

***BAD NEWS ON THE DOORSTEP***

SIXTY MINUTE PILOT

BY

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BASED ON THE NOVEL ***BAD NEWS ON THE DOORSTEP***

BY

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INSPIRED BY A TRUE STORY

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: "Winter Storm Threatens Final Football Game"... "Police Investigate Local Money Scam"... "Three Top 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.

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.

CUT TO:

INT. BELLEVILLE LOCKERROOM - DAY

(THANKSGIVING 1957)

TEAMMATES congratulating each other on victory. COACHES, ADMINISTRATORS mixing in, complementing players. HEAD COACH EDDIE POPALINSKI brings order to the jubilant gathering.

POPALINSKI

All you Bellboys listen up!

(beat)

Could not be more proud of you guys.  
Great finish to a good season. A big  
thanks to all you seniors who are moving  
on. Never forget yas. And you  
underclassmen, don't get too cocky. It's  
a long way to next year, so keep your  
noses clean. Next year, we want to  
continue with the momentum. And we can't  
forget today's performance by Frankie  
Bonaducci. A couple of big TD's,  
interception on defense, ... Frankie gets  
today's game ball!

A ROAR of approval fills the crowded room. FRANK BONADUCCI, humble, handsome, and statuesque with face and upper body showing bumps and bruises of the game, WAVES the ball skyward.

Popalinski makes way to locker door and SEES Frank's father, ROCKY BONADUCCI, talking with other fans outside.

POPALINSKI (CONT'D)

Mr. Bonaducci! Come in.

ROCKY

Coach, big win. Hopefully signs of  
things to come for next year.

They exchange handshake. In his mid-thirties, Rocky's pencil mustache and svelte physique portray well his combat experience as a Marine in the South Pacific in the Big War.

POPALINSKI

Frankie had a great game. Next year  
could really be special for him.  
You have a special son.

Rocky accepts complement with humble nod.

POPALINSKI (CONT'D)

The kid's got the grades too, Mr.  
Bonaducci. Just make sure he stays on the  
straight and narrow, and maybe he becomes  
our first Ivy Leaguer.

Frank sits down on bench and puts arm around teammate, GINO BABULA. Gino's brooding nature, golden tight curly hair, and stocky build contrast to Frank's bright smile, black locks and lean frame.

FRANK

Could have never done it without you, Gino. God, their defensive ends will be dreaming about your forearms all winter. You were a blocking machine out there.

GINO

Yea, well, that's my job, and it was a pleasure being your escort and body guard this year, Frankie.

WILLIE BRINDISI, huge lineman, approaches them.

WILLIE

Gino, you madman, Frankie gonna buy ya a new car for all ya did for him this year?

FRANK

Wait till next year, Willie. Nobody will stop us.

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. I'll never forget how hopeful we all became in the days and months that followed.

(beat)

But, of course, there can't be any victories... without battles.

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, Rocky's sexy and loving sister in her early forties, dishes out hugs and kisses. AUNTS, UNCLES, COUSINS, and SIBLINGS abound.

UNCLE EMIL (Bella's husband) helps GRANDPA JOE move chairs next to a long table that stretches the length of the dining room.

The Bonaduccis - Rocky, MARIETTA (his wife), JO-JO (their other son, thirteen), and DONNA (six year old daughter) hang up their coats. Frank enters last.

Marietta, an aging beauty in her mid-thirties, fighting the rigors of a graveyard shift work schedule, struggles with platters of antipasto and Christmas cookies. AUNT JOSEPHINE (Rocky's up-tight, but intelligent older sister) and UNCLE ANTHONY (Rocky's smaller, 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 have 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 allege 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, the tall drink of water 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. Next year, what'aya think, Cornell for you? I hear those Ithaca girls in the winter...

FRANK

We're gonna visit when the weather gets better. Got to get through senior year first.

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, mid thirties, 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.

Rotund 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 FRAZZA (Marietta's older brother) enters from the kitchen, arms full of wrapped food platters and wine. Lovingly large and breathing heavy, his chubby face and smile evoke greetings from all.

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, Jersey side 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)  
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. And thanks for Frankie's great  
game on Thanksgiving. 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.

INT. 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, business is business. 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. 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 going to college if he doesn't get a scholarship next year.

ROCKY

The kid's got his heart set on Cornell. But it all depends on what he does next season.

CARMINE

Frankie's got a good head on his shoulders. Like his old man. But don't ever be too proud to remember that 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.

INT. BELLEVILLE HIGH - CORRIDOR - DAY - CONTINUOUS

First week of classes for new year. Frank exits boys lockerroom with other students. Head basketball coach HIRIAM WILHELM appears at the end of corridor.

WILHELM

Bonaducci.

