

The NYC Bad Hand

By Rob Wheeler

SAMPLE

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FADE IN:

CREDITS START:

EXT. ESTABLISHING - MODERN NEW YORK CITY -- CLEAR MORNING

An eagle's view of numerous sun-sparkled, high-rise structures.

The view closes on the top of one high-rise structure, to a well-designed, impressive sign -- C and N Investments.

The view moves towards a window of C and N Investments - logo on wall is of C and N. Under logo are the words - "Harvest The Money". A dozen cubicles, sophisticated sales staff on phones.

CUT TO:

EXT. ESTABLISHING -- OLD NEW YORK CITY -- LATER

A seagull's view of numerous low-rise stubborn, time-worn, brick, brownstone and the like structures, remnants of yester-century.

CREDITS END:

CUT TO:

INT. CLUTTERED SLUM OFFICE/APARTMENT -- NIGHT

SAM MARTIN (30s), muscular, dark clothes, black leather jacket, dark beard and attitude, stands feet apart, looks like he knows how to use the machine gun that hangs across his chest. There's a tattoo of dark flames around Sam's right wrist.

Sam drops a drinking glass onto the dirty tiled floor - it shatters.

IAN SUFFIELD, 23, small, long greasy hair, in worn bargain bin clothes, startles, spins around on his office chair, his attention diverted from one of his three computer monitors by the sound, sees the broken glass and Sam standing over it.

IAN

How did you find me?

Sam shrugs.

IAN (CONT'D)

I wasn't serious. A joke.

SAM
Not everyone's laughing.

IAN
(pleading)
What do you want from me?

SAM
Information.

IAN
I'll tell you anything you
want, don't . . .

SAM
(interrupting)
Who have you shared your
information with?

IAN
Information? What infor . . .

Sam slaps Ian.

SAM
C and N Investments
information!!! One doesn't
hack an institution without
consequences!

IAN
Nobody. Honest, nobody!

Sam looks Ian in the eyes.

SAM
(sarcastic)
Right.

Sam brings muzzle of gun to Ian's face.

SAM (CONT'D)
Tell the truth and I'll send you
on a free trip.

IAN
Trip?

SAM
A holiday.

IAN

Where?

SAM

(enjoying it)
Disneyland.

Ian fears up.

Sam takes full syringe in a clear container from a pocket,
shows it to Ian, puts it back into his pocket.

SAM (CONT'D)

Otherwise, it's artillery pain
time. About fifty well-aimed
shots would prove useful.

IAN

(whines)
No!

SAM

I start at toes, slowly work
my way up. So?!!!

Ian is terrified.

IAN

(desperate)
Philip Brock! I emailed him,
and and . . .

SAM

(slaps Ian's face)
And what?

IAN

Sent him a memory stick with
what I downloaded.

Pauses, takes in the information.

SAM

Tell me about Mr. Brock.

IAN

He's sort of of of a friend,
an an investment guy.

The barrel of the machine gun stops on Ian's forehead.

SAM
Accomplice?

IAN
(hesitant)
N-n-no, not then.

SAM
Go on.

IAN
He works in investments.
Thought he'd know its value.

SAM
Then what?!

IAN
I wanted him in on the scam,
but . . .

SAM
But?

IAN
I sent it yesterday. He hasn't
gotten back to me.

Sam looks Ian in the eyes, appears satisfied.

Sam hands the syringe to Ian.

SAM
Disneyland time.

IAN
Oh no, I'm s-s-sorry. I
promise, I'll . . .

Sam points gun at Ian's feet.

SAM
Mickey's waiting.

Ian takes the syringe, starts to inject himself.

CUT TO:

INT. CHUCK'S LIVINGROOM -- MORNING

Camera pans living room -- sparse, cheap furniture, not what a man who values comfort would choose.

A shelf of a dozen dusty mostly large martial arts trophies.

The carpet has a nearly empty open Jack Daniels bottle on its side . . . move via carpet to a gaudy necktie strewn out. A bra on floor reaches toward the bedroom.

INT. CHUCK'S BEDROOM -- LATER

CHUCK KILWALSKI (35ish), an XL, not XXL body, muscular, physically fit, nude, full head of hair, asleep face down on unmade bed.

Beside Chuck, also nude, is . . .

DAPHNE JACKSON (30ish), medium length black hair, athletic, beautiful body with intelligent eyes. A stunning beauty. (bra owner).

A cellular phone is on a night table by the bed.

NARRATOR CHUCK (V.O.)

