

BAD NEWS on the DOORSTEP

Screenplay

by

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Based on the novel by

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WRITER'S DRAFT

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FADE IN:

INT. VACANT BEDROOM - DAY

(THANKSGIVING 1995)

A MAN, in his fifties, handsome in business casual dress, but heavy-hearted, paces in the middle of a VACANT BEDROOM inside an ABANDONED HOUSE. A few packed MOVING BOXES litter the floor.

The man notices something sticking out of a pile of swept-up debris in a corner. He crouches down to see... A BLACK & WHITE PHOTOGRAPH.

A snapshot of a FAMILY OF FIVE standing in front of this very house. He picks it up, then lays it down.

Curious, the man feels along the baseboard of the wall near the debris pile. The wooden panel has broken off. He TUGS on the edge of the molding, opening a small HIDING PLACE inside the wall frame.

He REACHES INSIDE, pulling out a small SCRAPBOOK, filthy, stained with the passage of the decades. He opens the cover... PHOTOGRAPHS AND NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS.

Faded and torn. Collected moments of suburban life in the LATE FIFTIES. Kids playing in streets. Family holidays. Seasons changing. Graduations. Obituaries. A mosaic of a lifetime.

The man runs his FINGER across the frayed edge of one of the clippings.

Glimpses of HEADLINES: "Storm Threatens Final Football Game"... "Police Investigate Local Money Scam"... "Three Rock 'N' Roll Stars Perish In Plane Crash".

The man turns the pages. His eyes drift to another article... a yellowing newsprint showing a head-shot of a YOUNG MAN in his mid-twenties, intense and assured. Headline reads: "Mud Bowl Player Remembered". He caresses the news clipping; the name under the photo... FRANK BONADUCCI.

The man picks up the family photo again. He savors it.

THE MAN'S POV

The photo fills the screen. Magically, the monochrome image begins to flood with COLOR. We now HEAR the man, JO-JO, his voice becoming our NARRATOR.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

My brother Frank always used to tell me,
Cuz', when you look back, merely
glance... and never stare.

Images of the family on the photo DISAPPEAR one by one, but the house remains. Gray LIGHT bleeds onto the frame; SNOW begins to swirl... in front of the house.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

(DECEMBER 1958)

Flurries scatter under a glowing gray sky.

A brown, 1951 PACKARD approaches, passing a street sign:
BELMONT AVENUE.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

There were days not that long ago when
people never knew what takin' a day off
was like, let alone a week's vacation.

EXT. BONADUCCI HOME - MORNING

The same modest two-story in need of new paint, typical of street. The Packard pulls in the driveway.

MARIETTA BONADUCCI, mid-thirties, a beauty aged prematurely by the graveyard shift, STEPS out, careful not to slip.

MARIETTA

Thanks for the ride, Anthony.

Marietta struggles up the driveway, CRUNCHING ice underfoot. The WIND distracts her for a moment. A commuter train WHISTLE interrupts. She PUSHES IN the unlocked house door.

INT. BONADUCCI HOME - KITCHEN - EARLY MORNING

Marietta TOSSES her raincoat onto the kitchen table. A pack of LUCKY STRIKES lodged up the sleeve of her royal blue FACTORY UNIFORM.

She reaches back to flip the furnace switch. Sounds of CLANKING steam pipes.

Lights click on. A lived-in middle-class home, CLUTTERED, but cozy. She leans into the center hallway, CALLING upstairs.

MARIETTA

Everybody up! Uncle Pete's on his way.

INT. BONADUCCI HOME - BOY'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

FRANK BONADUCCI, seventeen, sits up on the edge of the bottom bunk. His dark eyes focused, staring into space; white tee-shirt and sweat pants conceal a lean muscular frame.

A crowded DRESSER with Frank's sports and academic trophies and awards. Book shelves filled with RECORD ALBUMS and FORTY-FIVES. Tacked-up album covers on wall.

JO-JO BONADUCCI, Frank's thirteen year-old brother, leans over the top bunk, secretly observing Frank with expressive eyes.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Frank was seventeen, just four years older than me, but he was already his own man. Even back then you could tell there was something special about him... in the way kids know things in their gut they can't understand or talk about until later on. What I knew more than anything... was I always wanted to be just like him.

After hitting the "on" button on his RCA Victor turntable, Frank still remains lost in thought, despite the song that begins to BLARE: Dion and the Belmont's "I Wonder Why".

INT. BONADUCCI HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

The music spills from upstairs. Marietta at the stove, wakes up a pot of gravy.

MARIETTA

(calling)

Frankie, it's a big day! Let's go.

A few KNOCKS on the back door. Marietta stirs gravy with one hand, reaches to open the kitchen door with the other.

MARIETTA (CONT'D)

OK, everybody! Uncle Pete's here.

PETE FRASSA, late thirties and lovingly large, enters freezing and breathing heavily. He PLOPS a wrapped paper bag stamped with FRASSA'S BUTCHER SHOP on the counter and TOSSES a bag of donuts onto kitchen table.

MARIETTA (CONT'D)

Pete, all this food?

PETE

(kissing Marietta's cheek)

Always my treat. Frankie up yet?

MARIETTA
 He hasn't come down.
 (calling, frustrated)
 Frankie, everybody! Uncle Pete's brought
 the pregame meal.

INT. BONADUCCI HOME - BOY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Jo-Jo hops off the upper bunk.

JO-JO
 Uncle Pete's here!

He dashes out. The SCRAPBOOK near his pillow, littered with
 cut-out articles about Frank.

Frank stares outside at the snowy weather. The WIND picks up,
 windows VIBRATE.

INT. BONADUCCI HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Pete at the table as Jo-Jo sprints in carrying snow-cruusted
 local paper... the NEWARK STAR LEDGER.

JO-JO
 Hi, Uncle Pete! I got the paper.

PETE
 Gimme a kiss. You're gettin' bigger every day.

They embrace. Jo-Jo WIPES Pete's wet kiss.

JO-JO
 I've been lifting.

PETE
 That's good. I used to lift, too.

MARIETTA
 The only thing you ever lifted was a fork
 to your mouth.

As Pete sheepishly fumbles for the sports page, Frank slips into
 the kitchen.

PETE
 There he is!

Pete embraces his nephew in a tight bear hug.

PETE (CONT'D)
 The hero of the day.

FRANK

You're too much, Uncle Pete.

PETE

It's official, Frankie. Dorfman and Glicker... both those clowns pick you guys to win.

FRANK

'bout time.

Frank settles at the table. Marietta hands him a cup of coffee and a plate of steak and eggs as she kisses his head.

MARIETTA

You're lucky it's all still hot.

FRANK

Thanks, Ma.

Pete points to SPORTS PAGE.

PETE

Here it is, Frank. The headline:

(reading the paper)

Bellboys Picked Over Nutley Despite Stormy Weather. Dorfman writes... Hoping to conclude its best season ever, the Belleville Bellboys may be facing more than one opponent today - the Nutley Raiders and the mud. Belleville High's Mr. Inside, senior Gino Babula, and Mr. Outside, senior Frank Bonaducci, will find the running tough after this week's snow and rain. Predict Babula will get the touchdown that makes him Essex County's top scorer. Belleville wins in snowy squeaker, six-zero.

Frank listens, sullen, his face in his meal.

PETE (CONT'D)

It's right here in black and white. A sure thing.

MARIETTA

Only God knows the end from the beginning, Pete.

PETE

C'mon, Madiett'. My nephew can take on anything. Ain't that right, Frankie?

FRANK

You're the best, Uncle Pete.

JO-JO

It's not good to be too cocky.

PETE

It ain't cockiness, Jo-Jo. It's destiny. The Bellboys bring home this win, Frankie and Gino finally get the recognition they deserve.

A VOICE (O.S.)

Don't look too far ahead. Only one link in the chain of destiny can be handled at a time.

Everyone TURNS as ROCKY BONADUCCI enters, late-thirties with pencil mustache, sinewy and weathered.

PETE

Where'd you hear that one, Rock, the Million Dollar Movie?

ROCKY

Churchill.

MARIETTA

Morning, Rocky.

Rocky kisses his wife, takes coffee and his place at the head of the table. His palpable presence commands attention.

ROCKY

It's the last pregame meal, Pete?

PETE

Nah, I'll do 'em for Jo-Jo next year.

JO-JO

I'm not sure if I'm playing yet.

PETE

Come on. Of course you will. It's in your blood.

MARIETTA

Jo-Jo's not like Frankie, Pete.

PETE

Don't listen to your mother, Jo-Jo... just this one time.

Jo-Jo smiles, stealing Frank's toast as Pete TUSSELES his hair.

ROCKY

Your Uncle Pete's an angel just like
you... an angel with a dirty face.

MARIETTA

Would you stop that, Rock?

PETE

Rock, you know I'd do anything for these kids.

Rocky nods as he REACHES for the paper.

DONNA BONADUCCI, eight years old, RUSHES in.

PETE (CONT'D)

Good morning, dolly.

Pete lifts Donna, SMOTHERING her with kisses.

DONNA

Uncle Pete, you didn't shave!

ROCKY

You ready, Frankie?

FRANK

They said the snow's gonna change to rain
this afternoon. The field will be a mess.

MARIETTA

They'll postpone the game again, Rocky?

ROCKY

It's not that bad. They'll play.

PETE

You and Gino can deal with a little mud.
What'a ya think, Frank?

FRANK

It'll be okay. We'll get it done.

MARIETTA

I just pray no one gets hurt on that
muddy field... Jesus, Mary, and Joseph!

ROCKY

You alright, Frank?

FRANK

Yeah. I should get ready.

Frank grabs the last piece of toast and heads back upstairs.

MARIETTA

Jo-Jo and Donna, go help your brother.

Pete HOISTS himself from the table.

PETE

I better get going, too. Gotta stop by Bloomfield Avenue before the game.

ROCKY

God forbid you didn't.

PETE

Don't be like that, Rock. All the guys had a great year on Frankie and Gino. They love 'em.

ROCKY

Betting on high school games ain't my idea of love.

(beat)

You hear anything more on that Avenue of yours about this counterfeiting thing?

PETE

That talk's just bull.

ROCKY

These articles in the Ledger... bad bills showing up all over the county. They've got evidence now.

PETE

I really don't know, Rock. And Sneaks ain't into that business, if that's what you're gettin' to.

ROCKY

Just make sure they keep that business away from here.

MARIETTA

Can we please not talk about this today?

PETE

I told you, Rocky. I don't know nothing about it. It's probably just a couple of low life Feds stirring up trouble.

Frank returns to kitchen with his football cleats.

PETE (CONT'D)

(hugging Frank)

You make me proud.

(MORE)

PETE (CONT'D)

Like you're my own kid. Give 'em everything you've got today. And tell Gino to make sure he runs like hell.

FRANK

I will, Uncle Pete.

PETE

I'll see everybody at the game.

Rocky escorts Pete to the door.

ROCKY

Pete, thanks. For all you do.

PETE

Anytime, Rock.

Pete leaves.

Donna places Frank's gym bag next to the stairs.

ROCKY

Let's go, Frankie.

Frank pulls on his jacket, hugs Donna and Marietta, and kisses Jo-Jo on the head.

EXT. BONADUCCI HOME - DAY

Rocky and Frank enter car. Jo-Jo follows to back patio.

Rocky's car BACKFIRES as it backs out.

JO-JO

(yelling)

The odds are good, Frankie. Today's your day.

Frank LOWERS the window.

FRANK

Who told you to say that?

JO-JO

Nobody. You'll make it happen.

FRANK

(cracking a smile)

Thanks, Cuz'. You've always been the smarter one.

ROCKY (O.S.)

Frankie, we gotta go.

Frank closes the window.

EXT. BELLEVILLE STREETS - DAY

Rocky's '49 CHEVY struggles down icing street.

Freezing rain PELTS the car.

INT. ROCKY'S CHEVY - CONTINUOUS

The windows FOG up.

ROCKY

Damn luck. If you played back in October when you're supposed to, it would've been dry. Crazy Asian flu hits, and now you're fightin' a blizzard.

FRANK

Already changing to rain, Dad.

ROCKY

I'm just saying be ready, Frank. It'll be tough out there.

FRANK

I'm okay. My ankle's better. And you know Gino. Nothing bothers him.

ROCKY

Yeah, that's always been his weakness...
(beat)
Roll down the window, I can't see anything.

Frank cranks it as Rocky WIPES windshield.

Outside, a local shop drifts by. Frank notices a banner over its window reading: GO BELLBOYS, BEAT NUTLEY, THANKS FOR 1958.

CLOSE ON FRANK - his eyes darting back and forth.

MOVING PAST OUTSIDE - The Capitol Movie Theater marquee:
"CLOSED FOR THE BIG GAME".

AROUND THE CORNER - a teenage hangout, the MILK BAR, comes into view. The OWNER and his FAMILY brave the weather, tacking up "GO BELLEVILLE" and "GOOD LUCK, FRANKIE #7" signs.

BACK TO FRANK - as he rolls up window, freezing rain ASSAULTS the windshield like bullets.

EXT. BELLEVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Rocky parks outside gymnasium. Other cars drop off players.

Nearby, a bustle of activity as groups of PARK WORKERS prep the wet field for the game. Even though late morning, darkened SKIES prevail.

INT. ROCKY'S CHEVY - DAY

Rocky turns off ignition. SILENCE.

ROCKY

You want to tell me what's been bothering you?

FRANK

Nothing.

ROCKY

Frankie, I can tell when you're all in that head of yours. I used to tell guys in the Marines, "Don't over-think this thing."

FRANK

Dad, I don't need a pep talk.

ROCKY

Stop worrying. No fear. That's when you're at your best. Don't try. Just do it.

FRANK

Everybody... it's just... you're all the ones worrying.

ROCKY

Hey, Mommie and me are just trying to support you. And as she says, "You're never alone." Use that to find strength. And have no regrets in the end. Like we always talk about. Right, Daddy?

Rocky addressing Frank as "Daddy" CAPTURES his attention. He PATS Rocky's hand on the wheel.

ROCKY (CONT'D)

And tell Gino we expect big things from him. That son of a gun's got thunder in his thighs..., but you got lightning in those legs of yours.

They exchange smiles as Frank BOLTS from the car, sprints to the locker room door, dodging puddles.

Rocky watches his every move, squeezing the steering wheel.

NARRATOR (VO)

My father was really Frankie's biggest fan, not his coach. That role was for my mother. And she'd cherish their private times together. Like she was giving herself a second chance. But Rocky and Marietta were always on the same page... always.

INT. BELLEVILLE HIGH - LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Frank descends into locker room. PLAYERS dressing, exchange greetings.

Frank SCANS room as he drops gym bag near one of the lockers. He approaches a huge player, WILLIE BRINDISI.

FRANK

Brindisi, you see Gino?

WILLIE

He was down here before. Probably out back smoking one of his mother's Camels.

Frank looks around for Gino as he heads deeper into locker room.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

(calling after Frank)

You ready to run wild, Bonaducci?

Frank ignores Willie and disappears at far end of the room.

INT. BELLEVILLE SCHOOL - GYM CORRIDOR - DAY

Frank emerges from locker room.

GINO BABULA, seventeen, smoking a cigarette, relaxes on a bench across from a large glass case holding shelves of TROPHIES. His golden curly hair matches the gold victory banners high on the cinder block walls. Same height as Frank, but more muscular.

FRANK

Hey.

GINO

'Bout time you showed up.

FRANK

What are you doing up here?

GINO

Smell of dirty jocks downstairs.

Frank sits next to Gino.

FRANK
How ya feeling?

GINO
Sick.

FRANK
Me, too.

GINO
Want a drag?

Gino OFFERS Frank cigarette, knowing he would never take it.

FRANK
Listen, I've been thinking...

GINO
So have I.

FRANK
Really?

GINO
Yeah. I know I didn't say it when you first mentioned this idea of yours, but thanks. I ain't used to people wanting to do good things for me.

FRANK
Gino--

GINO
--You remember back in the East Orange game? Third quarter, when you turned your ankle? I figured it was all over for us then. Remember what you told me?

Frank SHAKES his head.

GINO (CONT'D)
You said it was okay if you had to sit out a few games. That it was good you'd have to suffer through getting healthy again, 'cause that's the only way you'd rise up in the end. Become even better, tougher. At first I was like, don't start with your mom's Holy Roller junk. Then without you, I tried real hard to make up the difference.
(MORE)

GINO (CONT'D)

Before I know it, I start scorin' those eighteen touchdowns, you come back, we start winning bigger, and everybody's calling us Mr. Inside and Mr. Outside. And now we're here. The whole state's gonna be at the game. And I'm one TD away from the county scoring title. You read the Ledger?

FRANK

We got lucky.

GINO

Ain't luck. I listened to you, and we got here. It was meant to go this way. Then, you say you're gonna do anything to get me this touchdown today.

FRANK

Gino, that's what I wanted to talk to you about. It's gonna be tough now. This weather... I didn't think it would get this bad--

GINO

--If I score, and we win... my old man and all those hoods locked up with him will go wild.

Frank looks away, shaking his head in frustration.

FRANK

How's your dad holding up?

GINO

You know Sneaks. Old man never changes. You'd think a five year sentence would lighten up a guy like that. Maybe change him. My Ma's still a wreck. But if I'm set with college, things won't be so bad. And getting this TD...

FRANK

Gino, we both gotta nail this today, but the field and all...

Another PLAYER appears in the doorway.

PLAYER

What they hell are you guys doin'? Coach is starting.

Gino takes a deep drag.

GINO

You've become my biggest supporter,
Bonaducci. You'll get it done. Let's make
sure we get that one TD.

Gino heads back to locker room, leaving Frank alone with trophies.

INT. BELLEVILLE HIGH - LOCKER ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Belleville High football team sprawled on dusty concrete
floor. Frank and Gino in front row, in full uniform.

COACH POPALINSKI stares down the aisle of players.

POPALINSKI

Alright, listen up. If we win today, we
finish with the best record at Belleville
since before World War II when some of
your fathers and uncles were right where
you're sitting now. Some of them got sent
off to fight the Nazis; some to the South
Pacific. I knew those guys. They were
warriors. Yea, the war's over. But the
spirit of those men, those soldiers, it
lives on. Right here, right now. Nutley's
one of the best teams in the state. You've
fought hard to get here, and I'm proud of
each and every one of yas. The rain, snow,
and mud will make it tough, but we can't
lose sight of what's at stake.

Players' eyes FROZEN on Popalinski.

