

PART 1

**BEFORE VERY WELL**

## huck: blood records

Yes, I'm covered in it, but take my words as warning:  
we all have it in us – that and the other thing . . .

A little after my father took his leave, I was found on a beach, blinding blistering lights illuminating my face. Then came the voices, the pre-custodial warnings:

“You must get up, sir. You can't sleep here. You will be arrested if you do not comply. Are you under the influence of alcohol and/or narcotics? Said influence is illegal in the great State of Illinois and as such we have a duty to arrest you for said offenses . . . Sir . . . are you with us?”

“My friends, I believe I am not, no. I believe I am not with but against you, and that we must do a bloody battle,” I thought, as their industrial torches scanned me like packaged meat. With my eyes burned down to the nub, I reached out my hands, gesturing, “Comrades, help me to my feet,” but, with no kindness supplied nor quarter given, it took me a while, in my grog, to position myself upright, falling a little, a few times, to some unnecessary commentary. That's when I frankly and fully metabolized the gun – and saw for the first time what was in me – taking in the definitive

hardware, worn sloppily and unclipped. And I must admit, it was no Nazorean moment that stopped me from flourishing, from flowering into print, but concern that I might, in my state of inebriation and imbalance – chemical and psychological – not get to the gun in time . . . And as they led me off the beach, I felt a wartime rage. And madness too. That I never got my glory . . .

But today, now, here, in this mess, I have flowered.

Black screen. You hear my voice.

I'm seeing things as film now. I was always, I suppose. Only now I see that I see that I do. Movies, my looking glass into the world. The film between reality and me, my prosthesis, the old cane allowing me to hobble on.

From black we fade in.

And although we can see color and vague outlines, it takes a while, as you hear me talk, for everything to come into focus. I, the subject, am naked, next to the object, picking the strings on my guitar, singing somberly, soberly. You can see this, the singing, but the sound it muted.

Now we're in focus.

I dip my fingers in the pool of blood – so, yeah, there is a body - and keep playing. Only then do you hear me. My voice isn't bad:

*Not a feeling of cloth.*

*Because cloth is thin.*

*But a feeling of skin.*

*And entering in.*

*And the feeling of organs.*

*In the eyes.*

*Because that's where the dying lies.*

Is darkness or dying better? I'm talking about the last line, about word choice. Done fingering, I put the guitar down, walk out of the frame.

Black screen.

Next you see me shooting. I take several Polaroids: close-ups, long-range, side-profiles. I scatter the photographs and decide on the one with the body in the far-right corner, so that it's not taking over . . .

It's quite a scene here. Notice I say 'scene' not 'murder scene.' The system will come for me and then we'll see . . .

I almost went in the bath. And being myself, I thought about it. For if not now, in the gripless hole,

no rope, no hope, then when? But in dark waters, Joan Baez's "Silver Dagger" in my head – always a song to deal, of course – it never happened.

The shot here is overhead, and remember we're still in black and white, so the reddish water comes off darker than normal, which is kind of a nice effect and less brutish than crimson tide. You could, of course, shoot it so only the water is in color, but that's been done before. And more importantly, it's distasteful.

Side shot of me lying on the couch – filmed from the bathroom door so we're at distance, low light for the silhouette, no internal dialogue or music – maybe a leg comes off the couch and dangles down, probably just so the audience wonders about the significance of the dangling leg: like, is it a metaphor?

Because I didn't use a gun, and the only noises he made were stunted – shock and gurgling lungs – none of the neighbors know; there's laughter in the corridor, foreigners foreign-talking, marijuana, cinnamon-baking. I am the only one that knows. Even Jimmy didn't know I was a killer because Jimmy didn't know he was dead before he died. I feel he felt I was catatonic, then a stabber, then . . . well, he never felt again. I drink from a bottle of wine

. . . But really, I am no killer. A killer is a pervasive state of being. My life-taking was anomalous, retributive, cause and effect. I pick the guitar back up:

*No tremor as I pour,  
but the wine doesn't calm me,  
I was calm before.*

If this wasn't real . . . you'd see a black screen and hear knocking. The only light coming from behind the door when I open it. This should be done slowly. I guess you could say the light is the only light and the only light is the only hope. Symbolism for the lawyer standing before me. Only when he looks me up and down do I, and the audience, realize I'm still naked. Just a small comedy to lighten the mood. This would be a killer attorney, maybe someone my father knew, maybe an old family friend, maybe just a gun for gold, but good enough that we are assured an even fight awaits. You shoot this at distance. From the end of the hall, with the door still open, him facing me, two silhouettes – yes, yes, I realize I'm using silhouettes again, but I won't overuse it. It's customary to shoot such a scene of men measuring men in silence but it might be nicer to have the new neighbor Albanians down the corridor

in thunderous dispute. This loud large family of straight screamers juxtaposed to the uppity and/or reserved gays in the shot adds another comedic layer, and further contrast to the silent men staring at each other in the doorway. These neighbors are actually quite real; Mrs. Lipton's letters have kept me apprised.