(during the scene)

The inert male body is me,
Chuck Kilwalski, the ace in Ace
of Spades Private
Investigations Agency. After a
dozen years of marriage, my
Alice found herself a hedge
fund lover and left me flat.
Cheating spouses are much of my
business, but I was oblivious
at home. Daphne and I came
together a couple months ago,
barely afloat ships in the
night, torpedoed, nearly sunk
by false love. We knew we'd be
good together, but it wouldn't
last.

INT. CHUCK'S BEDROOM -- LATER

As Daphne quickly slips into her New York Police Sargent's uniform we see more of the sparse apartment.

Fully dressed, Daphne reaches for Chuck's pants slung over a chair, hand finds a leather belt, two holsters under the pants with two snub-nosed .38 revolvers, removes weapons, examines them, smiles, points them to an imaginary target.

 DAPHNE
 (softly)
 Bang. Bang.

Daphne places the guns into their holsters, moves to the bedroom doorway, turns back to Chuck, smiles, moves to Chuck, gives him a tender cheek kiss, EXITS the bedroom.

Chuck's cellular phone rings, the old-fashioned annoying ring, six times.

He stirs, groggily grabs the phone, stuffs it under the mattress, rings are muffled, then stop, goes back to sleep.

CUT TO:

EXT. OLD NEW YORK CITY STREET -- MORNING

A slow cruise of a shabby urban street -- could be from a 30s film noir era -- dark, trashy, general degradation -- to a rundown building -- down it's time-worn stairwell, to the weathered front door, a basement office door -- "ACE OF SPADES PRIVATE INVESTIGATIONS AGENCY".

There is a depiction of a spade from the playing card on or near the door.

INT. ACE PI OFFICE -- LATER

SALLY, (25ish), is big boned attractive, athletic, but not fat, with Brooklyn accent, sits on a swivel oak chair, feet up on an aged-scarred oak desk that holds a monitor.

High behind the chair is a small, never been cleaned, barred window to street.

Sally's dressed in blue jeans, plaid blouse, has her blonde hair in a messy ponytail.

Sally eats from a bag of cheesies, reads from a chunk of pulp fiction -- "All My Lovers" -- a hardcover book with a romance novel cover pasted over it - peeled cover shows a little of the original cover.

A hall tree by door, crooked on a wall hangs a mirror that lost a fight to a right hook, two narrow triangular shards either side of point of impact missing.

On a different wall is a framed Private Investigator Certificate with Chuck Kilwalski's name, beside it is a framed cheap print.

NARRATOR CHUCK (V.O.)

(during the above scene)

Sally's the daughter of a buddy. Sergeant Jack Morris, widower, took a slug at a drug bust, died, but not before asking me, the cop who saw him die, to watch out for her. Tragic . . . Something like that sticks with a man, so I give her a place to hang out while she furthers her education. Does office stuff for a percentage. Lately I've noticed she's developing an irritating knack for business.

Narration stops. A rat appears on the floor, Sally sees it, throws a cheesie toward it, rat moves to the cheesie, eats the it, Sally throws another, brings the rat closer, the rat moves to it.

Sally reaches into a corner, gabs a club that looks like an oversized croquet mallet, whaps the rat with it, rakes the rat to her with the mallet, takes it by its tale, drops it in the waste basket without taking feet from desk.

Sally picks up her book, starts to read, black 50s phone on the desk RINGS LOUD in its original voice.

Seven torturous rings, reluctantly she puts down her book, answers the phone.

An unintended hint of superiority in her voice, result of a troubled past.

SALLY

Ace PI. First and best. (pause)
Yeah . . . Yeah . . . Yeah. I
know. No, Mrs. Wilson, there's
no reason to come in now. I'll
have Chuck call you as soon as
possible. (pause while
listening) checks her watch.
Yeah, I know it's past eleven!
(insulted pause) You don't
understand! (frustrated pause)
It's his Daphne morning!

Sally slams the receiver onto its indestructible base, continues
to read her pulp fiction.

CUT TO:

EXT. ESTABLISHING - MODERN NEW YORK CITY -- CLEAR DAY

An eagle's view of numerous sun-sparkled, high-rise structures.
The view closes on the top of one high-rise structure, to a
well-designed, impressive sign -- C and N Investments.

INT. HIGHRISE BUSINESS OFFICE -- LATER

High above the chaos is a state-of-the-art, peaceful office
inhabited by two executives in expensive suits.

JACK CARSON (40ish) sits behind a massive desk that has three
monitors. Jack's a big man who exhibits equal amounts of superior
intelligence and intensity.

BILL NELSON (40ish) sits beside him, is slight, with a casual,
laid-back disposition.

Carson checks his watch.

CARSON

(abrupt)

What's keeping him?