POPALINSKI (CONT'D)

For you seniors, it's over after this one.
Babula - right in front of him is the
county scoring title. If he does what he's
supposed to do, he'll make Belleville
football history. And Bonaducci here,
well, maybe my best two-way player ever.

Gino NODS, well aware of the weight of the words.

POPALINSKI (CONT'D)

Some of you might be thinking... Coach, it's
just a high school football game. A lot of
people think that. Let me tell yas, though.
What they don't see is what you and I know
down deep, but we don't say - that for some
people like us and for your families, a high
school football game may just be... all we
have.

The room EXPLODES with cheers and thunderous applause. CHANTS of "Bellboys, Bellboys."

Gino BOMBARDED by pats on the back from teammates. Frank surrounded by rooting players. Both grab their helmets and push to front of the line towards the door, side by side.

GINO

This is it, Mr. Outside.

Off Frank's pensive reaction -

CUT TO:

EXT. BELLEVILLE HIGH - FOOTBALL FIELD - DAY

Ferocious, swirling SLEET continues. CROWDS pour into stands. The soaking wet football field surrounded by mounds of snow.

Trucks and cars parked around field's fenced sections with FANS standing on hoods to get a better view.

AT EDGE OF FIELD - CHEERLEADERS scramble under umbrellas.

IN STANDS - the Belleville High MARCHING BAND roars with Varsity Fight Song. On opposite side, Nutley BAND competes.

AMONG CHEERING FANS - the Bonaducci family gathering - Rocky, Marietta, and Donna, all bundled up, finding their seats in the bleachers. Jo-Jo pals around with buddies nearby.

AUNT BELLA, Rocky's glamorous sister, has saved seats. Bella's full-length fur contrasts with Marietta's worn raincoat.

BELLA

There's my handsome brother and his beautiful family.

ROCKY

How are ya, Bella?

Kisses and hugs all around. Nearby the rest of the Bonaducci clan nestles in: UNCLE EMIL (Bella's husband), and AUNT JOSEPHINE (Rocky's single sister) next to Rocky's father, GRANDPA JOE.

ROCKY (CONT'D)

What'a ya say, Pop?

GRANDPA JOE

Accidenti il diavolo. They gonna let these kids play in this?

BELLA

Pa, stai insilensio! You'll get Marietta nervous.

AT THE END ZONE - Uncle Pete with his sidekick, GREENIE. A menagerie of local WISE GUYS surround them. Pete spots Rocky in stands, waves.

CLOSE ON ROCKY - cautiously eyeing Pete and the guys.

Most sharply dressed wise guy, TWO TONES, squeezes next to Pete.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

My Uncle Pete's best friend was Greenie, and man, if they didn't remind me of Ralph Cramden and Norton from the Honeymooners. Then there was Thomas Antonelli, or Tony Anthony, or Two Tones, for the two "Anthony" names. Go figure. He was as smooth as my uncle and Greenie were not. But they all loved each other.

TWO TONES

How ya feeling today, Petey?

PETE

Freezin' my ass off, same as you.

TWO TONES

You wish your nephew good luck for us this morning?

PETE

Of course.

TWO TONES

It'll be rough out there.

PETE

Frankie and Gino ain't let nobody down yet.

TWO TONES

You hear anything more from Richie Bell's New York crew?

PETE

Why would I?

TWO TONES

Ya know, in your store. This thing's spreading all over the papers. I think you should talk to Gubitosi. If something goes down...

PETE

Would you forget it? Nothing's gonna go down.

TWO TONES

I'm just saying, Richie's New York guys would love to clean up a mess in Sneak's territory.

PETE

Let me watch the game in peace, huh?

GREENIE

Game ain't started yet, boss.

PETE

Nobody's askin' you, Greenie.

BACK ON FIELD - Belleville team enters stadium. Crowd RISES to get better view.

Frank leads team onto field, followed by Gino under the ROAR of cheering crowd. As they rush by, Frank glances to cheerleaders on sidelines.

RUTH CORINO, seventeen, catches his eye, BLOWING him a kiss.

Frank smiles back.

Both teams take their places on the sidelines.

AT MIDFIELD

Frank FACE TO FACE with NUTLEY CAPTAINS for flip of the coin.

NUTLEY CAPTAIN

We'll take heads.

COIN flies airborne.

REFEREE

Belleville wins.

FRANK

We'll kick off.

TEAMS get in position. Belleville readies to kick off. The ref's whistle BLOWS - Willie Brindisi kicks the ball, and the game begins.

RUNNING WITH A NUTLEY PLAYER - tailback JOHNNY IPPOLITO fields the kick. A Belleville lineman HITS him hard. Fumble. Belleville recovers the ball.

IN STANDS - Belleville fans ECSTATIC. Thousands of FACES scan the field. Difficult to tell who's who in fog, rain, and snow. Both team's uniforms already coated in MUD, obscuring school colors.

BELLA

Where's Frankie? I can't tell who he is.

EMIL

Sit down, will ya!

Belleville huddles. Quarterback GUY GRANT organizes the players. Frank focuses. Gino watches him like a hawk.

GUY

Let's start with thirty-one dive.

Gino takes hand-off... but slips, face first into the mud.

Crowd GASPS.

Grant quick-pitches to Frank. He stretches - but the ball SLIPS off his fingertips. He reacts by DIVING for it, sliding out of bounds. Ref's whistle BLARES.

Next play Gino takes ball, but SLAMMED down into mud again. He SCREAMS at the heavens. Impossible for anyone to keep their balance.

Rocky stands in his seat, his eyes locked on Frank.

Coach Popalinski sends in PUNTER. He KICKS - punt gives Nutley possession on the twenty-five yard line.

Frank TURNS to teammates.

FRANK

Six-three-two, guys. Hit hard and go for the ball.

ON SIDELINES, confusion.

MONTAGE

ON THE FIELD, both teams slosh around in the mud.

IN STANDS, Greenie leans into Pete...

GREENIE

It's a mess out there. You can't tell what's what.

PETE

Ya mean, who's who.

TWO TONES

These Nutley kids are like wild boars.

PETE
 (eyes the field)
 C'mon, Frankie, do something.

THE SCOREBOARD: ZERO TO ZERO TIE AT END OF THE FIRST HALF.

Like exhausted water buffaloes, both teams trudge off field to the locker rooms.

MONTAGE

FRUSTRATED fans lament conditions from stands.

FAN
 These administrators should be locked up
 for letting the kids play in this mess!

Teams return. The mud-soaked face-off continues. Gino and Frank alternately running the ball, but stifled by Nutley defense.

THE FOURTH QUARTER BEGINS

ON FIELD - Belleville punter gets into position. The kick - IPPOLITO fields the ball and drives up field, FLATTENED by two Belleville tacklers. The Belleville crowd ERUPTS.

Single wing quarterback, MICKEY GELTRUDI, CLAPS Nutley into huddle.

GELTRUDI
 We gotta start throwing like Coach said. Wing
 right, twenty nine-sweep pass, on two.
 (taps knee of end)
 McDonald, keep your eyes open.

MCDONALD
 The ball's wet, it's slippery.

GELTRUDI
 No kiddin'. Johnny will get it to you.
 Pretend it's dry, big guy!

Geltrudi breaks huddle and CALLS signals.

Nutley center hikes ball to Ippolito who RUNS wide. He tracks MCDONALD as he churns up field.

Ippolito LOFTS the ball - a perfect spiral pass stuns the raging crowd into SILENCE. MOVING WITH BALL - through the air in SLOW MOTION...

CLOSING IN ON FRANK as he SPRINTS... and LEAPS for ball - INTERCEPTION!

Frank PEERS up field, takes off for end zone sixty yards away.

FRANK'S POV

Chaotic, as he jumps over a stumbling NUTLEY PLAYER.

The THUNDER of standing delirious Belleville fans all around.

Marietta covers her mouth, STUNNED, HOPEFUL.

Huge Nutley LINEMAN heads straight up hash mark, running parallel to avoid mud-soaked middle of field.

ACROSS FIELD - TRAVELING WITH FRANK

Frank slows down. He GLANCES behind him.

FRANK

Gino! Gino!

Geltrudi appears out of nowhere and DIVES at Frank. Frank SPINS... Geltrudi misses.

ON THE FOUR YARD LINE

Frank stops, uncertain - then completely TURNS AROUND.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Gino! Damn it!

He WAVES the ball high.

IN THE STANDS

Fans closest to the field are STUPEFIED. Reaction trickles up to the higher bleachers. Rocky leans forward on those in front of him.

EMIL

Rock, what's he doing?

BACK TO THE FIELD

Frozen at the four-yard line, Frank SURVEYS behind him - Nutley's biggest guy is CHARGING...

FRANK'S POV

He looks left... then right. Sheets of SLEET and swirling SNOW. Almost as if trapped, Frank FREEZES.

IN THE DISTANCE - GINO APPEARS, sloshing forward as best he can through the dredge of mud.

Frank SPOTS him.

FRANK

Gino, now!

A Nutley player COLLIDES with Frank, but he sheds the tackle.

Frank's own teammates RUSH toward the goal line, some jubilant in anticipating score.

MOVING WITH GINO

Sprinting towards an opening, white VAPOR streaming from Gino's mouth like a raging bull.

As Willie Brindisi dashes toward Frank, he EYES the other behemoth Nutley player veering in Frank's direction.

WILLIE

(crazed)

Run it in, Frank! Run it in!

CLOSE ON FRANK

He loses sight of Gino behind the two converging linemen...

FRANK

Come on! Come on!

FRANK'S POV

... SPOTS Gino again. He grips ball, arches back. Sees Willie, closing out of the corner of his eye.

Gino on a clear trajectory toward the goal; in Frank's sights... He can get the ball to Gino.

Brindisi DIVES towards Nutley player, who FLIES at Frank...

Frank about to lateral... a deep breath...

THE STANDS, silent and motionless.

NUTLEY PLAYER CRASHES into Frank with incredible force, lifting him into the air, and driving him into the fence as the ball sails OUT OF BOUNDS.

A HUSH smothers the stadium.

Gino, near the goal, slows to a stop, MUDDLED.

PUSHING IN ON FRANK - LYING STILL ON MUDDY FIELD.

Teammates begin to hover. Referee jogs over, BLOWS whistle, signaling time out.

CLOSE ON ROCKY AND MARIETTA - SPEECHLESS AND STARING.

Coach Popalinski THROWS clipboard to ground, RUNS onto field.

SCORE IS FROZEN AT 0-0.

CLOSE ON FRANK

Propped up by other players, Frank shakes his head, groggy.

POPALINSKI
Bonaducci, you all right?

Frank gains his balance and does three-sixty - BLANK FACES of teammates stare back at him.

MONTAGE

Order returns.

And... Belleville FEEDS ball to Gino on four straight plays, but Nutley SLAMS him at goal line each time, ending the threat.

Taking over on downs, Nutley MARCHES up muddy field, overpowering crest-fallen Bellboys. Ippolito BREAKS AWAY for late game score.

As game ends, Nutley fans EXPLODE in jubilation. All of Belleville in shock.

NARRATOR (V.O.)
The only thing anyone remembered from that day was Frankie's one play. That one moment would come to define my brother... and all the rest of us would wonder about it for years to come. And, God, did we learn from it.

AT THE GOAL LINE - GINO, helmet in hand, stands alone in relentless rain, watching Frank led off field by Pete and Greenie.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BELMONT AVENUE - EARLY EVENING

Several cars parked in Bonaducci driveway.

INT. BONADUCCI HOUSE - BOYS BEDROOM - EVENING

Frank hovers over stereo. "Don't Pity Me" by Dion and the Belmonts plays. He wipes line of dust off one of his trophies.

DION, in the flesh, leans against the wall in the corner.

DION

What'a ya say, Cuz'?

Frank SEES Dion, but not fazed by his apparition. He regards the displaced pop star as a familiar, almost welcome sight.

DION (CONT'D)

I don't know much about sports. My gig's music, and that's what keeps me up at night. Still, I heard that was one hell of a show you put on out there. People will be talkin' about it... forever.

Frank shrugs.

DION (CONT'D)

Don't sweat it, Cuz'. Even these good looks can't expect to sell out the house every night. Every now and then all of us hit that bad note. Doesn't mean the show stops. Some people can't tell the difference. And remember, self-pity's a sin.

Frank almost manages a laugh.

Door half open. Rocky appears.

ROCKY

Mommy's making tomato pies. Ruth just got here.

FRANK

I don't feel like eating.

ROCKY

Jo-Jo said he tried to get you to listen to Marty Glickman's report on the radio, and you yelled at him.

FRANK

Why listen to that?

ROCKY

Frank, it's not every day guys from around here get on the radio.

FRANK

Who cares? All they'd say is how I blew it for the team.

ROCKY

Damn it, Frankie, what's gotten into you?

FRANK

I should've never talked to Gino about helping him get that TD.

Frank's eyes start to well up.

Rocky switches OFF record player. He settles down next to Frank, waiting for more explanation. SILENCE.

ROCKY

You wanted to lateral to Gino so he'd get in? You planned it before hand?

FRANK

Dad, Gino just needed one more score. He doesn't have the grades for college. And that's all he's been talking about all year. I had to do something. But I screwed it up. And God knows what everyone thinks right now.

Rocky stands, the weight of what Frank tried to do finally cuts through his confusion and HITS him.

ROCKY

Come downstairs. Everybody's here. Listen, ya gotta start remembering what your mother tells ya: People think more of you than you think of yourself.

Rocky leaves.

Frank looks to the corner of the room - Dion, still there, smiles and winks.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BELLEVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - THE NEXT WEEK

Christmas decorations fill the windows.

INT. BELLEVILLE HIGH - LOCKERS - DAY

Frank at his locker. Students scramble through hallway to classes. Willie walks toward Frank with Guy Grant and several other FOOTBALL PLAYERS.

FRANK

Hey, Willie. You seen Gino?

WILLIE

What'a ya asking me for, Bonaducci.

FRANK

He skipped third period.

GUY

C'mon, Willie, we gotta go.

FRANK

You guys heading to lunch?

WILLIE

(conflicted)

We gotta go, Frank.

Willie and the other players leave Frank in their dust.

A PUNK STUDENT approaches palming a FOOTBALL. He tosses it to Frank who flinches, but CATCHES it with one hand.

PUNK STUDENT (O.S.)

Now, Bonaducci, let's try that lateral again!

Frank STARES him down.

PUNK STUDENT (CONT'D)

Oops! Guess you can't reach me either, huh?

Punk Student LAUGHS, cracking up the rest of his group, as disgusted Frank FLINGS the pigskin up the hallway, shocking other students.

JULIE MANZER, seventeen and oozing out of her tight dress, approaches Frank. Two attractive GIRLFRIENDS accompany her.

JULIE

Hi, Frankie.

Frank takes in all of Julie.

FRANK

How are you, Julie?

JULIE
You heading to lunch?

FRANK
Yeah.

JULIE
Want to carry my books?

FRANK
Me?

JULIE
Everybody's talking about what happened
at the game.

FRANK
Tell me about it.

JULIE
You're more popular than ever.

FRANK
Maybe in the halls of Nutley High School.
I'm not so sure "popular" is the right
word around here.

JULIE
Oh, you're special, and I like special
boys. And they usually like me back.

Julie plucks a small leaf from the Christmas garland hanging near
the locker. She TEASES Frank's cheek with the LEAF.

JULIE (CONT'D)
Do you know what I like to do when I'm
around mistletoe, Frank?

Julie's girls giggle. She and her group ooze down the corridor.

ERIC THATCHER and JACKIE CAREY, both awkward examples of
seventeen, appear from the opposite end of the hallway -
Eric, a bespectacled Buddy Holly look-alike, and Jackie
something closer to Jughead from Archie Comics.

JACKIE
Getting yourself stuck in more mud, Frankie B.?

FRANK
What's with everybody?

ERIC
What's with you and Miss Manzer? Better
hope ol' Ruthie doesn't hear about that.

JACKIE

Yeah, Frank. People are whispering already.
Don't give 'em more to talk about.

FRANK

What'a ya mean talking?

JACKIE

About you and your other main squeeze,
Sneaks Jr.

ERIC

Word is that Gino's old man, Sneaks, put
you up to trying that crazy stunt. A
payoff to the boys.

JACKIE

Imagine that! Frankie and Gino - made
guys on Bloomfield Avenue.

FRANK

That's crazy.

JACKIE

Look at the bright side. Whether you're a
mob wannabe or not, that play will go
down in history.

FRANK

That makes me feel a whole lot better, Jackie.

ERIC

Can we get outta here? The bell's gonna
ring. I need a slice of Giordano's pizza
before I pass out.

At the end of the corridor, Gino sneaks toward the stairs.
Frank spots him.

FRANK

I'll catch up with you guys later.

Frank TROTS over to Gino.

ERIC

(yelling)
We're not waiting, Frankie!

JACKIE

Ongawda with those two.

Eric and Jackie peel off.

FRANK
Gino! Wait up.

Gino stops halfway out the door.

FRANK (CONT'D)
Where you been? I tried to get a hold of
you all weekend.

Gino ignores him, lights a cigarette.

FRANK (CONT'D)
We need to talk.

Gino exhales a WAFT of smoke.

GINO
That's the thing, Bonaducci. You're all
talk. Always were. Merry Christmas.

Gino EXITS, the door slamming in Frank's face. Bell rings.

CUT TO:

EXT. GRANDPA JOE'S HOUSE - CHRISTMAS EVE - NIGHT

A regal porched house along the Garden State Parkway. The
block GLOWING with thousands of twinkling Christmas bulbs.

INT. GRANDPA JOE'S HOUSE - CHRISTMAS EVE - NIGHT

A traffic jam forms in the vestibule. Aunt Bella dishes out
hugs and kisses. AUNTS, UNCLES, COUSINS, and SIBLINGS abound.

Uncle Emil helps Grandpa Joe move chairs next to a long table
that stretches the length of the dining room.

The Bonaduccis - Rocky, Marietta, Jo-Jo, and Donna hang up
their coats. Frank enters last.

Marietta's arms overflowing with platters of antipasto and
Christmas cookies. Aunt Josephine and UNCLE ANTHONY (Rocky's
younger brother) help her.

ANTHONY
Merry Christmas, Rock. How are ya?

ROCKY
Merry Christmas, Ant.

JOSEPHINE
Let me help you with this, Marietta.

MARIETTA

The Chevy wouldn't start, you believe that thing? We would've been here earlier.

JOSEPHINE

Mama's just putting the macaroni out now. The bacalao needs a little more time.