"May I come in?" he asks. "Of course," I reply. All very civilized. Perhaps for the audience it's not strange that he's calm about the body, but I find it odd. Different eyes, I guess. "Who's this, Huck?" he asks. "This is Jimi, Tommy," I say, because let's call the lawyer Tommy . . .

But this is the really real world, so no Tommy.

I lie on the floor next to the red and rotting and play records for a while . . .

## **huck: sixteen stab wounds & the forty-second precinct**

When I come out of my apartment the Albanians are screaming in the corridor. I say screaming but these are, to my knowledge, the first Albanians I have met,

meaning this could be just a geographical disposition I am witness to, tantamount to heavy handed camaraderie.

Two pairs of gays wait at the elevators. None hold hands, but one pair seems happy – a head on a shoulder – whilst the other pair are sullen, perhaps a row. And while there will be recriminations as to why I bathed and changed into linen, at least the gays and the Albanians are unwittingly grateful.

Everyone is consumed with the elevator dial as we descend, my mouth full of coin. Outside, I notice I have a bottle of wine in my hand, so I drain it in several long pulls, leaning forward so as not to stain the suit. The bottle drops to the floor but remains unsatisfyingly whole. When the light turns, I cross the road, vault the custodial steps, and I'm at the front desk of the Forty-second precinct.

“I would like to report . . .”

“Yes?” says the officer, without looking up.

“There is a body in my apartment.” Now I have his full attention. “It's a dead body, you see. And I thought you should know.”

I deposit my house keys on the counter, extend my hands for binding.

As you know, my memory is often blacked-out. Like a military redacted file, all the juicy bits disappeared



into the ether. Oh, what a thief the bottle is. But this is a red-letter day, one for remembering.

I have been officially arrested. This just means that they own my time and my body. Like a prostitute, I suppose. And like a hooker, they have things they'd like me to do for them. And like a pro, I go through the motions without complaint.

First comes the booking process. This is my first time. I am asked for what they call 'vital information.' They take notes. They want to know about the body. Next, the mug shot. I am told to sit and not stand for my closeups. This disorients me; could the movies have gotten this easy one wrong? What a thought . . . My clothes are now somewhere else, and I am wearing a custodial two-piece. My personal belongings, also gone. I have fingerprint ink on my fingers. They take saliva swabs and hair samples. For internal inspection, I spread my buttocks, squat, and cough. I have a rubber wrapped finger in my mouth. I am in a holding cell . . .

But you don't care about all that. So, we'll get to the meat of it. During interrogations, and I'm only going from movies here, they try to trip you up, make you

incriminate yourself. But there has been no heavy-handed tactics, no police brutality. My rights have been read to me: “Are you sure you don’t want a lawyer?” “Yes, I’m fine, thank you.” They are surprisingly polite. Handcuffs are not part of the deal.

There’s a dark stain on two of the walls. No peeling paint. The room is small. A table. Tape recorder. Video camera in the corner, red light. The sound of the tape recorder being pressed is much louder than I’d anticipated; probably they buy all their stuff industrial strength because of the heavy usage. I don’t ask. I surmise. The only thing that annoys me is the sound of a bad bulb buzzing above. And I wonder if my concern means I am in some sort of dissociative state, a dreamlike disillusionment of the stakes in play. And, because I know that’s the kind of shit lawyers use, I mention the bulb once the tape is recording.

“Tell us about the body.”

I consider acting mad but, not being a trained actor, I hold it together for fear of looking insincere.

“Well, he was a friend. At one time, at least. Well, not a friend per se. But we knew each other well. For several years. We didn’t socialize. I mean, we watched movies at his place with the sound

muted. But that wasn't my choice. I mean, I had free will to leave, if one believes in such a thing. But to boil it down: he was my supplier. A reliable man."