NELSON

(checks watch)

Five minutes. (shrugs)

BRIAN JONES (50ish) rushes into the office, out of breath --
large man in a cheap business suit, less refined than Jack or
Bill.

Brian's face attempts to hide doubt, worry.

BRIAN
Been delayed. Sorry. Really
sorry.

A suspicious look from Carson.

CARSON
Anything we need to be
concerned about?

BRIAN
(hesitant)
Well, yes. I think so.

CARSON
What?

BRIAN
There was an extortion
attempt.

Carson and Nelson are noticeably affected by the news.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
(panicked)
It was just an attempt!!

NELSON
Details?

BRIAN
A hacker got through the . . .

CARSON
(interrupting)
Everything's encrypted!

BRIAN
He exploited a vulnerable area.
The system indicated
information has been
downloaded onto a memory
stick.

CARSON
Critical information?!!
Information that can be used
against us?!!!

BRIAN
I suspect so.

CARSON
You idiot!!!

NELSON
A blackmailer?!!

BRIAN
Yeah. He left a phone message
saying he wanted ten thousand
for the memory stick.

Carson and Nelson look at each other, relieved.

CARSON
Amateur.

NELSON
Absolutely.

CARSON
(to Jones)
You assured us it couldn't
happen!

BRIAN
At that time, yes, it couldn't,
but now . . . hackers develop
new tools, techniques, go at
areas we've never thought
about. But it's okay. We've re-
encrypted everything. We're
good now.

CARSON
What about the amateur?

NELSON
Can you track him?

BRIAN
He's been tracked and dealt with.

NELSON

Good.

BRIAN

It's been mostly contained.

CARSON

What?!!!

JONES

The prick had a friend.

CARSON

Incriminating friend?

BRIAN

A Philip Brock. It seems the hacker sent the memory stick to Brock for safe keeping.

CARSON

Get Sam Martin and his crew on it. See to it Brock and anyone he's talked to are silenced! Do you understand?!!!

BRIAN

Absolutely.

CARSON

And destroy that damn stick or I'll see to it you'll be lucky to get a job as a crossing guard in this or any other town!

BRIAN

No problem.

CARSON

You're sure?!!!

BRIAN

Absolutely.

CARSON

Get out!!

CUT TO:

INT. CHUCK'S APARTMENT BEDROOM -- MORNING

Chuck, weary, dark eyes, laboriously dresses, slips on his navy sport jacket over his white shirt and shoulder holstered .38s.

His home phone rings from living room. He exits the bedroom.

INT. CHUCK'S APARTMENT LIVINGROOM -- LATER

Chuck grabs the phone, notices the number, smiles, moves to sofa, slips on shoes as he answers phone.

CHUCK

Hi Doughnut. I'm running a little behind.

SALLY (V.O.)

It's not little.

CHUCK

What?

SALLY (V.O.)

It's average.

CHUCK

I'll be right down.

INT. ACE PI OFFICE -- LATER

Sally reads from her pulp fiction behind desk with feet on it.

Chuck ENTERS, still exhausted, collapses onto the love seat, rubs face and hair tries to wake up.

Sally pulls open a desk drawer, snatches a bottle of water from it, possibly Perrier, throws it at Chuck.

SALLY

Hydrate.

He catches it with one hand, takes a long swig from the bottle.

CHUCK

(looks her in eyes)
Average?

SALLY

(shrugs)

You're not a fat horse's ass!
Not yet.

CHUCK

Doughnut, for most people, fat
or horse would have been
enough. You might have noticed
a horses' ass is fat, so fat
horse's ass is overkill.

SALLY

I'm not fond of underkill.
Besides, I'm not most people.

CHUCK

Noticed. You gotta stop
reading romance trash.

SALLY

Sounds a tad controlling?
Employee abuse?

CHUCK

They're twisting your mind.

SALLY

All minds are twisted, some more
than others.

CHUCK

Just saying, if you intend to
become a serious journalist
you need to learn to seek out
and report facts, not fantasy.

SALLY

Hu.

CHUCK

You're taking journalism,
right?

SALLY

Right.

Close on Sally as she smiles.

DISSOLVE TO:

FLASHBACK

INT. SMALL URBAN CLASSROOM -- NIGHT

Sally sits among ten students.

On the white board -- "Private Investigations 101".

Under it is a crude drawing of a .38 caliber handgun about the size of a mid-size TV.

Under it is a drawing of a cartridge that would be used in that size gun.

WILBUR WHITE, 70ish, conducts the class. There are six handguns on the desk.

WHITE

Let's review a few items.
Let's see. You have covered
required physical defense
instruction, so are looking
forward to the lethal force
aspects, right?

No response from the class.

WHITE (CONT'D)

Right?!!

CLASS

Right!!