Anthony takes a tray, INSPECTS it as everyone walks in.

ANTHONY

Marietta, you didn't skimp on the allegé this year, did ya?

MARIETTA

Plenty there for you, Anthony.

Frank looks at the decorations around crowded NATIVITY DISPLAY - an oversized Baby Jesus next to an odd looking Santa riding a donkey.

MARSHALL, a seventeen-year old cousin, walks over.

MARSHALL

Merry Christmas, Frankie.

FRANK

You too, Marshall.

MARSHALL

There must have been a sale on nativity statues at Bambergers or something. Aunt Jo went crazy this year. Twelve wise men, sixteen sheep, and twenty angels.

FRANK

(laughing)

You apply to any schools yet?

MARSHALL

Planning on Rutgers. Figure it's my best shot. What's up with Cornell? I hear those Ithaca girls in the winter...

FRANK

We're gonna visit when the weather gets better.

Something grabs Frank's attention... IN DINING ROOM Rocky embraces his imposing cousin, CARMINE.

FRANK (CONT'D)

I didn't know cousin Carmine was eating with us.

MARSHALL

Yeah, the whole New York side is over this year. You know, with Uncle John gone.

(smiling)

You think the cops are staking out across the street?

Carmine, slick and well dressed, appears more like a professional business man than an alleged "wise guy".

ROCKY

A nice surprise, Carmine.

CARMINE

Glad I'm welcome, Rocky. Being with the Jersey cousins here... just like the old days when we were kids and everybody was together

Frank STUDIES the exchange as Carmine's family filters in.

LATER - AT THE DINNER TABLE

Grandpa Joe stands at the head of table, proud, barrel-chested, bald, and in charge.

GRANDPA JOE

Attenzione! Scusi, per favore, ma tutti a tavola a mangiare. Buona Natale, mia familia.

FRANK

Marshall, what's all that mean again?

MARSHALL

You want me to translate for you, my Ivy League-bound cousin? It means... sit your little fannies down now, before Grandpa eats all the smelts.

GRANDMA MAMIE and the aunts ENTER with antipasto, spaghetti, and fish dishes. Stained aprons shield holiday dresses.

BELLA

Kids at the end, oldest closest to Grandpa Joe.

Everyone JOCKEYS for seats as frazzled Uncle Pete enters from the kitchen, arms full of wrapped food platters and wine.

CARMINE

There he is! Petey Five Corners.

MARIETTA

You're late, Pete.

PETE

I wanted to stop by the shop, pick up
extra sgungille.

Pete kisses Grandma Mamie.

GRANDMA MAMIE

Leave it all by the stove, Pete. Where's
your mother?

PETE

Ah, she's home cryin' for my father.
Madiett' knows how she is on Christmas
Eve without him.

GRANDPA JOE

Come sit down, Pete.

Pete pays respects to everyone, SQUEEZES next to Carmine.

MARSHALL

Hey, Frankie. What did Cousin Carmine
call him? Petey Five Corners?

FRANK

That's what they call him down Newark. He
and my Grandmother live at 358 Bloomfield
Avenue, on one of the five corners there.
Big intersection, big fat guy... so--

MARSHALL

--Petey Five Corners.

PETE

Merry Christmas, Carm.

CARMINE

The Brooklyn boys send their love, Pete.
Still say you make the best tripe, both
sides of the Hudson.

Rocky eyes Pete, glances at Carmine.

BELLA

Look at this, everybody all together.

Her statuesque figure rises, apron gone.

BELLA (CONT'D)

Just a little prayer, everybody:
(silence)
(MORE)

BELLA (CONT'D)

Dear Father, in Jesus' name, we thank you
for our families, this food, our work,
and our church, especially the Catholic
War Veterans. It's great that we're all
together on this blessed Christmas Eve.
We promise we'll be at midnight mass
tonight. Amen.

FAMILY

(echoes)

Amen!

Eating begins. Bing Crosby's "White Christmas" SERENADES all.

MARSHALL

Grandma, you got any records from this century?

JOSEPHINE

Marshall, what's wrong with Bing Crosby?
You kids with that rock 'n roll. It'll be
the ruination of this country.

Amid loud conversations, clinking plates and glasses -

EMIL

Hey, Rock, you read about this
counterfeiting scam? It's looking like
the whole county's gonna get indicted.

ANTHONY

That's baloney. Just the papers making headlines.

EMIL

Say what you want. If you ask me, this is
more than just the guys down on
Bloomfield Avenue. It's organized crime.
It's spreading everywhere.

GRANDPA JOE

C'mon with that.

Pete laughs as he SHOVELS food into his mouth.

PETE

Those Feds are gavvones. Can't leave good
people alone.

Carmine watches Rocky. RESTLESS reaction from Marietta as she
squeezes out of her seat.

MARIETTA

Anybody need anything... more gravy, cheese?

Frank's eyes dash from Carmine to Rocky.

EMIL

My cop buddy, Angelo Longo, says Richie Bell's New York crowd's taking over Essex County with Sneaks Babula being locked up.

PETE

Longo's a dope.

EMIL

Why would he lie, Pete?

ANTHONY

All this "mob" talk. They mention it everywhere. It's like the new boogie man. It's the Jews who run the papers talking lies about Italians.

BELLA

Anthony, don't forget. Jesus was a Jew.

PETE

Sneaks ain't a bad guy no matter what people say. And none of you know him like I do. Frankie and his kid are like brothers.

Rocky delivers a stern look to Pete, then Frank.

CARMINE

Richie Bell's crowd wouldn't bother with counterfeiting. Besides, this side of the Hudson is small potatoes to him.

ROCKY

Good reason to stay in New York, then.

JOSEPHINE

Do we need this kind of talk? On Christmas Eve?

MARSHALL

If something like this hits close to home, it'll be big here, Aunt Jo.

ANTHONY

And what do you know about it?

MARSHALL

Everybody relax. I'm just saying that people around here work hard. And the cops and politicians don't do anything to help. It's like it's always been with this kind of stuff. Right, Cousin Carm?

ANTHONY

My son, the christened supporter of the masses.

CARMINE

The kid's not far off, Anthony. Guys like Sneaks and even Richie Bell, they'll always be around to help when no one else will. That's how families like ours pulled through in the old days.

ROCKY

Carmine, please.

CARMINE

It's true, Rock. I don't have to give you a history lesson. Good people always look out for their own kind.

BELLA

This thing, fake money? I don't see the big deal.

MARIETTA

Breaking the law is breaking the law, Bella. The Lord said you have to respect man's laws, too. There's no excuse for this behavior.

BELLA

But, Marietta, a little dollar here, a little dollar there. Who's to know?

FRANK

Uncle Emil, what are the cops gonna do?

EMIL

Longo said our Prosecutor friend, Sal Genitempo, is gonna start naming names in the New Year. What's to stop them from arresting the whole lot of us? You know how much cash I handle down at Petty's Pharmacy?

ANTHONY

Hopefully because Sally Boy is from the neighborhood, he'll give some guys a break.

GRANDPA JOE

Basta, please!

MARIETTA

I agree with Pop. Who wants some more wine?

Rocky raises his hand as he starts to speak, but decides against it. Jo-Jo watches the adults closely.

EXT. GRANDPA JOE'S HOME - FRONT PORCH - LATER

Rocky lights up a Lucky. Carmine enters with a cigar and two glasses of anisette.

CARMINE

A little tense in there, huh?

ROCKY

There are better things to talk about.

CARMINE

(offering Rocky the glass)
... To changing times.

Rocky TOASTS, sips.

ROCKY

You never change, Carm. You're still as smooth as ever. God bless ya.

CARMINE

C'mon Rock. You know how much I admire my war hero cousin here.

ROCKY

We got the same last name, but we're different.

CARMINE

Rock, now you insult me? On Christmas?

ROCKY

Be honest. This money thing - Emil's right. It's gonna blow up.

CARMINE

You got nothing to worry about.

ROCKY

Who says I'm worried?

CARMINE

Listen. I know how tight you are with Petey Five Corners. And Marietta's devoted to her brother. But, he's a big boy, and so are we. I don't apologize for anything, except when I'm wrong.

ROCKY

I hear that kind of talk all the time from Pete. You all love being so close to it. It used to be just the neighborhood guys horsin' around for a quick buck. But now with the new cars, the fancy suits, the cash all out in the open.

(MORE)

ROCKY (CONT'D)

It's just getting worse. It's a bad thing for everybody... for our people. Always has been.

CARMINE

Don't start playing judge and jury. I do my best for my kids.

ROCKY

Please.

CARMINE

What about you? Leaving school for a job in Pete's butcher shop. Then this backbreaking factory work for less than a hundred dollars a week for how many years? And Marietta working the graveyard shift six days a week? You're killing yourselves.

ROCKY

Make your point, Carmine.

CARMINE

Back in the old days, your father, my father... they'd do whatever it took.

ROCKY

My old man never broke a law.

CARMINE

Don't be so self-righteous. I'll tell you this much - if this money thing does become a mess... with Sneaks out of the picture to clean it up, Richie Bell and those other Brooklyn guys will carve up Jersey like a roast. And then things will really start changing.

Rocky stares at him. Carmine finishes his cigar.

CARMINE (CONT'D)

Marietta was saying you guys are gonna be squeezed with Frankie's college.

ROCKY

The kid's got his heart set on Cornell. Had a scholarship waiting for him, but now with what happened at that game...

CARMINE

Frankie's got a good head on his shoulders. Like his old man. But don't ever be too proud to remember we're family. I'll be there for him. You know what I mean, Rock?

Carmine tosses his cigar and heads back inside.

INT. GRANDPA JOE'S HOUSE - STAIRS - THAT MOMENT

Frank treads down stairs. He sees Carmine coming back in and Rocky out on the porch. Frank halts, out of Carmine's sight.

Carmine runs into Pete in foyer. Pete has a drink in hand for Carmine. They EMBRACE.

Frank studies the exchange.

Jo-Jo appears from behind the stairwell.

JO-JO

What's the matter, Frankie?

FRANK

Nothing.

On the wall behind Frank PHOTOGRAPHS show generations of family members in military, athletic, church-related scenes.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

My father was an easy going guy despite the Marines. He always gave my Uncle Pete a pass... and Cousin Carmine? Well, Dad loved his swagger, just detested the streets he strutted on. I think it was the hand-to-hand combat in the Pacific. My father could never believe that he came home alive... after the carnage he was a part of. So, he never judged anyone too harshly... especially family. His days being a tough guy ended with VJ Day.

CUT TO:

A FESTIVE BANNER, PROCLAIMING "WELCOME 1959"

INT. BELLEVILLE HIGH - GYMNASIUM - JANUARY 1959

A ROCKING start to the semester with dance in progress. Enthusiastic teenagers crowd the gym floor.

Frank, Eric, and Jackie ENTER.

JACKIE

Now this is what I call post-holiday cheer. Who's up for a friendly wager on how many of these beauties Jackie Carey can pile into his Heavenly Heap tonight?

ERIC
I'll double down on zero.

JACKIE
Ease off, Snatch'. For tonight and for these last twelve months of the fifties, good vibes only, please?

Jackie produces a FLASK, takes a swig, and passes it to Eric who offers it to Frank. Frank ignores it.

ERIC
What's this noise? Sounds like the junk my mother plays after she's had a couple of her manhattans. Good thing I brought my forty-fives.

Eric dashes over to the DJ podium with a handful of records.

JACKIE
That'a boy Snatch', let's get this party started.

RUTH (O.S.)
Frankie!

Ruth rushes over to Frank. She hugs him tightly, PLANTING a soft kiss on his cheek.

RUTH (CONT'D)
I didn't think you'd come.

FRANK
Me neither.

RUTH
C'mon, everybody's dancing.

JACKIE
Hey, Ruth. Tell those cute freshman cheerleaders Jackie Carey has arrived, is open for business, and is offering personal tours of his own private dance floor... free of charge.

RUTH
(laughs)
Everybody knows you're no Fred Astaire, Jackie.

She pulls Frank over to the dance floor. At DJ table, Eric takes control of the music.

ERIC
I'm gonna dedicate this first slow one to my best buddy, Frank Bonaducci.
(MORE)

ERIC (CONT'D)

A little something from The Five Satins:
the one and only "In the Still of the
Night".

Music SWELLS. Frank dances with Ruth. Mid-sway he notices
COLD STARES from other students.

FRANK

I don't get time off for good behavior, huh?

RUTH

It'll pass. Everybody's just confused.

FRANK

It's been like a month. Enough already.
Gino still won't talk to me.

RUTH

He'll have to figure things out for himself.
He's so selfish and stuck-up. You'll never
make him see it your way.

FRANK

I just want to apologize, for everything.

RUTH

You apologize to him? You care too much.

FRANK

Isn't that why you like me?

Ruth smiles, puts her head on his shoulder.

Suddenly, COMMOTION near the door - Frank and Ruth break away from
their moment. A group of NUTLEY FOOTBALL PLAYERS enter. Belleville
students REACT. Basketball coach HIRAM WILHELM and the other adult
chaperons CONFRONT players as they file in. Jackie and other
Belleville students gather near Frank and Ruth.

JACKIE

Surprise, surprise. What are they doing on our turf?

FRANK

Calm down.

Bulging Nutley players approach in a hoard. Belleville kids
exchange tense looks.

NUTLEY PLAYER #1

Hey, Bonaducci. Don't stop dancing. We
just wanted to come by to thank you for
our victory.

NUTLEY PLAYER #2

Yeah, we couldn't do it without you, Frankie.

Willie Brindisi and Guy Grant edge in closer to the group.

WILLIE

Do I need to teach some of you boys a lesson... this being our school and all?

Grant RESTRAINS Willie.

GUY

Who invited you dopes anyway?

NUTLEY PLAYER #1

What did you say, Grant?

JACKIE

Look, kids, there's plenty of booze for everybody.

(offers his flask)

Now my pal, Eric, will start playing some of your favorite tunes, so why don't we all--

FRANK

--Jackie, forget it. They've already had too much.

Frank stares down the intruders.

FRANK (CONT'D)

You guys want to say something? Say it to me.

NUTLEY PLAYER #1

We're just showing respect, Bonaducci. To Babula, too. Where's the other wise guy?

The Nutley crew CRACKS themselves up.

WILLIE

Man, youse guys don't understand. Frankie ain't like that. And you got no business here, so get out.

NUTLEY PLAYER #2

Going out of your way to stand up for a guy who blew your whole season, Brindisi?

NUTLEY PLAYER #3

How long till you trade in your number seven jersey for an orange Rahway uniform, Frankie?

RUTH

Let's go, Frank.

NUTLEY PLAYER #2
 You'll be pretty safe having Old Sneaks
 as a cell mate, don't you think, Bonaducci?

FRANK
 (fuming)
 Cellmate?

Frank THRUSTS a RIGHT HOOK into Nutley Player #2's jaw. The kid TUMBLES back into his friends. Brindisi, Grant, and Belleville guys POUNCE. CHAOS erupts as students CONVERGE and SCATTER. Wilhelm and other teachers rush in to break up fight. A dozen or so football players RUMBLE. SHOUTING and CURSING everywhere. SCREAMING and CHEERS overtake the party music.

Eric bolts away from DJ table. Jackie PUSHES into the melee but is SHOVED aside. Frank appears in the eye of the storm, THROWING wild jabs with uncharacteristic fury. Guy JUMPS on the back of a Nutley player who FLIPS him over his head. Guy lands on his back, attempts to recover, but PASSES OUT.

Order restored as Frank, Willie, Jackie, and Eric attend to Guy. When teachers see he is unconscious, they SCREAM for ambulance.

INT. HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOM - LATER

Belleville kids are gathered. TENSION, CONFLICT, DISBELIEF. HOSPITAL OFFICIAL pushes through crowd.

JACKIE
 Hey, Doc, what's with Grant?

HOSPITAL OFFICIAL

Look, kids, the news is not good. He's gone.

SHOCK, girls CRYING. Frank's battered face FROZEN in disbelief. Others exchange looks of CONFUSION, HELPLESSNESS, glancing back at Frank.

INT. BELLEVILLE HIGH - PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - FOLLOWING WEEK

Jackie and Eric wait outside the door.

ERIC
 How long has he been in there?

JACKIE
 Knowing old man Jacone, Frankie's gonna get six months to life. Particularly with Guy goin'.

Door opens. Frank emerges, stone faced with a swollen lip. Coach Popalinski follows him out, pats him on the shoulder.

JACKIE (CONT'D)

Look at it this way, Frankie, Cornell's gotta be hard up for juvenile delinquents.

ERIC

What'd you get? Suspension? The chair?

FRANK

A big lecture. And a warning.

ERIC

What?

FRANK

They said it was my first offense. And since those Nutley guys weren't exactly invited, and what happened to Guy, ...

JACKIE

The golden boy dodges another bullet!

FRANK

Coach P. stood up for me. So did Guy's parents.

Coach P. departs.

ERIC

Only you'd be able to start a rumble during a school dance and get away with it. Your mother's prayers must be working. Unbelievable.

JACKIE

Now that you've been paroled, Joe Palooka, what'a ya say we head over to the Milk Bar? The gossip's gonna be choice.

FRANK

I gotta get home. My dad was pretty ticked this weekend, we're all sick about Guy. And I gotta tell my mother she can now stop bothering God to not expel me.

The boys start off. Wilhelm appears at the end of corridor.

WILHELM

Bonaducci.

ERIC

Jeez, they're letting everyone take a whack?

FRANK

I'll see you guys later.

Frank glides over to his coach. Wilhelm palms a BASKETBALL.

INT. BELLEVILLE HIGH - CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Wilhelm tosses basketball to Frank.

WILHELM

They go hard on you in there?

FRANK

Not too bad, Coach.

WILHELM

Those Nutley kids were picking a fight if you ask me, but then the Guy Grant thing... What a mess. You get the schedule for practice?

FRANK

I'm seeing Doc Ameo to check out my ankle next week.

WILHELM

The ankle's not what I'm worried about, Bonaducci. Frank, you can jump with any of those black kids from the Newark City League. You've got raw talent. We can make it to the Essex County Championship this year. I just want some reassurance from you.

FRANK

Reassurance?

WILHELM

I have zero tolerance for this sentimental bull you've been pulling. I know you're close with Babula. Popalinski tolerated it for some reason. Take my advice... Gino's kind is no good. He's already messed it up for himself, and you don't need to go down with him. Look with happened to Grant with all this wise guy stuff.

FRANK

Is now the time for this, Coach?