"Would you like to tell us what happened, in your own words?"

I hadn't been prepared for this line of questioning. I wasn't sure where to start, what to leave out, what to highlight. So, I just kept it simple. "He raped someone I like."

The interviewer nods his head in approval. "And this made you angry?"

"He raped someone I like," I repeat, but with a little more confidence, "so, I wanted to talk."

"So, you invited him over?"

"Not exactly. He was living at my place, so I knew where he was."

"He was living with you?"

"No. Well, initially yes. But then he raped someone I like and she didn't want to live there anymore . . . She left, I left. And then she told me he raped her."

"And how long after the rape did she tell you?"

"Several months, at least."

"Ok. And what happened in the apartment?"

"I killed him."

"You attacked him with the knife?"

“No. He attacked me.”

“But he didn’t stab you?”

“No. I’m fine, thank you.”

“And how do you account for that?”

“Account for what?”

Silence.

“Oh, right,” I say. “Kung fu movies, I guess. Or genetic predisposition. Fast twitch muscles.”

I do kung fu moves with my hands, adding the requisite sound effects.

“For the tape the arrestee is doing kung fu.”

The holding cell smells of sadness and sweat. I sit against a wall. To avoid trouble, I keep my eyes out of focus: an old trick. Someone is rapping; I assume he is here often . . . I am quite shaken. The interrogation didn’t go well. They were confused by the lack of blood on my garments. And when I told them about the bath, the fresh threads, this appeared to go against me. I thought about telling them about the gays and the Albanians, and how I’d benefitted them by coming out clean, but decided against it. I didn’t mention the Polaroids, the singing, the record playing; some of my thoughts are for myself, some for my friends, some for none . . . I am wet with sweat. I try to sleep. I remember a movie that said only the innocent sleep. And I have

some hope that this is being recorded. But, of course, I can't sleep. Wrenching, bile, cold sweats, shaking. Above all my stomach. I have been through this before. Feelings of death knock loudly. I leave this cell; I take myself to the water again. See the tub, shot in color, how oddly red . . .

jake: goodbye, farewell fickle  
followers

. . . a close-up of the water but, when we pull back, we can see this is an altogether pricier tub – perhaps copper, perhaps freestanding – in a better bathroom.

And why is Jake Gyllenhaal floating in the bathwater? Why has he given up?

In the living room, sculptured people are oblivious: lecturing, playing instruments, drinking mushroom-tea and laughing and lying down and seeing personalized scenes on the ceiling; some of the mushroom takers are trying to convince other takers that their scenes are the real scenes and why don't they see them.

A famous actress has officially given up cocaine, so she tries the bathroom door, picks the lock with her hairpin, is already tipping her vile onto the back of her bony hand when she looks up – an actress-y scream. And twenty people trickle into the bathroom in slow motion; someone calls their manager, and two people leave because they can't be here, and Jake's sister (in town for work) calls an ambulance; and no one really knows what to say, and someone says "we shouldn't be here" and half the people leave and they take the drugs with them. An hour later TMZ posts a video of all of this. Someone at the party getting paid, I guess.

The paramedics shuffle quickly onto the scene . . . Jake is on a stretcher now, in the back of an ambulance; and the sirens must be muted for this shot; for 'die or not, but do it quietly' we say, and have said in our cars, God help us.

His arms have been bandaged and he's on oxygen. And we don't know if he's going to make it. We don't know what kind of movie this is yet.

Jake stands at the back of the church. Away from the mourners. Important people in makeup, family members without. People stand up, nice things are said. Lots of standing, plenty of warm language.

“This is more like it,” says Jake . . . Rude but familiar voices from somewhere in the pews start arguing loudly. No one stops them though:

“They’re very plain. Are these the best they have?”

“They’re fucking bandages, Rolf.”

“And?”

“And Prada don’t accessorize hospitals.”

“Oh, fuck you very much, Tone.”

“No, fuck you, Rolf.”

The voices fade.

Coma.

## jake: the day before

In his apartment, in his bathrobe. An interviewer. A slow sweeping shot of the camera crew. Jake considers a question.

“If we don’t expand, we contract; we contract, we die.”

“Your last movie ‘Build Up’ was incredibly . . . expansive.”

“Thank you.”

“You play a gay bodybuilder who refuses to have sex with his lover because he is building up to a huge competition. And the closing scene: you’re on the podium, holding up the trophy, with cuts to, what I’m assuming is, post-competition gay sex.”