WHITE

Good.

White points to the illustration of the .38.

WHITE (CONT'D)

What's this?

Silence from class.

WHITE (CONT'D)

Come on. This is the easy part.

CLASS MEMBER

A gun?

WHITE

Wrong. It's a .38 caliber
revolver handgun. We need to
be specific when dealing with
firearms.

White points to the illustration of the cartridge.

WHITE (CONT'D)

What's this?

DIFFERENT MEMBER

It's a bullet.

WHITE

Wrong. What is it?!!

Silence from class.

ANOTHER MEMBER (MALE)

A vibrator?

Class laughs.

SALLY

It's a cartridge.

WHITE

Right. The four components of
an ammunition cartridge are
the case, primer, powder and
bullet. The casing is the
container that holds all the
components together. The
primer is an explosive
chemical compound that ignites
the gunpowder when struck by a
firing pin.

END OF FLASHBACK

CUT TO:

INT. ACE PI OFFICE -- LATER

Chuck is on the loveseat and Sally behind the desk as before.

Sally's face is placid, not fully arrived from reminiscing.

CHUCK
Hello, Sally. You here?

Sally snaps out of it.

SALLY
You missed a bunch of stuff.

CHUCK
Important stuff?

SALLY
If you want to stay in
business.

CHUCK
Doughnut, I'm detecting an
accusatory tone?

SALLY
Totally!

CHUCK
Just wanted to be clear.

SALLY
You've got some catching up to
do.

CHUCK
To what?

SALLY
Rats!

CHUCK
If you mean collections
people, say collections
people! If I'm out, don't let
them take anything.

SALLY
Furry ones.

CHUCK
Oh.

SALLY

We've got 'em. Big too. Called exterminator. Comin' by in a couple days. You want me to have them take care of the floor above?

CHUCK

My apartment?!

SALLY

Yeah.

CHUCK

No! Although, yes, better send 'em up. That everything?

SALLY

Rachel Wilson, suspicious wife, wants you to track down her after work wandering husband.

CHUCK

Wilson? (racks brain) A clue?

SALLY

She was in last week.

CHUCK

(trying to remember)
Vaguely.

SALLY

Flat chest.

CHUCK

(flash of remembrance)
Right.

SALLY

I could make an appointment for eleven tomorrow. Can you be in by then?

CHUCK

(tries to remember)
Hold on!

SALLY

What?

CHUCK

What's her name, uhm, you know
the other one, the shitty one?

SALLY

Last week's disaster?

CHUCK

Semi-disaster!

SALLY

Millie?

CHUCK

Yeah, Millie Green!

Close on Chuck as he remembers.

DISSOLVE TO:

FLASHBACK:

INT. ACE PI OFFICE -- DAY

MILLIE GREEN, (40), a tall, well-built and dressed woman with average lips, holds a folder in front of Chuck's desk.

Chuck sits behind the desk. Millie pulls photos out, looks at them, throws photos and folder at Chuck.

Sally sprawls in a corner love seat, reads from her bulky romance novel.

MILLIE

I paid for pictures of my
husband's slut, not for shots
of monkeys, penguins, and
cheap art!

CHUCK

My camera doesn't function on
the fantasy level. It shoots
what it sees. When it sees
monkeys, penguins, and

Rembrandts that's what it'll
give me.

MILLIE
(belligerent)
Hu!

CHUCK
The guy goes to the zoo
mostly, sometimes the museum.

MILLIE
He got wise to you, led you
where he wanted you to go!

CHUCK
Mrs. Green, listen, I've been
in business, for, for . . .

Chuck looks to Sally who reads from her novel.

SALLY
(without looking up)
Five and a half years, give or
take a lifetime.

CHUCK
Well over five years.
Sometimes facts don't match
expectations, but that's not
my problem, it's yours.

MILLIE
Chuckie Baby, I've given you
all you're getting get out of
me, so you might want to
reconsider who's got the
problem.

Millie throws the folder at Chuck, slams the door as she EXITS.
Chuck is frozen in the moment. Sally looks up from reading.

SALLY
What sayeth yonder dead in the
water patsy?

Chuck grabs the folder jumps up.

CHUCK
Ahhhhha!!!

Chuck rushes out the door with the folder.

The SOUND OF A WOMAN'S SCREAM.

Chuck ENTERS without the folder. Shows a half dozen \$100 bills.

SALLY
Did yu smack her?

CHUCK
No.

SALLY
I would have. Stab her?

Stabbing gesture from Sally.

CHUCK
No.

SALLY
Shoot her?
(makes handgun with hand)
Pow!

CHUCK
No.

SALLY
What?

CHUCK
You heard the beautiful sound of
reconsidering.