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

Wilhelm tosses basketball to Frank.

WILHELM (CONT'D)

How's the ankle?

FRANK

Not too bad, Coach. I'm seeing Doc Ameo to check it out today.

WILHELM

The ankle's not what I'm worried about, Bonaducci.

(MORE)

WILHELM (CONT'D)

Frank, you can jump with any of those black kids from the Newark City League. You've got raw talent. It could be a championship season for us. I just want some reassurance from you.

FRANK

Reassurance?

WILHELM

I have zero tolerance for this bull I've been hearing. I know you're close with Babula. Popalinski tolerated it for obvious reasons. But take my advice... Gino's kind is no good. I know you're trying to keep him out of trouble so he's there for you next year, but he's already messed it up for himself, and you don't need to go down with him. If you're gonna play basketball for me, I don't want to see ya near him.

FRANK

Is now the time for this, Coach?

WILHELM

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

Frank BOUNCES the basketball.

FRANK

Coach, I know about Gino and his family. Just trying to help out.

(beat)

But, you know what, Coach? You do need assurances. And, maybe I just can't give you all you need with my ankle and, now this thing you have for Gino. So, ... standing here listening to you, I think I've played my last basketball game for you.

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

EXT. BELLEVILLE HIGH - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Frank STORMS out, takes several deep breathes of cold air to calm down. He GLANCES to corner bus stop as a NEW YORK-BOUND BUS slows at the corner.

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

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.

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.

Bevy of girls have been watching; surround Frank.

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

JULIE  
Hi, Frankie.

Frank takes all of Julie in.

FRANK  
How are you, Julie?

JULIE  
You heading home?

FRANK  
Yeah.

JULIE  
Gonna see you tonight?

FRANK  
Me?

JULIE  
At my party.

FRANK  
Oh, maybe.

JULIE  
Everybody's talking about what a great year you had playing football.

FRANK  
Let's see what happens next year.

JULIE  
You're more popular than ever.

FRANK  
Maybe.

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

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

JULIE (CONT'D)  
I can see why your girlfriend 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 tonight.

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

The lived-in middle-class home, CLUTTERED, but cozy.

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

ROCKY

These bills. They don't let up.

MARIETTA

Any more letters from colleges for Frankie?

Rocky tosses envelopes aside.

ROCKY

Not today.

MARIETTA

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)

Rocky, you think that if Frankie has  
another good year in football, he can get  
a scholarship?

ROCKY

For the money they shell out, these  
schools want only the kids with the best  
reputations. I don't know, Marietta.

MARIETTA

His grades are good, no attitude problems.

ROCKY

I'm just saying we got a year, and it's too soon to be worrying about that stuff.

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

Marietta, get this kid a new hobby.

Back door opens. Frank enters.

JO-JO

Hey, Touchdown Frank.

MARIETTA

Everything OK 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?

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 the ricotta pie 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 Gino. Wants  
reassurances I wasn't gonna let him down by  
hangin with him, ... being Gino's friend.

ROCKY  
So you quit?

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

ROCKY  
--Gino again?  
(rising)  
I've told you before about that kid, too!  
I know how he blocked for you this year,  
but enough with trying to baby-sit him.

MARIETTA  
Frankie, 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 CAREY's GOLDEN CUSTOMIZED MERCURY pulls up in front of Frank's driveway; Jackie in the driver's seat. ERIC THATCHER rolls window down.

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

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.

JACKIE

With the vivacious curves of hostess Julie Manzer at your fingertips, you think you might stop being so depressed? Where's that million dollar smile of yours?

ERIC

And if you're not there to let your main squeeze 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. 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.

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

Frank slouches on a couch. RUTH CORINO, Frank's girlfriend, 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.

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. Maybe you get back on the team.

FRANK

My father's right. I have to stop being concerned about Gino staying in school and all, having him around for next football season.

RUTH

Frank, just stop trying to control everything. Especially Gino. It'll just make you sick.

FRANK

(pondering)

So I should forget everything, and it'll all take care of itself? Like you're always thinking.

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, my parents are so upset, 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 juniors, 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. Julie closes her eyes as she pulls him in.

ONLOOKERS holding their breath... but right before contact, Frank breaks away.

FRANK  
Great party.

He RUSHES out, brushing up against Eric, stunning him.

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)  
(MORE)

JACKIE (CONT'D)

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

(to Eric)

I miss something?

ERIC

(to Jackie)

Just our very own Frankie B. tongued with Julie Manzer, while Lady Ruth watched from the wings. Plus, the more this guy worries about Gino stayin' in school, the moodier he gets, just like Gino.

JACKIE

Holy Moses, Frankie, you starting bad habits?

FRANK

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  
At least it'll get me to Florida.