“Right.”

“And you became gay for the role.”

“Right.”

“Can you explain that?”

“Gladly. But let me correct you. I didn’t become gay. That’s not the right way to put it. But I embodied the character fully, and the character was fully gay. And as that character I made love to several men in preparation for the role.”

“And that wasn’t odd to you?”

“In what way?”

“Physically, mentally.”

“I mean, it was a process. I prepared well. Preparation is always key. I started off with gay porn, the club scene, kissing, fondling, exploration, oral stimulation, ass play, and when I felt fully invested in the role – ready on an emotional level to give myself to it – I let myself be entered. Coming out of a role is always the trickier process. A lot of confused disentangling. I had to de-gay myself, in essence, and I felt the withdrawal.”



“Don’t you think that means you could be gay . . . or bi?”

Jake stares at the interviewer. “You’re really not understanding me.”

“Let’s talk about the movie before that. That was your first foray beyond the classic Hollywood roles that made you a bonified leading-man.”

“Foray, yeah. Good word.”

“Now, in ‘Abort Baby Jesus’ you play a hyper-conservative leading the charge to kill women entering abortion clinics in the name of Christ. Do you believe in abortion?”

“You don’t have a right to my personal theology. You can ask about the character, Clint; you can ask what Clint’s feelings are. What you should ask is why would Clint – who’s against the killing of what he sees as children of God – advocate, provoke, for the killing of fully-formed God’s children?”

There follows a long-staring silence.

“Every one of these movies has been a failure.”

“Define failure.”

“Financially, critically, many would argue morally. You’ve been called anti-Republican, a liberal-hater; you’ve been called homophobic; you’ve been called a closeted homosexual; anti-Christian;

anti-Semite; someone who advocates for murder. GQ rates you as one of the top five most hated people in America. What do you have to say to the American people?”

“I think my movies have already said quite a lot to the American people. Listen, I am an artist. I make art. Sometimes that provokes conversation. We talk about the evolution of this country, and we talk about the abolition of slavery, the civil rights movement, but censorship is coming back, sister; this fear-driven sanitization is systemic. How big is the box we get to paint in? It’s getting pretty fucking small, pal. Listen, Hitler invades Poland in 1939 and World War Two kicks off. In 1940, Charlie Chaplin makes a comedy about Hitler. The world is going to end and Chaplin gets green lit to make this movie. Now, you can say it’s propaganda or whatever but front center is Charlie with the tiny moustache; and, yeah, did he have it before Hitler? Sure. But you don’t get lip hair grandfathered in. Months after Hitler began trying to end the world, no one tried to censor Charlie’s grooming regiment. Look, the outrage, people saying I’m this or that – it’s a testament to how well I embody the role. These are the same motherfuckers who would simultaneously burn Nabokov in 1955 for being a pedophile, for writing Lolita, and call him the greatest writer of the

20<sup>th</sup> century, today . . . for writing Lolita. You are fair-weather fashionable fanatics, man. This time capsule outrage that we're in now? That's the real fucking end of the world. And people like you don't even know it."

Jake takes off his mic, walks off camera.

When this interview airs two days later, people become protestors, and he can't leave his apartment. And so . . . the party.

## red and lipton: a quick old romance

He was sedated, so they didn't talk. And it was strange for her to see him like that: not electric, not lit up, no showbusiness. She missed his fire, his alcoholic barbarism; most significantly, she longed for the anger he caused her, the liveliness of it.

To be together, they'd compromised more than their age allowed. He went to tap class. Black screen. We hear tapping – toe, tap, tap, tap, toe – the tempo building. A shot of feet; camera pulling back: Red, tap dancing . . . She came to the track. Black screen. Screaming men; thunder of hooves. Shot of the

horses' legs. Shot of Red admiring Lipton screaming for her horse to "fucking come on." He taught her how to read the form guide. How to place bets . . . They bickered, but just to smokescreen their crawls to the middle: he drank less – not much but some – she started drinking a little, enjoying a little grass.

When she'd asked him what it was like, he took her to a tent city with two crates of cheap wine; there they passed them out; then followed a night of drinking with his old friends. When he said he couldn't swim, she taught him, then took him skinny dipping in Lake Michigan . . .