SALLY
What'd it take?

CHUCK
Told her I'd take the money she
had on her as full payment.

SALLY
Rob her. That'll work.

CHUCK

Said without payment I'm a
public eye. Hand-deliver my
findings to her husband.

SALLY

Tact trumps force?!

CHUCK

(srugs)
When necessary.

END OF FLASHBACK

CUT TO:

INT. ACE PI OFFICE -- LATER

Chuck sits on the loveseat and Sally behind the desk as before.

CHUCK

She tried to stiff me.

SALLY

(smiles)
Stiff has other . . .
imaginings. Say hi to Daphne
for me.

CHUCK

Daphne?

Chuck jumps up, frustrated Sally is aware of Daphne.

CHUCK (CONT'D)

Don't you have office business
to take care of?

SALLY

What'll I tell miss flat chest
when she calls?!!

CHUCK

(pause, remembering)
What about her lips?

SALLY

What?

CHUCK

Rachel. Her lips. Lips! Can you remember? Average, full . . . what?

SALLY

(thinks back)

Razor.

CHUCK

Millie lips. Tell Razor Lips I'm too busy detecting, uh (thinking) insurance, that's it, insurance fraud for some of the country's biggest firms.

SALLY

Bills are pilein' up. What'll I do?

CHUCK

(scratches, head thinking) Yeah. Uh. Pay internet, phone and I'm pretty sure the utilities.

SALLY

What about the plastic?

CHUCK

Plastic can wait. Anything else?

SALLY

Oh, yeah. A guy called, sounded pissed.

CHUCK

Drunk pissed or regular pissed?

SALLY

Drunk pissed. Wouldn't leave a name. Mumbled something about insurance, investments, hard to tell. Said he'd be in touch. We could use the business.

CUT TO:

EXT. TIMEWORN URBAN SIDEWALK AND STREET -- NIGHT

Sheets of rain pound the derelict area.

PHILIP BROCK (30s), a little man in an expensive dark suit, nervous scurries down a deserted sidewalk. The vacant, rain-soaked street glistens under incandescent light from time-battered, sporadically active fixtures.

Philip clutches a wind-damaged umbrella and a beat-up briefcase, stops, warily looks behind, hurries on, turns right onto the sidewalk of an intersecting street. To his left is the darkened street, to his right the grimy brick wall of a building.

Walks faster, a quick glance back, starts to run. A block of cars parked on the opposite side of the street face him, none on Philip's side.

Struggles to take his car starter from a pocket, points it at the parked cars ahead, desperately pushes unlock button three times, lights on a parked car half a block ahead flash on and off three times, relief on Philip's face.

Headlights on a black minivan parked behind the flashing lights car snap on. Philip slams to a stop, a second of disbelief then terror. The minivan screeches out, across the street, roars after its prey.

Philip turns, runs toward the corner he just turned, now fifty feet away, a grey windowless door in the brick wall, tries handle, locked, tries to run, falls, gets up, runs.

Minivan jumps onto sidewalk, a mechanical black leopard destroys a mailbox, trash barrels, bears down on terror-stricken Philip. He throws the umbrella but not the briefcase, a desperate dash toward the corner, is almost there . . .

The van slams Philip into the dirty brick wall, bounces off the sidewalk to the street, hisses in the wet, disappears into its urban jungle.

A look of disbelief as Philip's crushed, bleeding body slides down the wall to the sidewalk, sprawls crumpled at the foot of the wall.

A large MAN, his features in shadow, wears a dark overcoat gets out of an adjacent parked car, quick steps to the body, takes the dead man's wallet and briefcase, returns to the car, starts it, drives away.

CUT TO:

INT. ACE PI OFFICE -- MORNING

Sally sits behind the desk, reads one of her romance novels. Chuck ENTERS dressed in a worn blue jacket, mostly white shirt, open collar with loosely tied orange and turquoise striped tie.

Sally looks up from reading, sees Chuck, jumps up.

CHUCK
That bad?

SALLY
Not for Mardi Gras.

Sally yanks open a desk drawer, pulls out a suitable tie from a bunch, throws it at Chuck.

CHUCK
Doughnut!

SALLY
What?

CHUCK
(yielding)
Colorblindness is a curse.

SALLY
(smiles)
One of many.

Chuck exchanges ties looking into the partly shattered mirror for the next dialogue.

CHUCK
Curses?

SALLY
Blind nesses.

CHUCK
(not hearing her)
Losing one sense makes the
rest keener. I can hear a pin
drop . . .

Chuck pulls the partially tied tie apart.

CHUCK (CONT'D)
(having trouble with tie)
. . . but can't . . . Ahhha!