WILHELM

You're on your way to screwing up big time, and, honestly, I need to know you're gonna be able to deliver. We don't have room on my team for any mistakes. That's all I'm saying.

Frank BOUNCES the basketball.

FRANK

The first mistake I made was not getting that ball to Gino. And the second was standing here listening to you for this long. Coach, I've played my last basketball game here.

Frank TOSSES the ball at Wilhelm, HARD. He walks off.

NARRATOR

My brother never talked to me about Guy dying. But every time the Nutley game came up, I could tell he wasn't just thinking of what he tried to do for Gino. Maybe there was guilt, confusion, or conviction. I don't know how he handled it all.

EXT. BELLEVILLE HIGH - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Frank STORMS out.

A NEW YORK-BOUND BUS stops at the corner.

Frank watches as a student with cerebral palsy, NICKY FRANCELLO, struggles to climb in while lugging a large briefcase.

FRANK

Need a hand, Nicky?

NICKY

Do I appear like some kind of retard, Bonaducci?

Frank laughs out of nerves.

NICKY (CONT'D)

What's so funny? You okay, Bonaducci? You look sick. I know it's been a couple of tough weeks for you.

FRANK

I just thought you needed some help.

Frank reaches for Nicky's briefcase.

FRANK (CONT'D)

This bus goes to the city.

NICKY

And... ?

FRANK
You got family there?

NICKY
Nope. I got a date.

FRANK
A date? In New York?

NICKY
Got two more next Friday. Booked a table for three at the Copa. And yes, I did say three.

FRANK
You're a real comedian, Francello.

NICKY
It's not just the jokes, Frankie; it's my smooth moves the girls love. I could give you some pointers if you want. Later, Bonaducci.

Nicky STUMBLES onto the bus. The doors shut. Frank stands dumbstruck.

Julie and her girlfriends have been watching; surround Frank.

JULIE
What a gentleman.

Julie nestles close to Frank - too close. Frank freezes.

JULIE (CONT'D)
I can see why Ruth likes you so much. Why haven't you ever called me, Frankie?

FRANK
I... uh... I don't have your number.

JULIE
Everybody else does. Ask around... and don't forget my party. It'll help get your mind off of Guy dying.

Frank nods as Julie and friends waltz off. As Frank's eyes lock onto her departure, his flushed face fades.

ACROSS STREET, Gino leans against a car with a gaggle of young wise guys. All are too well dressed for high school kids. Gino lights a cigarette. Frank sees him, makes eye contact. Gino HOLDS his look, then turns back to his friends.

INT. BONADUCCI HOME - KITCHEN - EVENING

Marietta prepares dinner. On kitchen table a pile of opened mail sprawls before Rocky.

ROCKY
These bills. They don't let up.

MARIETTA
Anything about Frankie's scholarship?

Rocky tosses envelopes aside.

ROCKY
We should have heard by now. And who knows with Guy's tragedy and all.

MARIETTA
Rocky, that has nothing to do with Frankie. And you know how these big schools are, with so many kids to deal with.

Rocky reaches for the Ledger. Marietta looks over at him.

MARIETTA (CONT'D)
You don't think... I mean with that Nutley game? And then Guy's accident. God, Rock, you think that would change things?

ROCKY
For the money they shell out, these schools want only the kids with the best reputations. And a lot's changed around here. I don't know, Marietta.

MARIETTA
But one game, Rock?

ROCKY
I'm just saying I'd feel better if we knew something by now.

Marietta returns to cooking. She crosses herself.

Jo-Jo struts in holding the SCRAPBOOK.

JO-JO
You done with the paper, Dad?

Jo-Jo DROPS scrapbook and a pile of pictures on the table.

ROCKY
 So you can cut holes out of it again?
 (sees Jo-Jo's photos)
 Where'd you get those?

JO-JO
 That box in the closet.

ROCKY
 Jo-Jo, you're a good little brother.

Back door opens. Frank enters.

JO-JO
 Hey, Mr. Outside.

MARIETTA
 Everything work out today at school, Frankie?

Frank nods as he grabs a bottle of milk from the fridge, stares off into space. Rocky waits for verbal response. Nothing.

ROCKY
 (reading the newspaper)
 Genitempo's hinting they're gonna indict
 half of Bloomfield Avenue.

MARIETTA
 They aren't saying who, are they, Rock?

ROCKY
 Not yet.

FRANK
 What about Uncle Pete?

MARIETTA
 Your uncle's not a criminal.

Rocky scans the paper, but continues to check Frank's disposition.

ROCKY
 Damn editorial says "it's time things get
 cleaned up around here." I wonder what
 that means.

MARIETTA
 My God, they're talking about the guys
 from the neighborhood.

Phone RINGS.

ROCKY

Let's hope this is all just Genitempo trying to show everyone what he wants to be when he grows up.

(to Frank)

Main thing... what's going on at school with you and everything?

DONNA (O.S.)

Daddy, phone's for you.

Rocky gets up, reaches for the phone in the hallway.

JO-JO

Ma, will the cops come and get Uncle Pete?

MARIETTA

Jo-Jo!

Rocky hangs up phone and returns to kitchen disturbed.

MARIETTA (CONT'D)

Was that your mother? I told her we'd bring by some of Pete's pig's feet after dinner.

ROCKY

That was Coach Wilhelm.

Frank goes stiff.

MARIETTA

Frankie's basketball coach?

ROCKY

(to Frank)

He said you quit the team.

MARIETTA

Quit? Frankie! My God...

A pregnant silence.

FRANK

He pissed me off.

ROCKY

What? Since when did you start talking this way around here?

FRANK

He got all over me about the Nutley game. Started questioning if I was gonna let him down, too.

ROCKY
So you quit?

FRANK
I didn't want to. It just happened... All
this stuff with Guy, and then Gino--

ROCKY
--Gino again?
(rising)
I've told you before about that kid!

FRANK
It was after I got lectured by the
principal. I was frustrated.

ROCKY
You get thrown out of a school function
for fighting, a tragedy happens, and you
make up for it with this?

MARIETTA
Frankie, it's your last year playing. God
has plans for you. Without winter sports...

ROCKY
(stern)
Marietta.
(to Frank)
What were you thinking, Frank?

FRANK
I just told you I wasn't thinking.
Wilhelm's a jerk anyway. The way he talks
to everyone. I don't want to play on his
team. I didn't need to take that.

ROCKY
I know he can be tough. But Frank, he's
your coach. You owe him respect. What
have we taught you?

FRANK
Take his side, sure. You weren't even there.

ROCKY
Stop being so damn sensitive, Frank!
What's Mommy always telling you? "Don't
get hurt, get mad."

FRANK
(boiling)
I did get mad!

MARIETTA

Frankie, get mad at the situation. Not the person.

FRANK

Now I'm really confused. What part of the Bible ya get that one from, Ma?

ROCKY

Now, you're really getting me mad, Frank.

Frank GRABS his jacket and rushes out. Marietta follows.

MARIETTA

Frankie...

FRANK

No, Ma, just leave me alone!

ROCKY

(angry)
Let him go.

EXT. BONADUCCI HOME - FRONT YARD - DUSK

Frank SPRINTS down the driveway breathing in the cold. He crosses Belmont Avenue. HEADLIGHTS approach. Frank turns, stunned by the oncoming lights... Jackie's GOLDEN CUSTOMIZED MERCURY pulls up in front of Frank's driveway; Jackie in the driver's seat. Eric rolls window down.

ERIC

What are you doing smack in the middle of Belmont Avenue? You got a death wish or something?

FRANK

Where you guys going?

JACKIE

C'mon, Frank. It's party time. Everybody's gonna be there. Hop in.

FRANK

Oh, I forgot. I can't.

ERIC

Don't start this again. Guy would want us all loosening up a bit.

JACKIE

With the vivacious curves of hostess Julie Manzer at your fingertips, you think you might stop being so depressed?

ERIC

And if you're not there to let Ruthie hang all over you, none of her friends will pay any attention to us. So get in!

Frank hesitates. He glances back at his house. Rocky stands in doorway watching, ARMS FOLDED. Frank gets in car.

JACKIE

Now we're talking.

Frank pulls door shut, as car drives off, mufflers PURRING.

INT. JULIE MANZER'S HOUSE - BASEMENT

Wall to wall teenagers. Some drinking, some smoking, some making out. Others still talking about Guy's death.

Eric mans the record machine. Fifties love songs ECHO off the wood paneling.

Frank slouches on a couch. Ruth strolls over, hands him a bottle of Coca Cola. She cuddles up.

RUTH

I don't know how much fun we can have with you sitting in the corner all night.

FRANK

I don't know what I was thinking with Wilhelm.

RUTH

We all heard. Sometimes you think too much. It's over now. It wasn't your fault. None of it is.

Ruth leans in for a kiss. He ignores her.

FRANK

It was like... before I knew it, it just happened. And then I'm home, arguing with my parents. I was so angry. Same thing at the dance.

RUTH

Don't dwell on it, Frankie. It'll be okay. Just a couple of tough weeks.

FRANK

My father's right. If I don't get any money from Cornell, I'll have to stay local. What then?

RUTH

That wouldn't be so bad, would it? We'd be together.

FRANK

(sarcastic)

Yeah. It's only my entire life, Ruth.

RUTH

Why do you say it like that?

FRANK

You know what I mean.

RUTH

Frank, stop trying to control everything, thinking you're responsible for all of it. It'll just make you sick.

FRANK

So I should forget everything, and it'll all go away? Like you're always doing.

RUTH

Thanks for the insult. Can you please stop? For once? It's a party.

FRANK

Right, it's a party! I'm supposed to be happy. Drinking, dancing... making out--

RUTH

--What's gotten into you?

FRANK

I only came because of you. I figured you'd make me feel better. I shouldn't have even left home. Hell, I'm probably grounded for life already.

RUTH

Maybe you should be, and maybe you should just leave.

FRANK

That's the best thing you've said yet.

Frank stands up and heads out. Willie STUMBLES over him, drunk.

WILLIE

(handing Frank a beer)

Hey, Frankie! How 'bout a cold one?

FRANK
Move, Willie.

WILLIE
C'mon, Frank... it's a... party.

FRANK
Right. It's a party!

Frank GRABS the beer, walks towards Julie, popping out of her tight dress.

JULIE
Hi, Frankie! The girls told me you came by. Welcome to my house.

FRANK
(chugging the beer)
Hey, Julie.

JULIE
I'm glad you're here. Love that leather.

FRANK
Thanks.

Julie fondles Frank's jacket.

JULIE
Jackie Carey was saying you were all stressed out. You know, if you ever need to talk... about anything.

FRANK
Jackie's got a big mouth.

JULIE
I'm gonna tell you a secret. I always wished we'd gotten to know each other better. And now that we're seniors, well, we don't have much time left, and every moment... well, you've got to make it count, right?

FRANK
I guess... listen--

JULIE
--would you like to see my room?

Ruth WATCHES from behind them.

FRANK
I should go.

Julie GRABS his hand.

JULIE

Why? The fun may just be starting.

With Julie mere inches away, her look dares him. Frank turns, LOCKS eyes with Ruth... then faces Julie. She turns him to the wall. Julie closes her eyes as she pulls him in.

ONLOOKERS holding their breath... Julie stuns Frank with a passionate KISS, but Frank BREAKS away. He regains composure.

FRANK

Great party.

He RUSHES out, COLLIDES into Eric, scattering records.

ERIC

Anybody got a request?

EXT. JULIE MANZER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Jackie leans against the Mercury, showing it off to three FRESHMAN GIRLS. He notices Frank approaching with the beer.

JACKIE

Hey, Frankie.

(to the freshmen)

Look at this, ladies, free room service.

Frank takes a final swig, then chucks it.

FRANK

I need to bail.

AT FRONT DOOR - Ruth and her friends start to leave in a hurry. They head down driveway passing Frank and Jackie.

FRANK (CONT'D)

I said let's go. Now!

Jackie sees Ruth in tears.

JACKIE

You know what girls? You should be heading home. Way past your bedtimes. Go on, scram!

(to Frank)

Something go sour between you and Mother Superior?

FRANK

Lay off. Just take me home.

Eric trots down driveway with records in hand as girls exit.

ERIC
 What's with all this show, Frank? I was
 in the middle of a great set.

FRANK
 If you want to stay, stay. I'm leaving.

JACKIE
 I miss something?

ERIC
 Just our very own Frankie B. tongue-tied
 with Julie Manzer, while Lady Ruth
 watched from the wings.

JACKIE
 Holy Moses, Frankie, you starting a habit?

FRANK
 (to Eric)
 Tongue-tied?
 (beat)
 Are we leaving?

Behind them, a brand new BLUE CADILLAC pulls up.

ERIC
 What's this?

Gino driving. He parks car, leans out window.

GINO
 Giving out free brewskies tonight, fellas?
 All eyes on Frank. He surveys the car.

GINO (CONT'D)
 Hey, Cuz'. Let's talk.

Frank hesitates. Gino WAVES him over. Frank gets in.

INT. GINO'S CADILLAC - CONTINUOUS

Outside, Jackie and Eric try to eavesdrop.

GINO
 How 'ya been?

FRANK
 Seen better days. You?

GINO
 Like the new wheels?

FRANK

A little too much for my taste and pocketbook.

GINO

Yeah, well, it's a gift.

FRANK

Nice gift.

GINO

You hear from Cornell?

FRANK

Nope. But it's still early.

GINO

Sorry about that.

FRANK

I'm the one who should apologize. I screwed it all up. That's what I've been trying to tell you. It's been making me sick us not talking like this.

GINO

Yeah, well, what can you do? It just ain't in the cards for me up here, Frankie. I should've realized that a long time ago. Better weather in Florida anyway.

FRANK

Florida?

GINO

Sneaks' got some contacts down there. They said they'd help me out if the college thing didn't come through. I'm driving down tonight. Guy was supposed to ride shot-gun. I only came by to say adios.

FRANK

You serious?

GINO

I need a big change, Frank. Football don't count outside this place, and everybody ain't Ivy League material like you.

FRANK

You want to give your mother a heart attack?

GINO

Heart attack? What about your mother?

FRANK
You don't belong with those hoods.

GINO
Hoods? Don't be a bene', Bonaducci.

FRANK
I'm sorry. Sneaks isn't a bad guy. He's your dad. But if you'd get messed up with that crowd--

GINO
--I got nothing left here.

Gino starts the car.

GINO (CONT'D)
By the way, that was some scene you pulled at the dance. I heard Mickey Geltrudi needed stitches.

FRANK
Don't remind me.

GINO
Got it.

Frank looks at Gino. He eyes the steering wheel... and his own wheels start spinning.

GINO (CONT'D)
We had some good games, Mr. Outside. But it's time for the next play.

Frank reaches over and SNATCHES the keys out of the ignition.

GINO (CONT'D)
What the hell? Frank!

Frank jumps out of car with the keys.

EXT. CADILLAC - THAT MOMENT

Frank bolts around to driver's side.

JACKIE
What's going on, Frank?

FRANK
Get in. Now!

Frank pulls open driver's side door.

GINO
Gimme the keys, Frank!

Frank PUSHES his way in.

INT. CADILLAC - CONTINUOUS

Frank practically in Gino's lap.

FRANK
You're not driving this car anywhere, Gino.

GINO
Don't pull another stunt with me, Frank.

FRANK
If you want to run away, great... but I'm
not gonna let you do it alone. Move over.

Gino stares at Frank in amazement.

GINO
Get out of the car!

Frank GRABS the wheel, shoving Gino who offers little
resistance.

FRANK
Until graduation, we're still on the same team.
(to Jackie and Eric)
You two coming?

Frank starts the car, shifts into first. Jackie and Eric PILE
into the back seat.

JACKIE
How's it goin', Gino babe?

GINO
Everybody get outta this car. Now!

ERIC
Can somebody please tell me what's going on?

FRANK
We're going on a little road trip.

EXT. JULIE MANZER'S HOUSE - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The Cadillac backs out and SCREECHES off.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

If there was one thing that could always be said about my brother, it's that once he put his mind to something, for good or for bad, there was no stopping him. At least not yet.

INT. BONADUCCI HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Marietta on phone. Rocky, Uncle Pete, and Jo-Jo uneasy at the table. Marietta hangs up.

MARIETTA

That was Ruth's mother. It's Frankie...

ROCKY

What's wrong?

MARIETTA

Gino Babula, Jackie and Eric. All of them... they ran off.

ROCKY

Ran off?

MARIETTA

They were at Julie Manzer's house. Something about dropping out.

CUT TO:

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

Heavy SNOW scatters between the streams of headlights as the Cadillac speeds out of the Lincoln Tunnel.

INT. CADILLAC

Frank driving, Gino next to him. Eric and Jackie in back seat.

ERIC

(panicked)

What are we doing in the city? I think I heard you two geniuses talking about Florida! At least, ... how 'bout a change of clothes and toothpaste...?

FRANK

It was just one wrong turn. Don't worry, Gino's got money.

JACKIE

I smell a Hudson River rat.

GINO

Frank, what's the deal?

FRANK

I must have gotten lost. We'll just double back.

ERIC

This is crazy. We're gonna get harri-karried out here.

JACKIE

Jeez, Snatch', don't go in your pants. And speaking of accidents, I really gotta go.

ERIC

You're not going in here.

JACKIE

Without any alternative, my close friend, you just might feel warmer real soon.

GINO

Turn around on the next street.

FRANK

No. We're taking Broadway.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - NIGHT

The Cadillac quickly rounds a corner into the gleaming lights of TIMES SQUARE.

INT. CADILLAC

The guys absorb the GLITTERING SIGHTS towering above them outside. Snow spreads across windshield.

FRANK

We're not going to Florida.

GINO

Ya think I didn't know that?

JACKIE

(to Eric)

Gino's gonna whack him, Bloomfield Avenue style, I know it...

ERIC

Muzzle it, you stunad.

FRANK

We're not going to Florida tonight. Look at the weather. It's snowing, which means ice on the Turnpike. We'll never make it.

GINO

It's no snowstorm, Frank. Drive us back to Jersey, will ya?

FRANK

We'll get on the road tomorrow. Hang out in the city for the night. We'll have a good time.

ERIC

Hang out? In the city?

JACKIE

Now we're talkin'! I always wanted to see the insides of some seedy motel. You know, meet one of those ladies that start working after midnight?

GINO

You're asking for it, Bonaducci. I'm done playing games! Turn the car around and give me the keys before I make you.

FRANK

We're all in this together now, Gino. Deal with it.

ERIC

I'm not all into this or anything right now... except reform school once my mother gets a hold of me.