And by his bed, in the cab home, all these memories played. Black screen. So, she didn't see the yellow tape across Huck's door, almost missed his letter. But she read it, and didn't collapse, and did the right thing. The only thing that nagged at her as she gave her statement – shot of Lipton, close-up, sound mute – was that she should have burned the letter like the letter had said and – camera pulls out, and we see she's in an interrogation room, giving a statement to the police – she pictured it in the sink, soaked in accelerant but fully formed, as she sat chatting with the nice detectives; she'd been worried about setting the fire alarm off.

## doc halliday: questions for the old woman

Black screen

6 months ago

Doc Halliday puts his seat belt on, takes a mechanical exhalation; he is outside the dry cleaners; he is at home, showering; he is sitting naked on his bed, in front of him a rack of color-coded shirts, all dry cleaned, still in their plastic wrappers. He picks up a white shirt, puts on a black suit, black tie, and gets into his car alone; he parks outside a cemetery; he stoically sits next to his wife, watches his daughter lowered into the ground; he shakes hands with mourners at the grave, then at the wake, more hands. He goes back home alone. He sets the table for three, cooks, brings plates and saucepans out, dishes up for three. The next morning, in the same suit and tie, he pulls into his parking space marked 'District Attorney'; he takes the elevator alone; once inside his office he reads files; he is outwardly emotionless; he is automated.

Black screen

7 months ago

Laughter. Camera fades in. At the dining room table, mother and daughter – fortyish, nineteen/twentyish – joke about something; Doc comes into the shot carrying saucepans and plates. Cuts to the three of them eating and laughing together . . . It wasn't always like this, of course – camera cuts to the empty dining room, but we can hear arguing upstairs, all three voices – but this was a pretty okay family, as families go . . . Cut to the parents, distraught, sitting at a hospital bed with their daughter; the daughter starts to scream and is sedated.

Black screen

present day

He sits alone at his dining table, reading a file . . . She wouldn't have a rape kit. He pleaded, but no. But she did tell him who it was. Not at first, but eventually, sure that when she did, he would take care of this. He was her father. He was the law. But nothing happened. "No rape kit, no evidence; I'm sorry." His words. Those he'd confided in said she'd get through this (they never said she'd 'get over it' –

that would have been too flippant). And maybe she would've done if he'd been a father . . . She didn't leave a note, which he was glad for, and he was glad too that he had found her and not her mother – the mother who'd wanted to be a mother and buy a gun, before he talked her out of it. And she could never forgive either of them for that. So, she left, never came back after the funeral.

Black screen

“Huck” flashes on the screen then disappears. The DA driving. Him parked outside Jerry's Gun Show Shop. Inside the shop holding various six-shooters. Ruger, Taurus, Smith & Wesson. He gets the feel of them, checks out their balance. He's holding the 57 when the shop attendant comes over. “Yup. She's a good-looking gun, nice weight, but she's got a recoil to her. Good for target practice though.”

The DA pulls up to a police precinct. Freeze frame. They talked about him at the office. He drove from the wake right into work. Business as usual. Didn't seem right how normal he was. So, they talked about him callously and without concern. He was good at looking taped up like a citizen. He shaved each morning; his clothes were always ironed. He

never smelled of alcohol or appeared high. He managed his caseload. He took home very particular cases; he dug into the subjects involved and waited for the right case . . . He gets out of his car.

Sound muted. He's talking to the desk sergeant. He's in a room with the boy. The boy seems nervous.

“Are you my lawyer? asks the boy, fidgeting nervously in his seat. “I don't remember asking for one. But I could have. It's been wild in here . . . emotionally.”

There was no need to be here, of course. The way the criminal justice system works, the DA could have chosen not to charge Huck and he would have been released. At certain pressure points in the system, accountability is more conceptual than actual. That the victim was stabbed sixteen times, that the assailant had not a mark on him – no lacerations, cuts, no defensive wounds –were just facts. It was important, however, that a Mrs. Lipton, in the report, stated that the victim had threatened to kill the man in custody if he ever saw him again. And while the DA believed the man had gone to kill – that his act was rageous, retributive, punitive vigilantism – he could make it so he hadn't; he could walk him. Because he had gone to make right, as much as one can, a rape.



So, entering the room, sitting opposite the young man, he had come to ascertain, not the truth of what happened, but the truth of the man. The victim, being unlovable, had no loved ones that might make noise. And he was a bad man, this victim. The DA had no opinion on what a man did for a living; it was all the same to him. How we treated others, most significantly, against their will, was how the DA saw good and evil. And there was no evil, save pedophilia, for the DA worse than rape. And that the victim, according to the DA's research, had, on four occasions, been acquitted of rape (the victims, it was suspected, had been threatened and refused to cooperate) made this a case to ponder . . . if, and this was why he was here, the man he sat opposite now, was, to the DA, a man of good moral standing.