Chuck undoes tie, starts to re-tie it.

SALLY
You need a better mirror.

CHUCK
This one's got sentimental value.

SALLY
(studies him)
Why are you here?

CHUCK
(a quizzical look)
I detect! Live to detect.

Sally pulls a once crumpled typed letter from the garbage pail,
holds it open for him to view.

CHUCK
Doughnut's getting personal.

Sally drops it into the waste basket and pulls another crumpled
letter from it. Reads it to herself, then . . .

SALLY
Says here you can teach
martial arts in Tuscan and
make well over double what
you're bringing in here.
Another wants you in London,
England.

CHUCK
Part of your job is not going
through garbage.

Sally crumples the paper, drops it in the garbage then brings a printout of a news story from a desk drawer.

Heading reads "Martial Arts Student Freed After Killing Two."

There is a photo of a much younger Sam Martin with the article.

SALLY

Sam Martin?

Chuck stops tying his tie, backfist toward the mirror, stops an inch before contact.

SALLY (CONT'D)

Paper says he got off.

CHUCK

Old news!!

SALLY

Says Sam was one of your students?

CHUCK

So?

SALLY

(something)

Nothing.

Chuck finishes tying the tie.

CHUCK

How did you find out?

SALLY

Internet junkie. So, what's the story?

CHUCK

(mildly angry)

Arresting officer was an off-duty cadet; didn't read him his rights and had a few drinks. (pause, normal tone) I'm no longer a sensei. I'm a PI, separating the chafe from the wheat. My kind of people are here. My work uplifts

mankind.

SALLY

Not to mention woman kind or
would that be kind women?

CHUCK

(frustrated)

My dear Difficult-nut, how can
you manage the business, your
schooling, and still have time
to pry into my past?

SALLY

(smug)

Lucky you.

Blank "what" look from Chuck. Wants an answer.

SALLY (CONT'D)

I'm a multi-tasker.

CHUCK

Probably a good thing.

SALLY

If I'm Doughnut, what are you?

CHUCK

Donno. Uh, how about Boss-nut?
Any calls?

SALLY

Razor lips.

CHUCK

We're not that broke. There's
four ways to acquire money -
find it, earn it, steal it, or
win it. It's time for the
latter.

CUT TO:

INT. BLACKJACK TABLE IN CASINO -- NIGHT

Chuck is one of four players, nice pile of chips in front of
him, gets a blackjack, rakes in more chips, indicates to the
dealer to cash out, about to leave.

Dealer gives a gorgeous blonde near Chuck the eye which tells her he wants her to keep Chuck at the table.

The blonde pushes into Chuck with a drink and ample boobs.

Chuck smiles grabs his chips, dodges her but not the drink, gulps it as he slips past her.

INT. AREA AROUND CASINO COAT CHECK -- LATER

Chuck staggers drunk between the coat check area and the front door, turns to exit the casino, spots two tough guys loitering at the entrance, hides a sly smile, turns back to the coat check woman. Her eyes undress him.

COATCHECK WOMAN

Had enough?

CHUCK

(slurs)

Night's young.

COATCHECK WOMAN

(she wants him)

I'm gettin' younger lookin' at ya.

CHUCK

(slurs)

Got some dancing to do.

COATCHECK WOMAN

(encouraged)

You and me?

CHUCK

(shakes head, slurs,
shrugs)

Parkin' lot polka.

Chuck smiles, staggers toward the exit.

EXT. CASINO PARKING LOT -- LATER

Chuck staggers drunk toward cars.

One of the toughs approaches Chuck from the front, the other from the rear.

They charge. Chuck smiles, ducks low - rear tough goes over Chuck into the tough attacking from the front.

Embarrassed, the toughs scramble up. Chuck smiles.

CHUCK
(to the thugs)
Listen for the music.

The thugs give each other questioning looks, move at Chuck.

Thug one holds Chuck from behind while thug two administers a couple punches, causes Chuck's nose to bleed. Chuck jams his heel down hard on the thug one's foot, causes him to release Chuck. Thug one hops around holding his foot.

Chuck wipes his bloody nose, smiles, fake drunk staggers around, out of the way of a right hook from thug two, then lightening quick, Chuck lands a turning kick to thug two's mid-section, taking him down gasping for air.

Chuck staggers toward thug one, smiling all the while. Frustrated, thug one charges Chuck. Chuck sends a front kick to the attacker's face, knocking him flat and out.

Thug two catches his breath, gets up, charges, but Chuck's spinning back kick slams into the side of his face, knocking out teeth and blood and him to the pavement unconscious.

CHUCK
(disappointed)
When the music stops, dance is done.