FRANK  
Florida?

GINO  
Yea, it just ain't in the cards  
for me up here, Frankie. I should  
have realized that a long time ago.  
Better weather in Florida anyway.  
Sneaks' got some contacts down there.  
I'm driving down tonight. 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?  
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.

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

GINO (CONT'D)  
You had some good games this year, Mr. Touchdown. And I know we made quite a team. But it's time for my 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 any stunts 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.

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 Carey and Eric Thatcher. 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.

(beat)

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 tonight.

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. Don't worry about next year.

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 crashes here once in a  
while with a buddy of his from New York.

ROCKY

Ya gotta stop thinking you need Gino so much.  
Forget him. You'll be OK next year without  
him. 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 it how you feel...  
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 won't let 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... and 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.

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)

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. Touchdown.  
 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 doesn't go on for an hour, so  
 let's get 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.

NICK

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. 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.

FRANK

Maybe so, 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.

ERIC

Hard to believe all that's from Belleville.

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 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. Touchdown Frank. 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 bet on our  
games all last year. 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?

GINO

The hell with you, Frank! You're just worrying I won't be around to take care of you next year.

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 the Lord can.

GINO

Heerre we go! 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. The fact is you're a mess. Ya gotta get rid of that anger, that moodiness. 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 is gonna watch my back. And I'm just supposed to sit back and let Him?

(beat)

And I didn't look out for you this year? Maybe it's you who should start appreciating others.

(takes a puff)

What I can't believe is that if you ain't thinking of yourself when it comes to me, then who are you thinking of?

FRANK

Ya, know, a true friend is going to tell you the truth; just what you don't want to hear.

That familiar anger boils to Frank's surface.

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 and ROLLS his eyes, throwing his hands up in frustration. Gino opens back stage door and vanishes.

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 arrives.

ROCKY

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

Jo-Jo looks at Frank, 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 to come pick you guys 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.

ROCKY

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

FRANK

Until now.

ROCKY

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 even 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, Dad. I promise.

ROCKY

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

Rocky 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 jungles. 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.

Rocky RUBS his son's back, gets up, and strides out.

INT. BONADUCCI HOME - KITCHEN - WEEKS LATER

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. It's gonna take time. 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 two TWENTY DOLLAR BILLS out of her purse. She TEARS them into pieces, crams them into the trash.

EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - DAY

(DECEMBER 1958, LAST GAME OF FRANK'S HIGH SCHOOL CAREER)

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. Yea, the Lord was surely right, ... in the world there will be tribulation.

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, burdened mentally and physically by the graveyard shift and circumstances of the fall of '58, 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 counter. A pack of LUCKY STRIKES lodged up the sleeve of her royal blue FACTORY UNIFORM.

She flips the furnace switch. Sounds of CLANKING steam pipes.

Lights click on. 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 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 leans over the top bunk, secretly observing Frank with expressive eyes.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Today would be Frank's last game. When he turned his ankle in the season opener against East Orange everything changed. Yea, Gino never did run away to Florida, so, he was ready to help make Frankie an All Stater in their senior year. But the tables turned in one moment in time. God bless my brother, he recovered fully from the injury a couple of games later, ... but I don't know if he was ever the same, mentally or spiritually.

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.

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)  
 Let's go everybody! Uncle Pete's here.

Pete 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 jogs in carrying snow-crusted 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 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  
Glicken... 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.  
(MORE)

PETE (CONT'D)

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. 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

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. 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 have been dry. Crazy Asian flu hits, and now you're playing in 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-JUST ONE MORE FOR GINO".

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. Put any fearful thinking aside. That's when you've been your best. Do what you need to.

FRANK

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

ROCKY

Hey, Mommie and I are just trying to support you. As she says, "You're never alone." Use that to find strength. And have no regrets at 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. He's got the thunder in his thighs... you've got the lightning in your legs.

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.

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 huge 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, 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

Smelled like 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. Before I know it, you come back, I start scorin' those eighteen touchdowns, we start winning bigger, and everyone'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. 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 best friend, 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 Nazi Germany; some to the South Pacific. I knew those guys. They were warriors. Now the war's over. But the spirit of those men, those soldiers, it lives on. 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 you. 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 - 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 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: Cousin Marshall, Uncle Emil and Aunt Josephine next to 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 Frankie.

TWO TONES

How ya feeling today, Petey?

PETE

Freezin' my cazzones 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

This thing's about to blow up. I think you should talk to Gubitosi. If something goes down...

PETE

Would you forget it? It's just been talk for a year. 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 catches his eye, BLOWING him a kiss. Frank smiles back.

Both TEAMS take their places on the sidelines.

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.

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

FADE OUT.

THE END

