at the Globe first crack at the story, but tell her to hold it til I call. By then I'll have Velda.

Pat: Where are you going?

Mike: Out in the rain to think some more.

Group Phone Conversation on Balcony

Emily: I have often wondered ... why I'm so addicted to these shows about violence & pathology. I mean, they actually calm me down!

Bry: I know -- how can it possibly not be bad for us -- to consume so much of this stuff?

Ryan: So this woman, this professor at Harvard -- I think she, uh, wrote about the Grimm brothers -- & she's head of a department in -- um -- mythology & folklore -- she says this stuff is actually healthy for us!

All: Oh really --

Yeah -- that because it's fiction, and we know it's not real, it's a useful place for us to deal with our own fears, our own demons.

Jessi: Mmm...demons within & demons without.

Julia: Yup.... It's so extreme, it's unbelievable.

Jamer: But that makes it a safe place to work on ourselves.

Ryan: She says children actually know what to do with this violence, they're not overwhelmed by it.

Allie: There's the great 'once upon a time'. Meaning – this is not the here and now.

Emily: Huh...OK...now I can feel less guilty about my addiction. I guess.

MN: I'm thinking so hard I'm not thinking at all. One lousy little gimmick and I could have it.

FN: And then there it is, and his finger's on it and he's not letting go.

MN: It's a little after one but you can still find dead people around.

Scene 7, The Morgue & Home

[Mike goes to the morgue]

Mike: *[As coroner walks in]* Hi Doc.

Coroner: Hello Sledge. What are *you* doing here again? *[Walks by Mike, who grabs him]*
Let go of me!

Mike: *[Lets go]* I need a stomach autopsy on a corpse – girl named Berga Torn.

Coroner: That one's not slated for autopsy.

Mike: No time to get official backing. But this is your chance to do something other than listen for a heartbeat that isn't there for a change. To kick a few killers into the chair, to be the guy standing between lots of people living or dying in the next few hours. What'll it be?

Coroner: *[Pause]* Let's go see her.

FN: She does it the fast easy way, right there in the carrier she's laying on.

MN: When she finds it, she does me the favor of cleaning it before handing it to me. And there it is: a chunk of metal people have died for, and all this time it was in the stomach of a girl who was ready to do anything to beat them out of it. The key to the whole deal.

Mike: Someday I'll let you know how good a deed you've really done. *[Mike rushes off]*

MN: I can feel time going by.

FN: The race of the minutes. They never go any faster or any slower, but they always beat you.

[Mike goes to his own block & sees a cop guarding his place]

Cop: You got something Sledge?

Mike: Yeah, it's almost over.

Cop: And Evello's dead.

Mike: Yeah. How far did they get with his step-sister?

Cop: As far as here, buddy, & that's where it ended.

MN: Damn. Put herself on my side of the fence, tried to get to me with something that would unlock it all.

FN: Michael should've gotten herself a squad of cops instead of cutting loose to get the info to him. Maybe she thought she was as smart as *they* were. Berga thought that too.

MN: She could have been standing right there. Knowing she had one more minute to live. Like Berga.

FN: But Berga *did* something in those last minutes.

MN: *[Aha moment]* And so did Michael. I go to my mailbox and there's the note: It says "William Mist."

[Short phone-call: Mike & Pat]

Mike: What about that ship, the Cedric?

Pat: It's screwballed, Mike. In a Jersey port undergoing repairs. Got stripped to make over into a transport.

Mike: But I bet Nick Raymondo was on hand to pick up his investment. And somehow Billy Mist knew all about it. But how?

Scene 8, Billy Mist, Soberin, Lily Reveals Herself

[Mike rushes to Billy Mist's place. Fight action takes place during narration below]

FN: Billy was expecting somebody else, & was all packed and ready to leave town, a gun slung in a harness under his shoulder.

MN: I ram the door so hard it kicks him back into the room, and while he's reaching for his rod, I smash his nose into a bloody mess. He makes a second try and this time I kick the gun out of his hand and pick him up to go over him good.

FN: Mike holds him out where he wants him and puts one into his ribs that brings a scream choking up in his throat, and has the next one ready when Billy dies.

MN: No! I want him alive so bad I shake him like a rag doll, and when his mouth lolls open under those blank eyes I throw him away from me.