CUT TO:

INT. LOSERS' BAR -- NIGHT

Dark, sparse, the kind of bar that won't die because it's got a trickle-down supply of losers.

Chuck ENTERS, abrasions, mostly dried bloody nose, strides toward the bar, crashes up to the bar, upper body rests on it.

JOE (60), a typical sympathetic bartender to his special few, ignores customers when he sees Chuck's desperate eyes, shifts to Chuck, pours him a triple Jack Daniels, puts it in front of Chuck.

Chuck's hand shakes as he tries to drink the booze, gets most of it down.

JOE
Chuck, what happened?

CHUCK
Joe, chill. It's nothin'.

JOE
Police trouble?

CHUCK
Adrenalin trouble. Too much of it.

Chuck finishes his drink.

CHUCK (CONT'D)
A couple drinks and twenty minutes, I'll be fine.

JOE
Can't sleep?

CHUCK
Dancin' lessons. Given' dancin' lessons.

Chuck pulls a wad of thirty hundred-dollar bills from his pocket, slams it on the bar.

JOE
(points to money)
Doin' well.

CHUCK
Yeah.
(holds up glass)
Another.

Joe pours another drink. Chuck downs it with a steadier hand.

JOE
A dance coach with dough.
(shrugs) I don't see a
problem.

CHUCK
I like the work.

JOE
Most of my clientele hate what
they do. You're lucky.

CHUCK
(chuckles)
I coulda killed two guys
tonight, guys who deserve to
die. Had to stop myself.

Shocked look from Joe.

CHUCK (CONT'D)
My body needs exercise.

JOE
(a concerned look)
Get a civilized hobby.

CHUCK
Hobby?
(holds up glass for a refill)
How about this one?

Joe fills Chuck's glass.

HARRY STONE, (45), intense, dressed in an expensive business
suit, slides in beside Chuck, his hand near Chuck's wad of
bills.

Joe slides the dough in front of Chuck.

JOE
(to Chuck)
Put it away.

Chuck smiles, hands Joe two hundred dollar bills, pockets the rest.

HARRY
I don't want your money.

CHUCK
Oh?

Harry turns to the rest of the sparsely populated room, mostly losers drinking to forget, turns back to Chuck reassured.

HARRY
I'm Harry Stone. Are you Chuck
Kilwalski?

CHUCK
Yep.

HARRY
I called your office, left a
message.

CHUCK
Right.

HARRY
Are you okay?

CHUCK
Yep.

HARRY
You're a mess.

Chuck wipes his bloody nose with his sleeve.

CHUCK
A little trouble. A wash and
clean shirt, I'm good. What
can Ace Private Investigations
Agency do for you?

HARRY
Are you interested in new
business?

CHUCK
PI business?

HARRY
Sort of.

Chuck assesses Harry's attire, tries to figure him out.

JOE
Might take your mind off crazy
stuff.

Joe moves to the other end of the bar to service customers.

CHUCK
(looks closely at Harry)
We'll talk at the office.

CUT TO:

INT. WORKOUT GYM -- NIGHT

Sam Martin spars with a partner in a boxing ring, both with headgear.

It's an even fight for the first ten seconds, then the partner fast becomes Sam's human punching bag.

Sam gives no mercy, takes his sparring partner apart for the last ten seconds.

Brian Jones, in a suit, ENTERS, watches the action, motions for Sam to cut it short with a throat cutting action.

Sam Martin knocks out his partner, moves to Brian Jones.

INT. WORKOUT GYM HALLWAY -- LATER

Brian Jones hands Sam Martin a brown envelope.

Sam nods, enters a dressing room with the envelope as Jones moves along the hallway.

CUT TO:

INT. ACE PI OFFICE -- NIGHT

Chuck sits behind the desk, his feet square on top of the desk. Harry sits tense on the loveseat.

CHUCK
What've yu got?

Harry looks to the sparse office, pops up, a disturbed thought registers on his face, paces, wrings his hands.

HARRY
You're private, right?

CHUCK
Ace of Spades Private
Investigations. I'm the ace.

HARRY
That's good, very good.

CHUCK
So, what's . . .

HARRY
(interrupting)
You're not connected to other
. . . other businesses . . .
insurance . . . investments?

CHUCK
Just me and my associate. The
two of us. We invest in
ourselves.

HARRY
What I'm dealing with is . . .
it's sensitive, very . . .
there must not . . .

Harry scoots toward the exit.

HARRY (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, maybe I've . . .

CHUCK
I'll work with or for you, but
I'll need a retainer.

Harry stops, turns.

HARRY
Retainer?

CHUCK

A grand.

Harry looks seriously at Chuck, studies him.