"I don't normally come down here," offers the DA. Then, realizing he hasn't introduced himself, he puts out a hand, "Doc Halliday, District Attorney." But Huck is in handcuffs and can't shake his hand, and it's a little awkward. Embarrassed, and just now acutely aware of being recorded, and not having any idea of what to ask to get to where he needed to be, he pretends to have forgotten urgent business and leaves the station.

An odd scene next. The DA canvassing door to door. But Huck didn't know the gays, not really, nor the straights, holding them in equal contempt. And he hadn't had the chance to meet and thus not know the Albanians yet, so he didn't know them either. He deliberately leaves to last the subject's next-door neighbor, for she had provided the boy with a bit of flimsy cover, so he questioned, as lawyers do, her ability to be objective as to the character of the man in question. Still, he knocks and when the old stooping woman opens the door, the letter is still smoking in her sink. And instead of introducing himself to her, his attention is drawn to the sink in his eyeline, to the smell and sight of a recent burning, so when he doesn't say anything . . .

“What do you want?”

“I'd like to talk to you about Mr. Daisy,” replies the DA, and then, for reasons he can't fathom, he adds, “I mean to do you no harm.” Just then the Albanians begin another screaming match in the corridor and, if for no other reason than to remove herself from their noise, she shepherds the odd man in.

Once he's introduced himself properly, she makes them tea and they sit on the sofa, sipping, no one mentioning the sink of smoke. The dogs, who'd missed her terribly during her hospital visits,

crevice under her arms: two breathing armrests, one comfortably asleep, the other locked in unblinkingly at the District Attorney who sits there uneasy and unsure of himself. For he was a man who had, until recently, at least publicly, tied his morality to the letter of the law, and as such had always thought himself good, and accordingly carried himself with a righteousness that most people found off-putting. Indeed, he married his wife because she was the first girl to look past that, to the possibility of a better man, a hopefulness that never quite materialized, causing a strain on the marriage, that, in his pomposity, he hadn't sensed was there, and her noticing him not noticing caused the strain to ingrain further.

For something to say Doc thanks the old woman for the tea. For something to say, she tells him it was Lapsang, and, to avoid saying what he came to, he speaks about the Fujian province in China where the tea is grown for several minutes, only stopping when the look of the old woman suggests she finds this conversation rather peculiar.

“The neighbors say Huck is kind of a loner,” he says, putting down his tea.

“He used to like to keep to himself, but not a loner in any dangerous kind of way.”

“Dangerous?”

“He’s no Kaczynski.”

There follows an oddly long silence.

“Used to?” asks the DA, finally.

“What?”

“You said ‘used to’.”

“Yeah, after his father suicided he didn’t get out much. But then I start seeing him with this homeless guy. He moved him in, if you can believe that. No reason. Just moved him in. Looked after him. Went both ways, I suppose, the looking after. Then his place got real busy all of a sudden. Huck, the dealer fellow, the homeless man, and an actress from the television – all under the same roof. But then they emptied out, left the drug dealer there though.

“Tell me about this drug dealer.”

“He dealt drugs.”

“Did you have an interaction with him?”

“I don’t have much use for drugs.”

“What do you think of Huck?”

“What do you mean?”

“As a person. You and him are close?”

She looks at him confused.

“The neighbors said you were close.”

“If I were to describe it, that would be a word I’d use, yeah. I care for the boy. He had issues – like everyone, I guess – and his was drinking, but he

was, he is, a good boy. I nagged him more than was, is, my right about his drinking, but he was always polite and we'd spend time together sometimes; occasionally he'd watch my soaps with me when he felt I needed it, so, yeah, I love him, if it comes down to it."

The next camera shot is from a distance, man and woman in side profile, sound off . . . and although he's asking questions, the fact that you can't hear anything says we've heard enough.

Getting out of the cab, she almost loses her footing and has to sit down on the sidewalk outside the hospital. Once inside, she takes small steps towards his bed, where she sits, eyes closed, tired. How would she tell Red, if he comes to, about Huck and his troubles? The thought shakes her for she knows their closeness, so it's a while until she notices a nurse's hand on her shoulder.