JACKIE

And everybody says I'm the comedian.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY - TIMES SQUARE - NIGHT

The Cadillac arcs down 37th street, DISAPPEARING into the dark of the city's intersections. Snowfall continues.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BONADUCCI HOUSE - NIGHT

Lights still on. Phone RINGS. Rocky steps into hall to answer it.

ROCKY

Frank, where the hell are you? Everyone's upset.

Marietta appears on the stairs in bathrobe.

FRANK (O.S.)
 (on the phone)
 I'm okay, Dad.

INT. BROOKLYN HEIGHTS APARTMENT - NIGHT

Frank on the phone in the corner of a small kitchen.

FRANK
 I'm with Eric and Jackie. We ended up in
 the city.

ROCKY
 The city? Frank, it's past midnight.

INT. BONADUCCI HOUSE - INTERCUT

Marietta hangs on every word.

MARIETTA
 Is he okay, Rock?

ROCKY
 What's this about running away?

INT. BROOKLYN HEIGHTS APARTMENT - NIGHT

Frank turns to the wall. WHISPERS into phone.

FRANK
 Gino was just making a big deal outta
 nothing. I didn't want him to be by himself.

ROCKY (O.S.)
 Frankie, I'm gonna tell you this one last time
 - you gotta stop getting involved with Gino.
 Let him make his own decisions.

FRANK
 It's not like that, Dad. I was just
 buying time so he'd calm down. We can't
 drive home if the roads ice up. I'll be
 back tomorrow.

ROCKY (O.S.)
 It's late, Frank. Where you gonna sleep?

FRANK
 We found Tommie Pelli's place in Brooklyn.
 He's letting us crash.

INT. BONADUCCI HOUSE - INTERCUT

Rocky RAISES voice.

ROCKY

Pelli? The barber? A place in the city? Let me talk to him.

FRANK (O.S.)

I'm okay, Dad. He stays here once in a while with a buddy of his from New York.

ROCKY

You're disappointing me, Frankie.

INT. BROOKLYN HEIGHTS APARTMENT - NIGHT

Frank SLOUCHES against wall.

FRANK

Yeah. I'm really sorry for that. But see... I can't help how everybody's feeling... Night, Dad.

Frank hangs up.

In the adjoining living room, Gino, Eric, and Jackie huddle together - the cramped studio apartment decorated like an entertainer's bachelor pad.

Frank passes a wall filled with glossy FRAMED PHOTOGRAPHS: Glamorous Las Vegas shows, Atlantic City nightlife, posh parties with famous entertainers.

TOMMIE PELLI saunters in with a handful of coffee mugs.

PELLI

What are you altar boys doing gallivanting around the city on a night like this? When I was your age, my old man would have the strap on my backside if I went as far as Bayonne.

Pelli passes hot mugs to the guys.

FRANK

Thanks for letting us crash, Tommie. We were running out of gas, and I didn't know who else to call.

PELLI

You were smart for getting off the roads. This weather's not letting up. Can I get you fellas anything else? I think I got some leftovers...

JACKIE

How 'bout some seven and sevens? Or maybe an Old Fashioned for yours truly?

PELLI

Jackie Carey, the dime store comedian.

ERIC

You mean Clara Belle the clown.

FRANK

We don't want to impose, Tommie. We'll be out first thing in the morning.

PELLI

Make yourselves at home. It's a little snug, but the rent's cheap.

Gino takes a closer look at photos on the wall.

GINO

I thought all you did was cut hair. You never said you were such a famous guy. This you?

PELLI

That's me alright. With my partner, Louie Benedetto. Doing stand-up at the Sands, '55, maybe '56.

FRANK

Louis Benedetto? The singer and comedian?

PELLI

The very same. We share this place.

Frank picks up one of the photos.

JACKIE

He's the one who writes all those corny jokes you're always blabbering instead of watching the scissors when I'm in the chair.

PELLI

I clipped your ear once, didn't I, Carey? Want me to make it a matching set?

Jackie smirks.

ERIC

(looking at another photo)
You guys opened for Sinatra?

GINO

No way.

PELLI

My hand to God. We used to be part of this crew of backstage johnnies out on the coast. Stuck around long enough to snag a few small gigs of our own. Madonna, the stories I could tell yas.

JACKIE

Backstage who?

ERIC

It's what they used to call showbiz wannabe guys. Hanging out with the stars before the big shows. Getting into all the fancy parties.

GINO

Without an invitation.

JACKIE

Get out. You ever make it with one of those leggy Vegas show girls, Tommie? You know, with all the feathers and fruit?

Eric elbows Jackie in the gut.

JACKIE (CONT'D)

What? We're all grown men here.

PELLI

We had our moments, believe you me. Still do, just not as often as I'd like.

FRANK

You guys still perform together?

PELLI

Every once and again, hoping we'll catch a break.

Frank's eyes dart to another photograph. He picks it up.

FRANK

Is this Dion?

Jackie, Eric, and Gino FILE in behind Frank, staring at the picture like rabid fans.

ERIC

Dion? As in... the Belmonts?

JACKIE

Man, this ain't a publicity shot!

PELLI

A manager friend snapped it this past summer after a rock 'n roll showcase. I didn't think anything of the kid then, but now look how he's grown up. They were with these guys I know from the Bronx. Neighborhood boys.

FRANK

Dion lives on the same street... I mean... Belmont Avenue in the Bronx. I live on Belmont Avenue in Belleville.

JACKIE

Hardly the same thing, Frankie.

FRANK

Jackie! This is so fantastic.

PELLI

(to Frank)
You're a big fan, huh?

ERIC

You have no idea.

JACKIE

He's obsessed. If Ruth ever dumped him, Bonaducci here would make a beeline straight for Dion.

PELLI

You want to meet him?

Frank and the boys TURN from the pictures back to Pelli.

FRANK

Meet him? For real?

PELLI

There's this big benefit tomorrow night, at the Paramount.

JACKIE

The Paramount Theater?

PELLI

It's been sold out for months. Jackie Wilson, The Four Loves, Connie Francis. She's not much older than you guys. From our neck of the woods, too.

ERIC
 (wide-eyed)
 You're gonna be mixin' with Connie Francis?

JACKIE
 Wait a minute, Tommie. If Dion was having
 a concert anywhere near Jersey, Frankie
 B. here would already have tickets in
 hand. What's the rub?

FRANK
 Yeah, I didn't hear anything about a show.

PELLI
 He's a surprise guest. A favor for some of these
 New York businessmen and their girlfriends. Then
 he's off to Iowa with Buddy Holly.

JACKIE
 You think... I mean, respectfully,
 Thomas, you think you could get us in?

PELLI
 I dunno. Four runaway delinquents from
 Jersey? Might be a tough sell.

ERIC
 Come on.

PELLI
 And I don't want to be responsible for
 giving asylum to Sneak's boy... even if
 it's for a fancy New York concert.

GINO
 Somebody giving you trouble?

PELLI
 No trouble. It's just not a state secret
 when Sneak's only heir takes off. Know
 what I mean?

Frank waits for Gino's reaction.

GINO
 Sneaks never cared what I do.

FRANK
 C'mon, Tommie. What'a ya say?

PELLI
 Well...
 (looks them over)
 (MORE)

PELLI (CONT'D)

You'd all need to get some new threads if you're gonna represent me. And some clean underwear.

CUT TO:

INT. BAY HEAD TAILOR'S SHOP - THE NEXT DAY

Hands TYING a black tie, adjusting the white collar. A newly pressed JACKET. WING-TIPPED LOAFERS. A comb pushes through a perfectly styled pompadour.

Gino, Eric, Jackie, and Frank in front of a wall to wall mirror - dressed to impress.

Pelli peeks in, sees the boys in their new styled threads, smiles.

EXT. THE PARAMOUNT THEATER - NIGHT

Lines of TAXI CABS snake down street HONKING at each other. THRONGS OF WELL DRESSED PEOPLE cross the busy street, crowding near the box office. MOVE over the crowd to the glowing neon MARQUEE.

EXT. THE PARAMOUNT THEATER - BACK DOOR ENTRANCE - NIGHT

EQUIPMENT TRUCKS and a TOUR BUS block an alleyway near loading dock.

The four boys line up at the back door.

ERIC

Are you sure this is right? Everyone else is going in the front way.

JACKIE

This must be the entrance for backstage bums.

FRANK

This is where he said to go.

Frank approaches BOUNCER in door - a massive, pot-bellied man in ornate African shirt draped to his knees.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Evening. I'm Frank Bonaducci...

The monster of a man GLARES.

FRANK (CONT'D)

... We're here for the show.

Again, no response.

FRANK (CONT'D)
We're friends of Tommie Pelli. He's inside.

BOUNCER
(giving them a once over)
You the blue bells?

Eric winces. The boys are speechless.

FRANK
If you mean Bellboys, yeah, that's us.

The Bouncer stares the boys down again, then disappears inside, SLAMMING door in their faces.

JACKIE
"Tiny" is something else.

ERIC
This is a bad idea.

GINO
(to Frank)
Pretty smooth there, Mr. Outside. Must be the shoes.

Frank shrugs. Door opens again. Bouncer reappears.

BOUNCER
Follow me, blue bells.

JACKIE
Take us to OZ, the great and powerful!

INT. PARAMOUNT THEATER - SERVICE ROOM

Frank, Gino, Jackie, and Eric follow the Bouncer through a small service corridor into a BUSTLING room. WAITERS and BUSBOYS swerve in and out with food and booze. A low pulse of MUSIC can be heard through the walls. At far end of room, Pelli talks to the MAITRE'D. He spots the guys as they enter.

PELLI
There they are! The four horsemen of Belleville High. I was worried you kids got lost.

FRANK
We got here alright.

JACKIE
And we're starving. A nip or two wouldn't hurt, either.

PELLI

You boys ready for the night of your lives?

ERIC

Is this your private party here, Tommie?

PELLI

It's not my party, kid, but we're crashing it all the same. Just don't get into too much trouble... unless it's the good kind of trouble. Know what I mean? First act don't go on for an hour, so let's get yas warmed up.

Pelli PUSHES open metal door into a cramped PARTY ROOM, backstage.

INT. PARAMOUNT THEATER - PARTY ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Wafts of smoke CLOUD the room mixing with steam from overheated buffet food. Crowds of CHATTERING people, all impeccably dressed, in cliques and on couches. Two BARTENDERS keeping drinks flowing - Pelli leads boys to the bar. Jackie does three-sixty.

JACKIE

Frankie. No disrespect, but Jackie Carey didn't venture into the depths of Brooklyn on the coldest night of the year just to hang out with a bunch of Jersey rejects. I mean look at this place! Practically Newark's whole North Ward is here.

ERIC

He's right, for once. The faces are familiar. We might as well be at the Red Door on Franklin Street in Belleville.

FRANK

Will you two calm down? If all you're gonna do is complain, you can--

Eric's eyes suddenly dart to a smoky corner of the room. His jaw drops.

ERIC

--Jesus.

Frank SLAPS Eric's chest with the back of his hand.

FRANK

Hey! I'm talking, Snatcher. And since when did you take the Lord's name in vain?

Eric now staring. Jackie, too, focuses across the room.

JACKIE
God Almighty!

FRANK
(annoyed)
What's with you...

Frank turns to see what's paralyzed them. His eyes widen.

FRANK (CONT'D)
(dumbstruck)
...guys?

ACROSS THE ROOM

Swaying slowly to the beat of piped-in music is a STATUESQUE BLONDE, mid-twenties, oozing sex in tight fitting red dress, black stockings, and dangerous high heels.

Gino returns with three cocktails. Hands one to Jackie.

GINO
You two can share.
(notices the guys staring)
What are you looking at?

JACKIE
You don't see it?

Gino quickly glances.

GINO
There are at least two dozen girls like that here, with bodies that don't want to end--

ERIC
--It's not her shape.

Gino takes a second look.

FRANK
It's her date.

Dancing with the blonde, HOLDING onto her hips as well as he can - Nicky Francello, the boy with cerebral palsy from Belleville High.

Frank shakes his head in disbelief.

After a moment, Nicky notices the four shell-shocked faces gawking at him from across the room. He smiles. The guys head over.

JACKIE

Nicky boy? Is that you?

NICKY

If you need glasses, Carey, you should wear 'em.

FRANK

Nick, what's the deal?

NICKY

We're in the real world, Bonaducci, so please do me the respect of Mr. Francello, yours truly.

Nicky's date leans into him.

NICKY (CONT'D)

Boys, let me introduce Deborah here, from California. Debbie, this motley crew in rented threads are the boys from back home.

DEBBIE

I only talk to men.

JACKIE

Lord, help me... now.

GINO

I didn't think you could make it down the Belleville High steps, let alone get yourself all the way to the city, Francello.

NICKY

There's a lot you don't know about me, Mr. Inside.

DEBBIE

I'll get us another drink,
(with a wink)
Nicholas.

Debbie caresses Nicky's cheek and walks off.

ERIC

(downs his drink)
I need another one, too.

Eric bails for the bar, trailing Debbie.

JACKIE

Make that a double.

Jackie tails him.

FRANK
Get to it, Nick. What gives?

NICKY
Surprised?

FRANK
A little, yeah.

NICKY
I'm here on business. And unlike you
slackers, I didn't have to sneak in the
back door.

GINO
This is too much. I'm gonna do a lap...
Looking good, Francello.

Gino pats Nicky's head, leaving him alone with Frank.

FRANK
What do you mean business?

NICKY
Ever heard of stand-up comedy?

FRANK
I know what it is.

NICKY
I have a cousin who's an agent out in
LA. I've been sending him gags for a few
years. You know, like the ones they
publish in the Times.

FRANK
Gags?

NICKY
Jokes, Bonaducci. Anyway, long story
short, he's gonna try to hook me up with
a spot on the comedy club circuit. Or
maybe writing a few bits for some comics
here in the city.

FRANK
That's... that's really unbelievable.

NICKY
Yeah, it's kind of great. Plus, I've been
coming into the city since our freshman
year for extra physical therapy.

(MORE)

NICKY (CONT'D)

I can't be schmoozing with Hollywood types waddling around like some kind of gimp. For my voice, too.

Nicky's eyes follow a KNOCKOUT BRUNETTE who strolls by.

FRANK

I never would have guessed, Nicky.

NICKY

People here treat me a little better than they do at our beloved Belleville High. Who knows why? Maybe I'd be more popular back home if I was a good looking jock who played on the football team. But, that's no guarantee either, right, Frank?

FRANK

You got that right, Nicky.

Nicky spots Debbie lingering.

NICKY

Listen, it's been cool running into you guys. I'd love to stay and catch up, but...

FRANK

(smiles)

She seems like a very nice girl, Nick.

NICKY

God, I hope not.

Nicky hobbles off back to Debbie. Frank's head spins in awe. He DRIFTS through the crowd, a stranger in a strange land.

INT. BROOKLYN PARAMOUNT THEATER - LATER

Frank, Jackie, and Eric sit in back row of sold out auditorium.

CONNIE FRANCIS on stage, singing her heart out, mesmerizing crowd.

Frank takes in the moment, WIDE-EYED. For an instant, Connie's eyes meet his from the stage. Frank CAPTIVATED by her, her song, and the scene around him.

ERIC

She's looking at you, Frank.

FRANK

You think?

ERIC

Hard to believe all that's from the same place we come from.

JACKIE

(moaning)

Whatever was in that drink is doing a number on me.

ERIC

Then you shouldn't have had five of them.

JACKIE

Seriously, I gotta hit the john.

ERIC

You are officially a backstage jerk.

Jackie scrambles out of his seat.

ERIC (CONT'D)

This is the life, isn't it, Frankie? We got it all wrong being back in Jersey. I was talking with Pelli... I'm starting to think I might have a shot in show biz. What'a ya think, could you see me dee-jaying, a big MC guy like Alan Freed? Imagine it - Eric "The Snatcher" Thatcher playing the top ten forty-fives in the USA.

Frank's eyes still glued to the stage and Connie Francis.

FRANK

I don't see it. Stick to baseball.

ERIC

It's the vision that counts, Frank.

Gino appears at end of the aisle, beckons to Frank.

FRANK

Gino. Where you been?

GINO

There's some people you should meet.

FRANK

But it's Connie Francis! She's looking straight at me.

GINO

(laughs)

Snatcher here will tell her to wait up. C'mon.

Frank follows Gino's lead, but looking back at the stage.

ERIC

You better get back before Dion
goes on. I'm not saving any seats.

INT. BROOKLYN PARAMOUNT THEATER - PRIVATE ROOM

Doors OPEN, revealing obnoxious group of gruff-looking, well dressed WISE GUYS huddled around a cocktail table holding court. Pelli in the middle. Frank and Gino stride over.

FRANK

My God, is that the real Richie Bell of
the New York family?

GINO

And guess who he wants to meet?

Gino pulls Frank into the gathering of New York "business men". RICHARD BELL, focus of everyone's attention, presides at the table like an emperor on his throne.

BELL

Gino's guardian angel. I've heard a lot
about you, kid.

Bell offers his hand to Frank, who takes it with a cold chill.

Gino merges into this crowd like he belongs.

BELL (CONT'D)

Grab a seat.

Frank sits down, uneasy. A familiar voice creeps up...

CARMINE (O.S.)

Now there's no way my Marine of a cousin
gave his permission for his son to be
cruising around Brooklyn.

Frank turns, face to face with cousin Carmine.

FRANK

Cousin Carmine. What are you doing here?

CARMINE

I should ask you the same thing.

(to the crowd)

Gentlemen, let me introduce Mr. Frankie
Bonaducci, my first cousin's oldest. This
handsome young man is also Petey Five
Corners' nephew.

All eyes turn to Frank.

CARMINE (CONT'D)

Don't worry, handsome, nobody here's gonna rat you out.

BELL

(to a waiter)

Another round for the table. And a strong one for our new young guest here.

Bell raises his glass towards Frank. Gino does the same out of respect. He leans over to Frank.

GINO

(to Frank)

This is crazy, huh? But, they've been betting on our games for years. Who would'a ever thought... these guys!

Frank shifts in his own skin.

FRANK

Yeah. Crazy.

WAITER brings over a round of drinks.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PARAMOUNT THEATER - ALLEYWAY - NIGHT

Gino lights a cigarette. The access door opens. Frank glances around, finds him.

FRANK

Gino, I've been trying to find you for thirty minutes. Why'd you leave?

GINO

I needed some air.

FRANK

What's with leaving me alone in there?

GINO

You looked like you could take care of yourself.