FN: Billy's broken face leers at him, the eyes seeing nothing.

MN: *[As Mikes lets out a raspy angry yell]* Billy Mist, who knew where Velda was, who was going to give me the pleasure of killing him slowly.

FN: As he leaves, Mike knocks over a shelf full of pill bottles. Dozens of them. A sick man's paradise, and Billy had been a very sick man after all.

MN: The prescribing doctor on all of them is a familiar name: Dr. Soberin.

[Mike goes to Soberin's place, and pushes open the door. Action as below.]

Mike: Dr. Soberin, I presume? *[Soberin is sitting as if at a desk.]*

MN: I catch him so far off guard I have time to get halfway across to him before he dips his hand in the drawer and I have his wrist before he can get the thing leveled.

FN: Mike lets him keep the gun in his hand so he can bend it back and hear his fingers break and when Soberin tries to yell Mike bottles the sound up by smashing his elbow into his mouth.

MN: I shove him away from me, slash the butt end of the rod across the side of his head and watch him drop into his chair.

Mike: *[Shaking his head as Soberin tries to speak]* You're dead mister. It took me a long time. I'm getting old for the game. One time I would've had it made as soon as I rolled it around a little bit. *[Soberin puts his hand to his mouth to try to stop the blood, makes him retch]* You went to a lot of trouble to get the information Berga had under her hat. Some clever thinking went into that deal at the sanitarium. You had it rigged pretty nicely. Sorry I spoiled your plan. You shouldn't have wrecked my heap.

Soberin: *[Coughing]* You...got...another one.

Mike: I'll keep it too. I didn't go for the booby trap, doc. That was kid stuff. *[Soberin moans softly, rocking in his chair]* Later I'll give my explanations to the police. Later I'll get raked over the coals for what I'm about to do, but what the hell, doc. Like I said, I'm getting old in the game. I don't care any more.

FN: Soberin's quiet in his chair. The quiet that terror brings. For once he knows the hand of terror himself.

Mike: *[Pointing gun at Soberin]* Doc.... *[While Soberin looks at the gun, Mike shoots him dead, in the eye]*

Mike: *[Picking up phone to call Pat at police headquarters]* Pat, did you ever ID the dead blonde from the river?

Pat: Lily Carver. Prints just came in. Might explain some missing pieces.

Mike: Yeah. Thanks. *[Hangs up, then starts to dial again]*

Lily: *[Holding a gun pointed at Mike]* Don't bother, Mike. I'm right here. You forgot about me, Mike.

Mike: I almost did, didn't I.

Lily: *[Looking at Soberin's body]* You shouldn't have done that, Mike.

Mike: No?

Lily: He was the only one who really loved me. And I loved him, you crumb you! *[She hisses]*

Mike: Sure. You loved him so much you killed Lily Carver and took her place. You loved him so much you set Berga Torn up for the kill and damn near made sure Velda died.

You loved him so much you never saw that all *he* loved was power and money and you were just something he could use.

Lily: Shut up.

Mike: Shut up hell. You stayed with me all the way. You passed the word right under my nose and had Billy packing to blow town, with all he needed to inherit Raymondo's investment. What did you think was going to happen, you two love birds go off together and live happily ever after? Nuts. You played me for a sucker but now it's over. This isn't the first time you've pointed a rod at me, sugar.

Lily: You're a deadly man, Mike. He was deadly too, but not like you. You're even worse. *[Lily starts laughing and shoots him in the side. She continues laughing as he gets the gun way from her, throws her off and runs, as she keeps laughing from where she's lying].*

Phone Conversation

A: This is just an artifact created by the nature of light. Especially when it's coming from one side.

B: No! This is enormous. This has consequences. This will be remembered. This is exhausting! This is how it is! This is a day like any other. This is a day different than all other days. This is --- *[A hangs up on B]*

[Mike hobbles off to find Velda in another room, sitting as if tied up, as sounds of drones bombing mixed with Eric's collage music begin and get gradually louder. Mike unties Velda.]

Mike: I love you, kitten. I love you more than I ever thought I could love anything.

Velda: I love you too, Mike.

[They hobble off together as bombs fall, lights flash, and collage sounds continue.]

Male Narrator: I can't face the end.

Female Narrator: Let's close our eyes. *[Lights fade]*

END