## jake: and we're live - a panel discussion

In a television studio, on a couch, five college kids sit squashed together. Next to, but ignoring, them,

big-time interviewer, R A Friend, sits behind his desk, smoking a cigarette. The guests, too, ignore each other. One of them is crying. No one tries to comfort her.

“And we’re live in 5, 4, 3 . . .”

The 2 and 1 are silent, then a finger is pointed at Friend just as he fans away the last of the smoke, his assistant running off screen, a burning cigarette in his palm.

He talks into the camera with a cultivated sadness. “As all of you know, Jake Gyllenhaal is at an undisclosed hospital—”

A voice from the couch, “Columbia Presbyterian.”

The camera swings to the couch, but we’re unable to see who spoke, so the camera swings back to Friend.

“Drugs and drug-related paraphernalia were found at his home, although at this time it is unclear if he attempted to take his own life or whether he just overdosed.”

Tutting from the couch, which the camera swings back to. One of the guests speaks up, “You can’t say ‘just’ overdosed. You’ll sound callous. You should re-record that.”

A voice from behind the camera, “We’re live.”

“You’re right. To any viewers who may have taken that to mean I don’t care about the state of Mr. Gyllenhaal, or to the millions of American families out there that have been affected by drug-related deaths, that was not my intention. As our cameraman—”

A voice from the couch interrupts. “Steve.”

“Yes, as Steve mentioned we are live and unable to edit or rerecord, so things might be said that were not meant, if you know what I mean . . . Our guests today are five fans of Mr. Gyllenhaal . . .”

The sound is muted, Nick Drake’s *Pink Moon* plays over the scene. The girl who cried before they went live is still crying. The other guests are in animated debate with the interviewer.

## jake: columbia presbyterian

It’s night, and outside Columbia Presbyterian a crowd gathers. Most, vigil-like, hold candles. And while inside, Jake’s sister sits dutifully by his bedside, his agent stands at the window, assessing the swell of people below.

“Christ,” says the agent. “How many neo-Nazis are in that crowd, you think?”

Nothing from the sister.

“Making him ‘the Reich will rise again’ poster-child is not the sort of rebranding I was hoping for . . . You have a cigarette?”

“No, but I’m sure you can bum one outside.”

“And get photographed getting a light from the Grand Wizard? No thanks.”

“Glad to see you’re coping.”

“Don’t be cunty, okay? I’m up here, okay? I’m with him. I don’t have to hold his hand.”

“You think he’s going to die?”

“You probably shouldn’t say that. They can hear you. In a coma they can hear everything. Read to him. It helps.”

“All I have is script.”

“When do you shoot?”

“Three weeks.”

“You’ve always been very professional. Not as talented as your brother, and some of those rom-com choices, I would’ve never advised that—”

A cold stare from the sister like: yes, he’s an asshole but the rom-coms were a bad idea.



## **huck: I am released**

Reclining on my couch, like a citizen, I read the paper. A team of cleaners are sanitizing the scene. You must pay for this yourself, whether you go down or not. They don't tell you that. As I was collecting my things from the duty sergeant, he gave me a card, said they were reliable. Probably a nephew of his or a sister-in-law. But the number was the only number I had for this sort of thing, so for two thousand they came over 'to restore the location to its pre-incident state.' For two thousand dollars. Most of the 'waste' had spread out over kitchen tiles, marble slabs, the walls, even the ceiling: that they could get, but the some of the wood flooring had to be removed. "You couldn't get blood out of wood," they said. But they knew a guy and for another three thousand they'd remove the contaminated panels, replace them, and stain them to match, but that would be another three, like I said. I told them to go ahead. They suggested I leave until the work was completed, but I didn't have anywhere I wanted to be, so I just read the paper on the couch. The nephew said they wouldn't charge me extra for staying. I think he was making a joke. Some sort of ammonia is being used and it's making me gag so I decide to take a bath.

In the tub, I switch on the radio. An interview regarding actor Jake Gyllenhaal is on. From the saccharine eulogizing I surmise he'd dead. I turn the radio off. I could do with a joint but I don't have any weed. I will also need a new supplier. Is it wrong that I am thinking of how Jimmy's death is an inconvenience to me? I was so angry with him. I am angry still, but I must be less so to be thinking about him dying as troublesome. It's hard to find a dealer who deals consistent drugs consistently. He was always available. My self-centeredness makes me ill and my empty stomach throws up bile into the bubbles of my bath. This is the first physical reaction I have had to the event. Stella must be worried. I have been gone three days. What do I say to her? I get dizzy. The numbness that had encased me is starting to wear off, so I tip whisky down my throat to bring some of it back. But you can't really blackout from a murder; justified or not, I still did what I did. I play Nick Drake's "Chime of City Clock" in my head.