FRANK

Are you nuts? I shouldn't have been anywhere near that crew.

GINO

Why? Afraid some of that grease ball slime would run off on you?

FRANK
You're drunk.

GINO
Stop playing me, Frank.

FRANK
C'mon, Gino, don't start talking crazy again.

GINO
Again?

FRANK
Again. Like you do sometimes. Let's go inside.

GINO
You've got everything figured out, don't you, Bonaducci? Every time I listen to you--

FRANK
--Now the booze is talking. Go ahead. Say it.

GINO
You know you shouldn't get all uptight schmoozing with wise guys. Your Uncle Pete--

FRANK
--Don't you say anything about my uncle. You hear me?

Gino's cigarette flutters out. He lights another.

GINO
You're so naive.

FRANK
You're still fuming about running off, aren't you? What was I supposed to do, let you go? Let you ruin your life? And another thing... you want to know the truth, Gino? The real truth? Nicky Francello would've been more effective in that mud than you were. You were useless against Nutley! I threw everything I had away just to make sure you were taken care of. And for what? Look at the mess I'm in now with colleges. But, it's always been that way with us, and I'm sick of it! You've got so much talent, but you're a taker. You never learn. You're selfish and lazy, and that's why you're where you're at. Not because of me!

GINO

The hell with you, Frank! It ain't my problem you've got a guilt complex. Blame your parents for that.

FRANK

What did you say?

GINO

You heard it.

Frank stews, doing all he can to restrain himself.

GINO (CONT'D)

Stop trying to save me.

FRANK

I can't save you. Only God can.

GINO

Heeerre we go! You know, I was wrong. We're not really friends. We're nothing alike. None of you are! Hell, off that field, you don't even know me. And you don't want to know me. So, don't think you can pull that religious junk about "saving" me. Yeah, you might know more about God than I do, but I'm not so sure you're as good an example as you think.

FRANK

I'm not talking religion. Fact is, you're a mess. Ya gotta get rid of that anger. So, yeah, you do need help from somebody, but mostly because you never think about anyone else. It's always about you.

GINO

So it's a sin taking care of myself? Sure, your God's gonna watch my back. And I'm just supposed to sit back and let Him? Maybe you're the one who should stop fighting. Maybe it's you who should relax a little bit.

FRANK

I had your back! I risked my ass for you. And, yeah, if I didn't believe in God, why help a selfish guy like you?

GINO

Ya, know, if you would'a just scored the touchdown yourself, we would'a had them on the ropes.

(MORE)

GINO (CONT'D)

And then maybe I'd get my TD later. You weren't thinking. What I can't figure out is that if you're so holy and so smart, why'd you do such a stupid thing in that game?

FRANK

I just told you why... but you weren't listening.

That familiar anger boils to Frank's surface.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Know what, Gino? Your old man is a better person than you. At least he tries to help people.

Gino shows no reaction. He takes a long drag. Frank stares at him, all life drained from his face.

FRANK (CONT'D)

You run off... there's no coming back from that. And then no one will be there to save you.

SILENCE.

GINO

(reflecting)

I thought you said God can do that for me.

Frank does a DOUBLE TAKE. He throws his hands up in frustration. Gino opens back stage door and vanishes.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PARAMOUNT THEATER - STAGE DOOR AREA - LATER

Frank wanders down the alleyway. Snow SWIRLING. From inside, we hear ROAR of the crowd as an act finishes on stage. Frank passes stage door, drifting in a haze of teenage intoxication. Out of nowhere he begins to hear a familiar tune, sung a cappella...

SINGING (O.S.)

I told my friends that we would never part. They often said that you would break my heart. I wonder why they think that we will part. We will part...

Frank turns around. Through snowy burst he sees a small TOUR VAN parked outside the stage door. Leaning against it, smoking and rehearsing are DION AND THE BELMONTS. Frank steps toward them in a trance, as if moving through a dream. Dion stops singing, scolds his group.

DION
Fellas, fill the harmony, will you?

SINGER #1
Sorry, Dee. It's freezing out here.

DION
It'll help with your voices. Go again.

The group starts the a cappella over. Dion's cigarette blows out.

DION (CONT'D)
Damn it.
(sees Frank)
Hey Cuz', spare a light?

Frank stands frozen.

DION (CONT'D)
Hey, kid, you deaf?

FRANK
No... uh... I don't... I don't smoke.

DION
(laughs)
That's good. These weeds'll kill ya.

Dion tosses cigarette butt.

FRANK
You're... you're here. Like really.

DION
The kid must be deaf and dumb.

FRANK
I'm not... I have all your records. You
guys... you're Dion and the Belmonts!
You're the best.

DION
If you're looking for an autograph, catch
me after the show.

FRANK
I'm from Belmont... Belmont Avenue. I
live there.

DION
Oh yeah? How 'bout that? Must be fate or
something, us meeting like this.

The other Belmonts laugh.

FRANK

I'm serious. You guys are the best. I can't believe you're here.

SINGER #2

Us neither.

SINGER #3

You catch the rest of the show? How was little Connie?

FRANK

She was great. Amazing. She went to the same school that I go to. In Belleville.

DION

You just said you were from the Bronx.

FRANK

Yeah, well... no. I meant there's a Belmont Ave in Jersey too. That's where I'm from.

DION

A real live Jersey boy?

Frank STARES at Dion with infatuation. Dion smiles, awkwardly, but appreciative of the attention.

DION (CONT'D)

Listen to this one, kid. Put your ear to it and tell me if we're outta pitch. People hate it when we don't sound like the record.

(to his group)

Okay, guys, get it straight this time. From the top.

Dion and the boys start the harmony again. Frank transfixed.

DION (CONT'D)

(singing)

When you're with me, I'm sure you're always true. When I'm away I wonder what you do. I wonder why I'm sure you're always true. Always true... Don't know why I do...

Frank's eyes brighten, completely absorbed in the moment. Dion glances over at him. The Belmonts continue.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. BONADUCCI HOME - BOY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Late next morning. Frank hung over, but getting dressed. Jo-Jo crouches in the corner near closet, working on scrapbook. Rocky and Marietta arrive.

ROCKY

Jo-Jo, go downstairs. Shut the door behind you.

Jo-Jo looks at his parents, then gets up. Before he leaves, he slides SCRAPBOOK into the HIDING SPOT in the wall.

ROCKY (CONT'D)

You're lucky Pelli knew to call Uncle Pete and Greenie to come pick you up. Drunk and passed out in the city? That's not like you, Frank. You're getting sloppy.

FRANK

I know.

Rocky settles on the bottom bunk.

ROCKY

Look, I know Gino's in a bad situation.

FRANK

I'm done talking about Gino.

MARIETTA

You're always coming from a good place. You try to fix things. And you were never a problem kid.

FRANK

Until now.

MARIETTA

Frank, you gotta realize that no matter what you do, the only person you can change is yourself. Now that doesn't make you selfish... It makes you smart. Maybe we've been unfair by putting all kinds of pressure on you. You just need to make sure you don't throw everything away for the wrong reasons.

FRANK

Gino said we weren't ever friends. And when I really think about it, he's right.

ROCKY

Gino's not a bad kid, but he's still his father's son.

FRANK

I'm gonna be better. I promise.

MARIETTA

You don't need to be better. Just become who you really are.

Marietta has gotten Frank's attention. SILENCE.

FRANK

I ran into Nicky Francello in the city. That kid with palsy from school. He's getting hired as a stand-up comic. You believe that? He can't even hardly talk.

ROCKY

You'd be amazed what people can do when they want it bad enough, or when they have to do it. I saw that in the Pacific.

MARIETTA

Frankie, never forget, the situation doesn't make the person... it reveals him.

They exchange reassuring glances.

FRANK

Dad, is Uncle Pete a bad guy?

ROCKY

You're uncle loves you, and he's never let any of us down yet. Remember that.

MARIETTA

Amen. We all gotta stop worrying. Me first.

Rocky RUBS his son's back. He and Marietta get up, and strides out.

INT. PETE'S BUTCHER SHOP - DAY

Pete tends to customers. Greenie wipes the counters. Marietta enters.

MARIETTA

Morning, Greenie.

GREENIE

Looking beautiful as ever, Madiett'.

PETE
 (to Greenie)
 Quit flirting with the customers, and get her order.

MARIETTA
 Just the pork loin, and add a half pound
 of liverwurst this week.

Greenie shuffles into back room.

PETE
 How's my Frankie doing?

MARIETTA
 He promised us he'd be good. Poor kid
 keeps so much on his mind. He's... a
 worrier, thinks too much. And then a
 little stubborn.

PETE
 I wonder where he gets that from.

Marietta rolls her eyes with embarrassment. Greenie returns,
 handing Marietta a bag.

Pete OPENS the cash register.

PETE (CONT'D)
 Before I forget, here's what I owe you
 for making those meatballs for the card
 game last week. The guys devoured them.

Pete hands Marietta two fresh TWENTY DOLLAR BILLS. She pushes
 back on the money.

MARIETTA
 Don't worry about it.

PETE
 C'mon Madiett'. That was a lot of work.
 My money's no good?

Without thinking, Marietta takes the money and shoves the
 twenties into her jacket pocket.

MARIETTA
 Sunday dinner's at three this week.
 Rocky's working a weekend shift. Tell
 Mama to be on time.

PETE
 You got it. Let Frankie know I'm asking
 for him.

Marietta looks around to make sure no one is listening.

MARIETTA

Listen though, Pete. Ya gotta do me a favor. Ya can't bring that colored kid.

PETE

Little Quincy?

MARIETTA

Of course, little Quincy. Ya got another one?

PETE

Marietta', why this mood?

MARIETTA

Pete, with everything going on with Frankie, we don't need more embarrassment. I can't take any more. I mean Rocky's getting fed up, too.

PETE

It's Roland's kid, ya remember my delivery guy.

Marietta loses her temper, biting her hand, waving her arms in frustration

MARIETTA

Yeah, sure, Pete. I remember Roland. You're a terrible liar! The kid's yours, ... if Pop was alive he'd kill you and her. Put a moustache on that chubby little face, and he's a black tiny you!

Pete stumbles around the counter to gently embrace her. She resists.

PETE

He's not mine! I just feel sorry for his mother since Roland died. Ya gotta believe me.

MARIETTA

Pete, believe ya? With the bad bills and everything, ... the colored kid, the guys betting on the games, ... where's God in your life?

PETE
 Look, we'll all get through this,
 ... just stop worrying, Mariett'. I
 go to confession.

Marietta shakes her head in desperation, but calms down.

MARIETTA
 Pete, ...is he yours? Tell me the truth.

PETE
 Of course not. I'm just tryin' to help.
 And he loves to be with the kids.

She stares at Pete.

MARIETTA
 Do me a favor, just leave him home
 this week.

Pete nods. Marietta SCRAMBLES out as Greenie opens the door for her. WIPING his brow with a handkerchief, Greenie looks at Pete with relief.

EXT. PETE'S BUTCHER SHOP - DAY

Marietta HURRIES down the street. She puts her hand in her pocket and retrieves the twenties. She STOPS short. Across the street, Marietta spots TWO COPS patrolling. She studies the officers.

She grasps the twenties... her face tight with fear. She STUFFS them into her purse, turns to glance back at Pete's shop. A look of DREAD falls over her. She continues on down the street.

INT. BONADUCCI HOME - KITCHEN

Rocky escorts SAL GENITEMPO out of the kitchen. Marietta struggles in with groceries... freezing in her tracks.

GENITEMPO
 Marietta. How ya been?

MARIETTA
 Sal..., Rocky, is everything alright?

ROCKY
 I was just seeing Sal out.

GENITEMPO
 You okay?

Genitempo hugs Marietta like an old friend.

MARIETTA

(nervous)

We're hanging in there, Sal. How's Diane and the kids?

GENITEMPO

Markie's gonna be a freshman this fall.

MARIETTA

They grow so fast.

GENITEMPO

Yeah, they do. I should be getting back downtown. Thanks again for listening, Rocky.

ROCKY

Let us know if you need anything, Sal.

Genitempo leaves. An uncomfortable tension EXPLODES as door shuts.

MARIETTA

Rocky, my God, what was Sal doing here?

ROCKY

Calm down. He just had a few questions.

MARIETTA

Questions? About what? Sacred Heart of Jesus, what did we do?

ROCKY

It wasn't about us.

MARIETTA

Then why was he here if we're not suspects?

ROCKY

(stunned)

Us? Suspects?

Rocky lights up a Lucky as he peers through window at Sal.

MARIETTA

My God, it was about Pete!

ROCKY

He didn't say anything for sure. He and his people are talking to everyone in the neighborhood. Since we used to be close, he wanted to prepare us, just in case.

MARIETTA

Not Pete, Rocky, no! The embarrassment for the family. It's hard enough for us as it is. I feel sick...

ROCKY

Nothing's happened yet. And no matter what, Sal said there's going to be a hearing down Newark to sort it all out. The whole thing could just go away.

MARIETTA

And what if it doesn't? What then?

ROCKY

You're the one who's always praying. Better keep it up.

Rocky vanishes into the TV room.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

My mother wasn't religious, but she was spiritual. Yeah, she worried about everything, but she seemed to have a sixth sense. And never had a problem making a decision. Frank was most like her, in more ways than one.

Marietta retrieves the TWENTY DOLLAR BILLS out of her purse. She TEARS them into pieces, crams them into the trash.

INT. BELLEVILLE HIGH - CLASSROOM - DAY

Frank sits at his desk among other students as the BELL RINGS. The date, scribbled in cursive chalk on front blackboard - FEBRUARY 3, 1959.

TEACHER

Alright, that's it for today. Chapters seven and eight for next time.

Students pack their things and hustle out.

INT. BELLEVILLE HIGH - CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

Frank flows past rows of lockers. Ruth appears through flock of students. Frank spots her, slows down, musters his strength.

FRANK

Hey you!

Ruth ignores him, but stops.

FRANK (CONT'D)
How was chemistry?

She doesn't answer.

FRANK (CONT'D)
C'mon, Ruthie. I told you I was sorry. You can't give me the silent treatment forever.

RUTH
Who says?

FRANK
I know I was wrong. Haven't I suffered enough?

RUTH
Not nearly.

FRANK
Please. Have you ever seen a face sadder than this?

Frank edges closer to her with pathetic smile.

RUTH
I'll talk to you on one condition.

FRANK
Anything.

RUTH
You have to get me Dion's autograph.

Ruth manages a slight smile. Frank takes her arm. They look down the hallway towards the open cafeteria. Inside, a large group of students HUDDLE together making a commotion.

RUTH (CONT'D)
What's going on?

FRANK
I don't know. Lunch period ended an hour ago.

INT. BELLEVILLE HIGH - CAFETERIA - CONTINUOUS

Frank and Ruth enter. A mass of students surrounds a table where a portable TRANSISTOR RADIO blares a NEWS BROADCAST. Several of the female students are CRYING. Eric, Jackie, and Willie appear from the stone-faced crowd.

FRANK
Snatch', what's all this?

ERIC
 (sullen)
 It's heavy, Frank.

JACKIE
 Turn it up.

A STUDENT increases volume on the radio - the Herb Oscar Anderson Show...

RADIO VOICE
 Ladies and gentlemen across the New York Metro area, this is your Morning Mayor repeating again the terrible news that arrived at our studios from Associated Press and United Press International. Early this morning, a small single engine plane crashed in central Iowa.

In addition to the aircraft's pilot, rock 'n' roll idol, Buddy Holly, teenage sensation, Ritchie Valens, and Texas DJ turned singer, Jiles Perry Richardson Jr., known affectionately as the "Big Bopper", are all dead. I repeat, Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, and the Big Bopper have all been killed in a tragic plane crash. We'll bring you more details as they come in. In tribute, we'll now play Buddy's hit, "True Love Ways"...

RUTH
 Oh, God.

FRANK'S POV - ASHEN FACES OF STUDENTS

JACKIE
 It's gotta be a joke. Right?

WILLIE
 Famous guys like that... they don't just die. Do they?

Frank steps away from the table, disoriented. Ruth starts to tear up. Several other female students join her.

INT. SCHOOL BUS - DAY

Frank leans against the window of the OVERCROWDED bus. No one speaking; transistor RADIOS playing a cacophony of Buddy Holly songs.

Frank stares out the bus's fog-shrouded windows - THROUGH THE WINDOW - the suburban streets of New Jersey MELT AWAY into a ghostly reflection of a country road splitting miles of snow-covered CORNFIELDS. Wind RATTLES the glass. Frank's eyes WIDEN - as if actually there, displaced into the Midwest, at the site of the crash.

EXT. CORNFIELDS - DAY

Frank wanders to the edge of a small knoll, towards a wire fence. Rows of undulating CORN HUSKS spread out in front of him towards the horizon. Early morning. In the distance, THREE FIGURES stand frozen in silhouette like ghosts, all looking to the skies. Drawn to them, Frank also gazes upward. The air fills with swirling SNOW, hardly disturbing Frank. A CLICKING sound grabs his attention.

REVEAL: DION STANDING NEXT TO FRANK, TRYING TO LIGHT HIS LIGHTER.

DION

Guess I'm outta luck, huh?

Dion tosses the lighter.

FRANK

You could'a been one of those guys?

DION

(somber)

Yeah. That's the thing about these gigs. You take one step in the wrong direction, before you know it, everything's coming down.

Above, the ROAR of a PLANE ENGINE trails through the sky, followed by SILENCE.

The three figures in the distance begin to slowly walk off, disappearing over the knoll.

DION (CONT'D)

Things will be different now. That's for sure.

FRANK

I don't understand. Why didn't you fly?

DION

We'll figure it out... someday.
This thing with you and me. We gotta get on with it. Know what I'm saying? Life's short. See ya around, Cuz'.

Dion fades away into the snow. Frank freezes, out of body, out of place, numb.

BUS DRIVER (O.S.)
Yo, Bonaducci. Bonaducci!

INT. SCHOOL BUS - DAY

Frank breaks from his trance at the back of the EMPTY bus.

BUS DRIVER (O.S.)
It's your stop. You getting off?

Frank gathers his bag, lugging it to the exit.

INT. BONADUCCI HOUSE - BOY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Haunted, Frank TRANSFIXES on a Ritchie Valens album.

Jo-Jo emerges behind him.

JO-JO
You okay, Frankie?

FRANK
Yeah.

JO-JO
Mom's praying downstairs. Asking God to take her first.

FRANK
They're all no different from anybody else. Just like that. You're here for one second, then you're not. It could'a been anyone. Dion... me.

JO-JO
Guys at school say you made it all up. That you didn't really meet Dion in New York. That you were drunk.

FRANK
Maybe I was.

JO-JO
Flying in snow is stupid.

FRANK
True. But, it's me that's really been stupid.

JO-JO
Don't say that. You're the best. Everybody knows.

Frank's expression evolves, as if he's had a sudden revelation.

FRANK

Maybe, with these famous guys... with Holly and Valens... maybe they were done doing all they had to do, you know? Like they say at church.

JO-JO

Since when do you pay attention in church?

FRANK

I mean they all made it. They reached the top doing what they wanted to do. And if they all lived to get old and stopped doing well what they loved, then what would be the point? No one would care anymore. But now... it's like Mom told Donna, everybody will keep playing their records. Forever. They went out on top. And so they'll keep on living, no matter what.

JO-JO

What do you mean?

Frank POINTS to the Valens album on wall.

FRANK

You just do your best, doing what you're put here to do. Don't be too tough on yourself. Then everything works out.

Jo-Jo shows doubt, then exchanges smile with Frank. Frank grabs Jo-Jo in a hug, messing up his hair.

THE CAMERA PULLS BACK, MOVING OUT THE WINDOW, PAST THE TWO BOYS -

Frost on the window begins to CRACKLE and MELT... the harsh winter light begins to GLOW...

WE MOVE OUTSIDE - down along the house, through the back yard. Thin rays of SUNLIGHT appear, dousing house with AMBER as the creaking oak trees SWAY in the breeze, BLOSSOMING with the first sign of spring. The clothes line garments FLOP lazily, caressed by the gentle wind.

WE CONTINUE MOVING - down Belmont Avenue past rows of houses. The drenched asphalt DRIES UP... fresh flowers on greening hedges. SUN SETS, and then RISES again on a new day.

SPRINGTIME.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. BLOOMFIELD AVENUE - DAY

At the front of FIVE CORNERS SOCIAL CLUB a NEWS CREW with 16mm film cameras. Neighborhood kids and citizens loiter, watching.

NEWSCASTER VOICE (O.S.)

Beginning at nine P.M. last night, officials from the United States FBI, in cooperation with the New Jersey and New York State Police Departments, began making arrests as part of their ongoing investigation into a counterfeiting operation allegedly supervised by organized crime throughout New Jersey.

INT. NEWARK CITY HALL - DAY

County Prosecutor Sal Genitempo stands at a podium flanked by police officers at a press conference.

GENITEMPO

The following individuals have been charged and are eligible to post bail with a hearing pending: Richard Bellatosi of Bay Head, New York...

EXT. BROOKLYN MANSION - NIGHT

Richie Bell walks to a waiting, unmarked POLICE SEDAN escorted by DETECTIVES. Huddles of WISEGUYS congregate around the curb flanking Bell. He ducks into the sedan, waving to PHOTOGRAPHERS.

BELL

Make sure you get my good side.

GENITEMPO (O.S.)

(continuing)

...Hiram Wilhelm of Ratzler Drive in Wayne...

EXT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - NIGHT

Coach Wilhelm led out by two Essex County SHERIFFS.

GENITEMPO (O.S.)

...Thomas "Two Tones" Anthony, Roseville Avenue, Newark...

EXT. BLOOMFIELD AVENUE BAR - NIGHT

Newark POLICE OFFICERS empty the late night hangout. Two Tones escorted by an OFFICER.

GENITEMPO (O.S.)
 ...Peter "Petey Five Corners" Frassa,
 Bloomfield Avenue, Newark....

INT. PETE'S BUTCHER SHOP - NIGHT

Pete sits in darkness, trembling like a frightened child. A loud KNOCK on the front door. His eyes dart towards it.

INT. BONADUCCI HOME - NIGHT

CLOSE on the reactions: Rocky, stone faced. Frank and Jo-Jo watch from the stairs. Marietta in kitchen, tears streaming down her face, but we hear only SILENCE.

GENITEMPO (O.S.)
 ... Gino "Sneaks" Babula, Sr. of
 Carpenter Street in Belleville, currently
 incarcerated for unrelated racketeering
 charges in Rahway State Prison.

INT. BABULA LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Several tough guys tend to SYLVIA BABULA in kitchen.

Gino lies on carpet glued to black and white television. Genitempo APPEARS on screen.

GENITEMPO
 ... others will be named shortly. I want
 to commend all our officers here in the
 county and statewide for their stellar
 work and their unrelenting efforts in
 conducting this investigation.

Gino JUMPS up, disgusted, and rushes out of room.

INT. BONADUCCI HOUSE - FOYER - THE NEXT MORNING

The NEWSPAPER CRASHES against the front door. Jo-Jo rushes over, opens door to retrieve it.

INT. BONADUCCI HOUSE - KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Rocky on phone. Frank at table with Aunt Bella, Uncle Emil, and Grandpa Joe. Marietta tries to compose herself, WAVING overused wash cloth to cool down. Jo-Jo arrives with the newspaper.

Frank pulls the paper from Jo-Jo.

BELLA

There's gotta be more information in the Ledger.

MARIETTA

Don't read it aloud. I don't want to hear anything more.

EMIL

They were talking about it on the radio when we were coming over. It's national news now, Marietta.

MARIETTA

What did the lawyer say, Rock? Did he talk to Pete?

ROCKY

Marty DeFalco spoke with Pete at the station last night. He's gonna go over everything with him this afternoon at his office.

MARIETTA

I gotta go down there, be with my brother.

ROCKY

Just stay put, you'll do nothing but upset him.

MARIETTA

But, Rock...

ROCKY

Frankie, I told your uncle you'd go by the shop and drive him over to DeFalco's place.

FRANK

Me?

ROCKY

Do as I say. Go get dressed.

Frank hurries out the kitchen.

JO-JO

What's gonna happen to Uncle Pete, Dad?

ROCKY

(reluctant)

I don't know, Jo-Jo.

INT. PETE'S BUTCHER SHOP - DAY

A SIGN ON DOOR READS: CLOSED FOR PERSONAL BUSINESS.

Frank slips in. Pete, disheveled, his face flushed and red, cleans the counter.

PETE

Frankie.

(hugging him)

I'm so sorry you gotta deal with all this.

FRANK

Relax, Uncle Pete. How ya doing?

PETE

I'm a wreck. I don't wanna ruin things for the family. That would kill me.

FRANK

Don't worry about us.

PETE

Seeing everybody down at the police station... Jesus, it's our whole neighborhood. We're good people here, what are they messing around with us for?

FRANK

You're tight with Sneaks and his family, aren't you?

PETE

C'mon, they're all just the guys from the neighborhood. That's all. It's no different than you and Gino. We all go way back.

FRANK

It's a lot different than me and Gino.

PETE

Frankie, those guys have been good to me over the years. To your father, too, no matter what those Amedigans say. And I never passed a bad bill in my life. And if I did, how was I supposed to know? For God's sake, how many people come through this shop? And what I'm supposed to do, tell them their money's no good?

FRANK

You've always been straight with me, right, Uncle Pete?

PETE

What's with that kind of talk?

FRANK

Nothing. Just tell the truth at this hearing. That's all you have to do.

PETE

God Almighty, this will kill my business.

FRANK

You kidding? People 'round here couldn't live without your escarole and beans, and forget about your gravy... and the tripe.

PETE

Gimme a hug, you.

Pete pulls Frank close.

EXT. ERIC'S HOUSE - BACK PORCH - DUSK

A late spring night. Eric manning his REEL TO REEL decks, shuffling pop forty-fives. Frank, Ruth, Jackie, and some friends hang out talking. Jo-Jo and his friends run around nearby.

ERIC

Hey you kids of all ages,
It's the Snatcher here,
The sage of all sages.
Our first selection's a special request,
So we're giving our tapes a little rest.
What forty-five could we possibly hear?
Why, it's "One Summer Night",
By the great Danleers!

JACKIE

Yo, Snatch', news to you - Jocko
Henderson ain't never looking to you as
his replacement.

ERIC

Just give me a few years after
graduation; I'll have my own morning
drive show.

FRANK

It appears we've already have a local
celebrity right here.

Frank chuckles as Nicky Francello hobbles around the corner of the house towards the porch. Everyone stares at him.

ERIC
Is that Francello, King of Comedy?

One of Ruth's friends leans in for a closer look.

FRIEND
Who invited him?

RUTH
Frankie did.

Frank helps Nicky step onto the porch.

FRANK
Glad you came by, Nicky.

NICKY
I got it, I got it. Yeah, well I didn't want to disappoint my fans here. But, I was a little surprised when you called, Bonaducci. You're not going soft, making friends with the cripples, are ya?

FRANK
No chance.
(to the crowd)
Guys, Nicky Francello has graced us with his presence.

RAISED eyebrows.

JACKIE
Nicky boy, where's that hot California babe of yours? You should'a brought her along.

NICKY
Why, so she could make fun of how you talk, Carey?

The kids laugh.

FRANK
Get the real comedian here some Brookdale soda.

EXT. ERIC'S HOUSE - BACK PORCH - LATER

Eric flips another record - "Stay" by Maurice Williams and The Zodiacs.

Nicky, absorbed into the crowd, cracks everyone up with his first one-liner...

NICKY

Yeah, they said I'd get drafted into the Army
as soon as the enemy's on the GW Bridge!

All LAUGH.

ERIC

(to Frank)

What do you think is going to happen at this
trial? Do they just put everyone in jail?

FRANK

It's not a trial. My dad said it's some kind
of arraignment hearing or something. To see if
they even have proof for a case.

RUTH

How's Uncle Pete doing?

FRANK

He's okay. But he's frightened.

JACKIE

I didn't think anything scared those wise guys.

FRANK

He's not like them, Jackie.

JACKIE

No disrespect meant, Frank.

ERIC

Have you heard from Gino?

FRANK

Nothing since New York. Honestly, I've
been avoiding him.

NICKY

And you're better off for it.

RUTH

Everyone's saying it's Gino's dad behind
all this. And that he's the reason all
the innocent people in the neighborhood
are getting blamed.

FRANK

Who knows?

ERIC

Graduation can't come soon enough.
Everything around here is going to the
dogs. We're all getting out just in time.
You all set at Cornell, Frank?

FRANK

Nope.

ERIC

What do you mean? You got the money from
Cornell, right?

Frank shakes his head "no".

JACKIE

Don't tell me you're gonna join Nicky
Francello in the Army, Frankie!

FRANK

There's just not enough financial aid. The
scholarship went down with the Nutley game.
My parents can't swing it after helping Uncle
Pete with the lawyer fees and all that. So...
I'm staying local.

NICKY

Those are tough breaks, Bonaducci.

JACKIE

Jeez, this party is so depressing.

FRANK

But it shouldn't be. I mean, how much
longer will we be able to all be together
like this? A few more months? Let's make
the most of it.

JACKIE

What do you suggest? Another wacko road trip?

FRANK

I dunno. What about a game? Why don't we
play Stalag 17?

JACKIE

Hide and seek? You kidding me? No wonder
Cornell had some second thoughts.

A smiling Frank gives Jackie a German haircut.

RUTH

I think it sounds like fun.

ERIC

No way I'm being an American prisoner again.

FRANK

Relax, Snatch'. Nicky, you're a German captain, pick your team.

NICKY

I think I'll sit this one out if you don't mind.

FRANK

Right. Hey, Jo-Jo. What about you?

JO-JO

What about me?

FRANK

Get your friends. Let's all play.

EXT. ERIC'S YARD - NIGHT

The kids scramble in and around the surrounding backyards playing their version of "hide and seek". BEAMS OF LIGHT spill from flashlights as "Germans" hunt down escaped "American prisoners". Jackie CALLS out from the dark.

JACKIE (O.S.)

Ready or not, you Amedigans better make for the high ground.

As Frank and Jo-Jo hustle near a fence at the back of the yard, other kids behind them duck into shadows.

JO-JO

Frank, where we going?

FRANK

Shh! C'mon.

Frank HOPS over fence. Jo-Jo follows.

JACKIE (O.S.)

C'mon you varmints! Show yourselves!

Jo-Jo climbs fence and FALLS on his back.

FRANK

(whispering)

This way.

EXT. NEIGHBORING BACK YARD - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

Frank and Jo-Jo take cover next to a large, dilapidated GARAGE.

FRANK
Give me your pocket knife.

JO-JO
What for?

Jo-Jo hands Frank a small POCKET KNIFE. Frank pries open the garage door.

FRANK
In here!

Frank YANKS open the door and pushes Jo-Jo inside.

JO-JO
This is crazy! Old man Gubitosi's garage?

INT. GUBITOSI GARAGE - CONTINUOUS

Pitch black. Frank pulls the door shut. LAUGHTER and CLATTER from the other kids running nearby outside.

JO-JO
I can't see anything.

FRANK
Give me your flashlight.

A THUD is heard.

JO-JO
I dropped it.

FRANK
C'mon, Joe.

Frank shuffles forward in the dark.

JO-JO
Watch it, Frank, I think there's a step or...

FRANK
Whoa!

Frank SLIPS in the dark and FALLS with a YELP. Loud BANG and CRUMPLING NOISE heard below.

JO-JO
Frankie, we can't see anything! You alright? Where are you?

The FLASHLIGHT clicks ON, illuminating Jo-Jo's feet.

FRANK (O.S.)
You're not gonna believe this.

Frank and Jo-Jo stand up straight in middle of the garage. In front of them rests a large, half-constructed derelict BOAT.

JO-JO
Now I know Mr. Gubitosi's really nuts.

FRANK
He can just set sail when this garage tips over. Then he won't have to worry about whether it fits through the front door.

INT. GUBITOSI GARAGE - BOAT - CONTINUOUS

Frank and Jo-Jo huddle next to the wooden framed bow.

They climb into the boat.

JO-JO
What's he doing with this in here?

FRANK
I don't know. It looks like it hasn't been worked on in years.

A large section is covered with a canvas tarp.

JO-JO
Wonder what's under the canvas.

FRANK
Let's find out.

JO-JO
We should go back. We'll get in trouble.

Frank lifts the canvas, pulling part of it aside. He steps down into a small opening in the boat's half-built cabin.

The sound of CRICKETS.

JO-JO (CONT'D)
I'm scared, Frank.

Frank peers into the cavity. He HITS the side of the flash light. The beam of light glows brighter. The light reflects off a sheet of SLICK MATERIAL. As Frank steps closer, he sees PILES OF WRAPPED PAPER BAGS stacked neatly against the side of the cabin.

FRANK
What's all this?

Jo-Jo slouches on the wooden floor, cushioning his butt with his hands. His fingers stick to something MOIST on the decking. He picks up what appears to be a wet slip of paper.

JO-JO

Frankie...

Frank shines the flashlight in Jo-Jo's direction. Jo-Jo picks up the wet slip of paper. Two pieces stuck together... newly printed TWENTY DOLLAR BILLS.

FRANK

No way.

JO-JO

Look!

Jo-Jo points to a hole in the cabin floor. Tucked just below the deck line, in the hold of the boat, an ink-covered PRINTING PRESS appears like a metallic monster.

Frank grabs one of the paper bags and pulls it open. He reaches in, producing a handful of COUNTERFEIT BILLS. The wrapping on the bag falls away. Frank notices the stamped label on the paper bags: FRASSA'S BUTCHER SHOP.

FRANK

Oh, no.

Jo-Jo sees the bags.

JO-JO

Frankie... they're for Uncle Pete's shop.

OUTSIDE - commotion of approaching kids heard.

ERIC (O.S.)

Ally, ally, in free! Game's over.
Everybody come out.

Frank picks up one of the wrapped bags filled with cash, HOLDING it tight. His face fills with emotion. He takes a step...

After a long pause...

FRANK

Don't touch anything. Leave it where it is.

JO-JO

But, Frankie...

FRANK

I said let's go!

Jo-Jo starts to climb back up onto the boat deck. Frank STUFFS the bills back into the bag, leaving it behind, and follows Jo-Jo out.

EXT. BONADUCCI HOUSE - NIGHT

Frank turns Chevy into the driveway. Jo-Jo riding shotgun.

INT. CHEVY - CONTINUOUS

Frank turns off the ignition, his strained face glows in the dark.

FRANK

Listen, Jo-Jo. You can't tell anybody about what we found there tonight. Just forget about it.

JO-JO

But, Frank. All that money? We gotta tell Daddy.

FRANK

It's fake money. And we can't tell anyone. Especially not Daddy.

JO-JO

But if Uncle Pete was helping Old Man Gubitosi... if they were both working for Sneaks... the police are gonna...

FRANK

The police aren't gonna know anything. I mean... they'll have to find out on their own.

JO-JO

But Uncle Pete! He's guilty!

FRANK

Don't jump to conclusions. And we can't tell anything to anyone! I need you to promise me. As my brother. Don't ever say anything. Ever. I'm asking you. Please.

Jo-Jo tears up.

JO-JO

But why?

FRANK

Let it happen on its own.

Jo-Jo EXPLODES and stuns Frank with his left fist to Frank's chest, CRYING out of control. Frank GRABS Jo-Jo's left wrist.

JO-JO

You didn't let it happen in the Nutley game. Why didn't you just score? Trying to help Gino, the biggest wiseguy in Belleville? You ruined it for yourself and Mommy and Daddy. They wanted you to go to Cornell. They don't have the money. Look how depressed they've been. You play God for Gino? And now you say let it be, when we saw what we just saw!

Frank releases Jo-Jo's wrist. SILENCE.

FRANK

Just let it happen. Let it go...

Jo-Jo turns away to the window as he wipes his tears.

EXT. NEWARK CITY HALL - DAY

Late spring.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

A packed gallery with JUDGE LILOIA presiding.

MARTY DEFALCO, PETE'S ATTORNEY, stands beside the defendants - a blue collar mosaic of the neighborhood. Among them: Wilhelm, Bell, Two Tones, Greenie, and Pete. Rocky, Aunt Bella, Uncle Emil, Grandpa Joe and other family members sit at the back of the courtroom watching intently.

Uncle Emil leans into Rocky.

EMIL

This Genitempo's a real pineapple. He's too smart for his own good.

ROCKY

Emil, please.

IN THE BALCONY ABOVE - Frank, Eric, Jackie, and Jo-Jo lean against the railing.

JUDGE LILOIA

Counsel for Peter Frassa Jr. will be next.

A somber looking Pete RISES with DeFalco. Greenie, dressed in his Sunday best, also rises.

JUDGE LILOIA (CONT'D)

Mr. Delaney. You do not have to stand. You had your turn.