## sergeant murto: leaks to the chicago tribune

Slow motion shot of Huck walking through the doors of the police station. Muted conversation with the desk sergeant. Huck putting his keys on the desk.

Most people don't like most people. And the sergeant on desk duty that particular night hated the DA. He'd screwed up the chain of evidence on a case once, and although it was covered up and the DA got his conviction, the DA made a thing of it and the sergeant, who should really, with time served, have been a lieutenant, would retire a sergeant on a smaller pension than he felt was by rights his. He wasn't a bad guy. He wasn't dirty. But he wasn't against getting a little mud on his shoes either.

A quiet bar. This is where they usually met. Good whiskey, no police. Jimmy Tonlaghn – disheveled, loose tied, newspaper man – who was always late, came in late, apologizing. Sergeant Murto, already three drinks in, motioned the barkeep for another glass for his friend. And they were friends, of a sort. Helping each other out for that long made it so for the Sergeant.

“What you got?”

“Could be something, could be nothing, but the something it could be could be big.”

Jimmy knows the dance. “You want five?”

“I was thinking a grand.”

“For that I want photos of Daley shooting up an underage prostitute . . . and he better be black.”

They both laugh. The mayor was a clever crook.

“You know the deal: you get five and if something pans out, then another five.”

“Fair enough.”

The sergeant signals the barkeep. “Leave the bottle.” He liked to drink, liked to drink free, liked to drink whiskey he couldn’t afford. “You can expense account it.”

“Fucking fine. Now what do you got?”

“So, this fella walks into the precinct. I’m on duty. At my age. Can you believe it? Anyway, this guy walks in and says there’s a body in his apartment.” Murto pulls out a copy of the police report and Tonlaghn starts flipping through it. “So, the boys go up and it’s a bit of a bloodbath. Only, the guy who walks in is spotless. He stabs the guy sixteen times, takes a bath, puts on a linen suit, and strolls in, real casual. Anyway, he confesses he did it. So, we take his statement, right? Send the file up

the chain. Now there's an old lady, neighbor of his—  
”

“Who? The deceased?”

“What? No. The walk in. Anyway, she says the dead guy threatened to kill the walk in.”

“Okay.”

“Okay? This guy is claiming self-defense. He didn't have a mark on him. Plus, the dead guy raped his girlfriend, some actress from the television.”

“Oh, yeah? Who?”

“I don't know, some broad. Either way, how is that a straight drop?”

“What do you know about the guy?”

“Which guy?”

“Both of 'em”

“Hey, I'm just a police officer.”

Tonlaghn laughs. “You really don't like the DA, huh?”

“You like everyone you work with?”

“No, but I'm not trying to jam them up either. Okay, I'll look into it. Got to go.” Tonlaghn takes the bottle but not before he pours Murto another drink.

comedian: gotham comedy club,  
manhattan, new york

“When is too soon? You ever think about that? Comedians, we think about that shit all the time. The Unabomber is caught and the first thing you think is ‘thank fuck for that,’ right? ‘I can open my mail now.’ The first thing we think is ‘when can I start rolling out my Kaczynski material?’ It’s a tight rope. You wait too long and it’s not a hot topic; other comedians, braver comedians, have already said all the shit that you wrote down in your joke pad; their courage is stealing your better shit. Problem is, if you go too soon, you’re a monster. Maybe not as big a monster as the Unabomber but you’re pretty fucking sick . . . Well, let me tell you something: comedians are all sick. We have these jokes all ready to go. And maybe we’re not even waiting for him to be caught to start using them. Most of us are just waiting for one comedian to dip his toe in the water first, see if he gets burned. If he comes out relatively unscathed, it’s a race. Take the Jake Gyllenhaal thing. I call it a thing because ‘was it a suicide attempt or was it an accidental overdose?’ And that matters. If it was a drug overdose and he didn’t mean to kill himself, then we can go at him straight away. And hard. With a suicide attempt you

have to wait a little longer. But how much longer? It's like quadratic equations for the morally flexible.”

The crowd laughs. The sound mutes. Nick Drake's Pink Moon plays over the rest of his set.