MURMURS and hushed GIGGLES from the gallery.

DEFALCO

Regarding the charges against my client, Mr. Peter R. Frassa Jr., I move for dismissal.

JUDGE LILOIA

Bailiff, please read the charges against Mr. Frassa for the record.

BAILIFF

The charges and specifications in regard to statute, Title 2C of the Essex County penal code - the State of New Jersey vs. Peter R. Frassa et all - conspiracy, forgery, fraud, manufacturing, altering, and distributing of counterfeit materials. Accessory to, and aiding and abetting in interstate racketeering activity.

JUDGE LILOIA

In response to the aforementioned charges, Mr. Frassa, how do you plead?

DeFalco consults with Pete. Baited breaths in the room.

PETE

I'm advised, your honor, to plead not guilty.

JUDGE LILOIA

So entered. Mr. DeFalco, have you submitted all affidavits and depositions to the court?

DEFALCO

We have, your honor.

JUDGE LILOIA

Alright then. Attorneys please approach the bench.

DeFalco, Genitempo, other attorneys, and their clerks confer with Liloia. An aide hands the judge an ENVELOPE.

Everyone in the room bakes in the long silence.

UP IN BALCONY - Frank's eyes are glued on Pete. Below, the Bailiff brings something to the judge's attention.

ERIC

What are they doing?

Frank shakes his head, unsure. After a moment, lawyers return to their desks.

JUDGE LILOIA

(clears throat)

There appear to be certain... surprising mitigating circumstances. Counsel has agreed to suspend this hearing on account of newly entered... evidence.

Sudden GASPS from crowd.

GENITEMPO

Your honor, the state requests an immediate recess to discuss in chambers...

DEFALCO

(interrupting)

Defense agrees your honor, but requests that the evidence be made public in open court first, for the benefit of our clients and for the record.

JUDGE LILOIA

If there is no objection...

Liloia scans Genitempo and his team.

GENITEMPO

(hesitant)

No objection.

JUDGE LILOIA

The following letter was submitted to the court prior to today's hearing and the arraignment of the defendants. The statement has been subsequently verified as factual by counsel. The letter to the court was composed by Mr. Gino Babula Sr.

Reactions, buzz, and confusion from the room.

JUDGE LILOIA (CONT'D)

(reading)

Your honor.

INTERCUT:

INT. PRISON CELL - DAY

SNEAKS BABULA himself reads letter aloud.

SNEAKS

You're a wise man with a big responsibility.

(MORE)

SNEAKS (CONT'D)

I'm a wise guy writing to you today to urge you to do the right thing. These people are good people - all of them upstanding citizens of the great city of Newark I grew up in. I love Newark. They ain't the guilty ones. Leave 'em alone. I'm locked up already, so I don't got much to lose... I myself take personal responsibility for this situation. And so does my most loyal associate...

INTERCUT:

INT. GUBITOSI'S GARAGE - THE BOAT

POLICE OFFICERS burst into Gubitosi's garage - they tear apart the boat; find several printing presses and PILES OF STACKED COUNTERFEIT MONEY ready to be distributed.

SNEAKS (O.S.) (CONT'D)

And because I'm an honest man, listed below is all you need to find the proof that I'm telling you all the truth... Ain't that right, Gubitosi?

BACK TO THE COURTROOM

CLOSE on GARY GUBITOSI, who is sitting in the audience - his face in complete shock.

Commotion from the gallery. The judge GAVELS for order!

JUDGE LILOIA

Order! In light of this new development, we recommend the state to revisit their case, taking into account the accuracy of this evidence and reapply to the court once discovery is complete. Until then, the current charges against the present defendants are summarily dismissed. Bailiff, take Mr. Gubitosi in for discussion.

PANDEMONIUM fills the room. Rocky, Frank, and the family converge on Pete.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

I'll never forget the look on Genitempo's face. He didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Sneaks sold out old man Gubitosi and seemingly took the fall for the entire money scam. And Uncle Pete didn't get touched.

The family surrounds a jubilant Pete. He turns to Frank, pulling him into a hug.

PETE
Come here, you!

Frank hesitates, staring at his uncle for a moment.

Hurt for one brief second, Pete shows relief when Frank finally smiles. As everyone exits court...

NARRATOR (V.O.)
The celebration was short and bittersweet. A few months after the hearing, Uncle Pete died of a heart attack. It must have been the weight of everything and that fight on the corner of Fifth Street and Bloomfield Avenue, right in front of Uncle Pete's butcher shop.

MONTAGE OF BLACK AND WHITE TEENS CLASHING IN STREET

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D.)
He and Greenie ran down to the social club to get the boys, ...first time my uncle probably ran since grade school. With him trying to separate the kids, ... it was just too much. He was dead on arrival.

MONTAGE OF MARIETTA AT THE KITCHEN STOVE

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)
My mother was never the same after that. Actually, relieved her brother was now at peace and free, and out of mischief, she stopped worrying as much, ... and, in fact, with all her spirituality, finally surrendered her life to the Lord. Frank and me? We never had the guts to tell Uncle Pete or anyone we knew the truth, ... or what we thought was the truth.

EXT. BELLEVILLE HIGH SCHOOL - MUNICIPAL STADIUM - DAY

Graduation day. CHEERS and APPLAUSE from the crowd as graduates stride by dais. Frank, in cap and gown, receives his DIPLOMA.

Entire Bonaducci family JUBILANT in the stands.

CONFETTI and STREAMERS flutter through the early summer air as the class rises from their seats and tosses their caps.

Frank, Ruth, Jackie, Eric, Nicky, Marshall, Willie, Julie and other graduates hug and congratulate each other.

Frank glances at an empty seat at the end of the aisle with Gino Babula's name on it. He looks around the field, but Gino cannot be found.

EXT. BONADUCCI HOME - DUSK

Driveway filled with cars. A festive graduation party underway in backyard.

Frank carries garbage to the curb. The blue CADILLAC pulls up. Gino steps out.

GINO

It's your party, and you're taking out the trash?

FRANK

(smiles)

Where you been, Gino?

GINO

Around. I'm good. I wanted to stop by, say congrats.

FRANK

You should have been at graduation with us.

GINO

Nah. School and me... really, how much did we really ever have in common?

FRANK

Everybody's in the backyard, there's tons of food, why don't you--

GINO

--Thanks, but I gotta run. I just wanted to, you know, catch you one more time.

FRANK

Before Florida?

GINO

I got a construction job with my cousin down there. It's solid work. And I promised Sneaks I'd try for community college classes in my spare time. So who knows, there may be hope for me yet.

FRANK

That's great, Gino. I mean it... and I won't steal your car this time.

GINO

What about you?

FRANK

I'm gonna work the summer. Then walk on with Rutgers for preseason football practice. In the spring semester, who knows?

GINO

Rutgers? That's a good school. A little beneath an Ivy League guy like you, though.

Frank shrugs as Gino reaches into his pocket and pulls out a folded ENVELOPE. He hands it to Frank.

FRANK

What's this?

GINO

You didn't think I'd leave without giving you a graduation present, did you?

Frank opens the envelope - discovers a CHECK for \$25,000, signed by Sneaks, made out to Frank.

FRANK

(utter shock)

Gino... this is... I can't...

GINO

Now before you start with some preachy, smart-ass conspiracy theory, you need to know this ain't "family money" if you know what I'm saying. Your Uncle Pete kept giving my dad a little bit of cash over the years as an... investment. Now, it's sort of a savings bond - for you. After what you did for me in the game... well, Old Sneaks ain't got no use for it now.

FRANK

I can't believe... is this for real?

GINO

It's real. One thing my old man never did was pass a bad check.

(laughs)

(MORE)

GINO (CONT'D)

Just get on up to Cornell and hand it over to them rich WASPS before you realize there's better ways to spend dough like that.

FRANK

I don't know what to say.

GINO

Now that's a first. You know, number seven, in all those games we played you really saved my fanny more than a couple of times. Now we're even.

FRANK

I can't save anybody. Only God can.

GINO

Well... who knows? But let me tell ya about your Uncle Pete. Sneaks said he never did nothing wrong. And, his biggest regret was not getting married and having kids. But, you, Jo-Jo and Donna were like his own.

FRANK

That's great to hear. I miss him.

Gino starts back to the car, looks back.

GINO

And, Frank... one bit of advice. Next time you've got the ball and find yourself at the four yard line - don't wait for anyone. Take it in yourself.

FRANK

(smiles)

Take care, Cuz'.

Gino smiles back, gets into Cadillac, and drives off.

INT. BONADUCCI HOUSE - BOY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Nearing end of summer.

Frank places his trophies into a box. Packed belongings cover his bunk. Jo-Jo steps in. He finds spot to sit on bunk.

JO-JO

Are you ever coming back?

FRANK

What are you kidding? I'm just making more room for you.

JO-JO
I like it the way it is.

FRANK
Yeah, me too.

JO-JO
Things are gonna be different with you gone.

FRANK
Cornell's only four hours away. And you guys will come up for the games.

JO-JO
Are you gonna play?

FRANK
I'll try out, but I'm hearing it'll be a lot different than Belleville.

JO-JO
Frank, Uncle Pete was helping Gubitosi, wasn't he? Why would he do that?

FRANK
We don't know that.

JO-JO
But we saw... in that garage. Why didn't you say something? You always say the truth is the most important thing.

FRANK
It is. But you know how everybody's always said how I try to control everything? Like Mommy? How I always try to set things so that they come out how I need them to? With this... I needed to know that if I didn't do that... if, for once in my life, I just let things happen... then everything could still end up alright... even better. Ya know, just surrender a little bit, and it all turns out the way it's supposed to.

JO-JO
That doesn't make any sense.

FRANK
Cuz', maybe it doesn't. Yeah, it's not common sense, but maybe it's uncommon sense. Maybe one day, when you and I are older, we'll really get it.

JO-JO
Any more advice?

FRANK
Yeah, one more thing: if you look back on all this... and I know you will, remember to just glance... and never stare.

Rocky calls up from downstairs.

ROCKY (O.S.)
Let's go, Frankie.

Jo-Jo jumps up.

Frank REACHES for the Dion and the Belmonts "I Wonder Why" forty-five. He starts to pack it into his suitcase.

JO-JO
Can we keep it here? That way it'll be like you never left.

FRANK
I never could figure out why Dion didn't go on that flight. He was one of the stars.

JO-JO
Maybe--

FRANK
--Ah, maybe he just had more to do.

They exchange confirming smiles as Frank FLIPS the record to Jo-Jo.

EXT. BONADUCCI HOUSE - DAY

Marietta, Ruth, and Donna stand in the driveway as Rocky starts up the Chevy. Frank approaches car with Jo-Jo carrying his suit cases. They load them into trunk.

Marietta cannot hold back TEARS as Frank hugs her tightly. He lifts Donna, holding her like a rag doll. Frank turns to Jo-Jo, PULLS his brother into a hug. Ruth and Frank embrace.

Rocky waves Frank into car. Frank glances at his house... and at his family. He finally gets into car.

Rocky starts the Chevy, backs out of driveway.

EXT. BELMONT AVENUE - DAY

As Marietta, Ruth, Donna, and Jo-Jo wave, the '49 Chevy drives off down block, turns past BELMONT AVENUE sign, and disappears into the distance.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Growing up, I never really totally understood my brother. The way he thought, the things he did. He was almost, ... counter-intuitive. I would hear what many would say about him - how he was special, gifted, a hero. I was a kid back then, and to me he was just Frankie. Yeah, he was that good looking guy who slept on the bottom bunk. And that was all I needed to know, that he would always be there for me...

DISSOLVE TO:

36 YEARS LATER, THANKSGIVING 1995

EXT. BELMONT AVE - DAY

In front of the Bonaducci house. It sits in disrepair. A FOR SALE sign sticks out on the front yard.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

When I think back to those days, I realize that now I do understand him... and that I learned so much from him.

INT. BONADUCCI HOME - BOY'S BEDROOM

ADULT JO-JO, back where we first met him, flips to the final page of the SCRAPBOOK. It has the news clipping of Frank's obituary.

The floor CREAKS. A BOY, not more than ten years old, walks in.

BOY

C'mon Dad, we'll be late.

Jo-Jo turns.

JO-JO

I'll be just a minute.

BOY

Was this your room, Daddy?

JO-JO
Yeah, it was. A long time ago.

BOY
It's small. Did Uncle Frank live in here, too?

JO-JO
He did. We had bunk beds... he slept on the bottom.

BOY
I wish I knew him.

JO-JO
I wish you did, too. Every day.

Jo-Jo closes scrapbook cover, WIPES a layer of dust.

BOY
What's that?

JO-JO
Something I almost forgot about.

BOY
Can I see it?

JO-JO
I'll show it to you later when we get to Aunt Ruth's. We shouldn't keep Mommy and everybody waiting.

The boy rushes out.

Jo-Jo takes one last look at the room, then exits.

EXT. BONADUCCI HOME - DAY

Boy and Jo-Jo enter his prized classic car - Jackie Carey's vintage '49 MERCURY, polished and looking good as new.

EXT. FRANK AND RUTH BONADUCCI'S HOUSE - DAY - LATER

The Merc pulls up in front of a large, upper-middle class brick house on a quiet street, upscale from Belmont Avenue.

Jo-Jo and his son approach the front door carrying a bottle of wine and a box of pastries. On the front steps his WIFE and young DAUGHTER hug them.

WIFE
Jo-Jo, Ruthie was wondering if you guys got lost.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Back in 1959, Frank proved to himself that good things can and do happen... if you learn how to let them. It's a lesson that's stayed with me ever since.

The door OPENS - RUTH, now an ADULT, welcomes them, smiling.

INT. FRANK AND RUTH BONADUCCI'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The house is TEEMING with family. Swarms of nieces, nephews, cousins, and some old friends greet Jo-Jo.

JO-JO

Happy Thanksgiving, Donna.

Jo-Jo embraces his ADULT SISTER.

We recognize familiar faces: Aunt Bella, now in her eighties. Two Tones. Greenie, in a wheelchair. A fifty-something Jackie Carey beaming a wide smile. Painfully absent are Rocky, Marietta, and Frank himself.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

My brother Frank was taken from us far too early, but not before he succeeded in making his life a shining example for all. In the end, he taught us how to allow life to come to us... and in doing so, he made some history, and he changed some people's lives.

On the wall behind them all framed BUSINESS AWARDS, TROPHIES, and PLAQUES stand out honoring Frank and his children's achievements.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

When I remember him and wonder about what could have been, I think back to those days when we were kids, when things were simpler. And that's when I realize that Frank, like his rock 'n roll idols, did all he had to do in the time he had... and that was enough.

Jo-Jo's eyes drift to the fireplace mantle - Rows of FRAMED PHOTOGRAPHS - Rocky and Marietta dancing at their wedding. Jo-Jo, Frank, and Donna at Christmas. Frank and Gino in their sports poses. The entire family at Frank and Ruth's wedding. A portrait of an older Rocky, without Marietta.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Frank understood this thing about living when he was only seventeen. Thank God he shared it with us before he left.

Jo-Jo takes the old FAMILY PHOTOGRAPH from his coat pocket and places it gently on the mantel next to the others.

PUSH IN on this special family for one last look, as they all were back then in 1959.

DISSOLVE TO:

SLOW MOTION PICTURE OF GINO PULLING UP IN BLUE CADILLAC.

Instrumental version of "American Pie" begins...

DISSOLVE TO:

STILL PICTURE OF THE REAL GINO IN FOOTBALL POSE.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Gino never went to Florida. Rather, he played one year of college football locally before an injury forced him to hang up his cleats. Today he's retired from the bar and restaurant business. He swears not a day goes by that he doesn't think of what his friend tried to do for him in the Nutley game. But most of all, he thanks Frank for convincing him... to surrender.

DISSOLVE TO:

SLOW MOTION PICTURE OF MARIETTA AT HER STOVE.

DISSOLVE TO:

STILL PICTURE OF THE REAL MARIETTA IN GRADUATION POSE.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

My mother saw her oldest child go to Cornell, but she died suddenly several years later at the age of forty-seven. While she never met one of her seven grandchildren, each of the girls have the same middle name... Marietta. Every one of her prayers for her children have been answered.

(MORE)

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

At her last moment, she was getting ready for the graveyard shift, still wearing her blue factory uniform, Lucky Strikes up her sleeve... with gravy simmering on the stove.

DISSOLVE TO:

SLOW MOTION PICTURE OF ROCKY AT CHRISTMAS EVE.

DISSOLVE TO:

STILL PICTURE OF THE REAL ROCKY IN MARINE DRESS BLUES.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Rocky lived for twenty-seven years as a widower, leaving factory work to become an award-winning Sales Manager in the resort industry. While health problems forced him into retirement, he never missed one of his grandchildren's school events. Passing on suddenly at seventy-three, he was buried on his favorite holiday, Christmas Eve. He was and will always be... a Marine.

DISSOLVE TO:

SLOW MOTION PICTURE OF FRANK HELPING NICKY FRANCELLO.

DISSOLVE TO:

STILL PICTURE OF THE REAL FRANK IN FOOTBALL POSE.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Frank never played college football, but did in the military. He became a prosperous entrepreneur, raised four children with Ruth, and was a key force in the early years of "Teen Challenge", the faith-based drug rehabilitation organization for young people. In 1992 his youngest son missed the Essex County Scoring Championship by one touchdown, just like Gino. But he went on to be named an All State Running Back, Frank's proudest moment. In 1994 Frank died at the age of fifty-four after a short illness. There were ninety-two cars in his funeral procession. What he tried to do for Gino in the Mud Bowl is still talked about around Belleville and Nutley to this day.

DISSOLVE TO:

SLOW MOTION OF JO-JO RUNNING WITH FRANK TO GUBITOSI GARAGE.

"American Pie" nears end...

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. FRANK AND RUTH BONADUCCI HOUSE - DAY - LATER
THANKSGIVING 1995

The adult Jo-Jo leans against his Mercury with arms folded.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Frank's life was part of my choosing to
play football in college. Later, his
example of serving others led me to
understand true leadership in my career.
In my semi-retired days I'm doing some
writing about my personal and
professional experiences, glancing back
on times gone by... trying hard not to
stare.

JO-JO'S POV

He stares at the front of the house.

DISSOLVE TO:

... THE 1959 PHOTOGRAPH OF THE ORIGINAL FAMILY IN FRONT OF
THEIR BELMONT AVENUE HOME.

FADE OUT.

THE END

As credits appear, Dion sings "Shu Bop (The Lost Track)"