HARRY

A thousand dollars?

CHUCK

Yeah.

Harry shrugs, turns, sits on the loveseat, more relaxed.

HARRY

Sounds reasonable.

CHUCK

Wayward spouse?

HARRY

No.

CHUCK

A misplaced child from your past?

HARRY

No again.

CHUCK

You could be what every good PI wishes for and dreads.

HARRY

What's that?

CHUCK

A client with money in a life or death situation.

HARRY

Bingo!

CHUCK

You're serious?

HARRY

(hesitates)

Have you heard of Carson and Nelson Investments?

CHUCK

People with money like them.

HARRY

A stranger, Philip Brock,
called me, told me he got an
email from an acquaintance
with hacking skills. This
acquaintance hacked into C and
N.

CHUCK

(impressed)

C and N?

HARRY

A day or so later the hacker,
Ian, dies of a drug overdose.
Then Philip receives a package
from Ian, mailed the day
before Ian's death.

CHUCK

Philip thought Ian was
murdered for the package and
terrified he'd be next? Is
that it?

HARRY

Mostly. Last night's TV news
reported Philip was killed by
a hit and run driver.

CHUCK

That's it?

Harry nods.

CHUCK (CONT'D)

What was the package?

HARRY

A memory stick with damaging
info on C and N. Philip said
he hid it in a safe place.

Harry looks intently at Chuck.

CHUCK

You could be a player.

HARRY

A player?

CHUCK

Playing me. Three hotshots
hack an investment firm, try
blackmail, things go wrong,
two die, and the third, you,
run to me to save your ass.

Harry pulls ID out of his pocket, shows it to Chuck.

HARRY

I'm an independent fraud
investigator, something like
what you do, but I work
exclusively with numbers. I've
been working the same beat for
ten years.

CHUCK

Okay.

HARRY

C and N controls about fifteen
billion in investments!

CHUCK

(impressed)
Fifteen billion?

HARRY

At least! Pensions,
institutions, even governments
have invested in C and N.
They're an important pillar in
this nation's financial
stability.

CHUCK

Why come to me? There are more
prominent investigating
services you could have gone
to. Bodyguards, etc.

HARRY

Most businesses are interconnected. People who invest don't like hearing bad news, tend to kill the well-intentioned messenger. I've heard good things about you from a trusted source.

CHUCK

There've been a few wins.

Harry jumps up, a new idea, nervous paces.

HARRY

The SEC meeting! The Securities and Exchange Committee meets in a week. I'm scheduled to speak on a different issue. For years I've suspected irregularities but have no proof. Will you help me find the memory stick so I can report on C and N?

CHUCK

You're missing something.

HARRY

What?

CHUCK

C and N knows about Philip's call to you. You'll need protecting.

HARRY

Right, that too.

CHUCK

(pause while thinking)
As it happens, my associate and I are available.

HARRY

Good.

CHUCK

How did you find me?

HARRY

Called your office. Your secretary told me where you'd be.

CHUCK

Sally's getting too efficient. Does anyone else know about the hacked information.

HARRY

Nobody I'm aware of.

CHUCK

Translation?

HARRY

Philip said I'm the only one he confided in.

CHUCK

That everything?

HARRY

My daughter knows.

CHUCK

Wife?

HARRY

I'm a widower. Car accident five years ago. My daughter Angela's my only family.

CHUCK

She's got friends, boyfriend, acquaintances? A blabbermouth?

HARRY

Angela will keep my suspicions to herself.

CHUCK

Why?

HARRY

She thinks I'm paranoid, so doesn't want anyone knowing.

CHUCK

You're not?

HARRY

Truthfully, I'm afraid for my
life!

CHUCK

Paranoid people say things
like that.

Chuck looks closely into Harry's eyes.

HARRY

What do you see?

CHUCK

Mostly truth. I'll need a two-
grand retainer and three
hundred a day, plus expenses.

HARRY

You said a grand.

CHUCK

Double the client, double . . .

The sound of BREAKING GLASS.

The muzzle of an automatic weapon sticks through the window
behind Chuck.

A SEVEN SECOND ROAR OF THE AUTOMATIC WEAPON FIRING. The muzzle
smokes and burns rounds into the room, shredding wood, walls, no
thing is left untouched by its ferocity!

During the rampage Chuck pulls Harry to the wall and floor behind
him, grabs Sally's novel from the desk, opens it, uses it to grab
the barrel of the weapon and yank it in through the barred
window, throws it on the desk.

It's a British Sten gun with the clip on the bottom, used in the
movie "Where Eagles Dare".

Chuck draws both .38s, points them at window.

The sound of footsteps running, car door opens, closes, vehicle
starts, drives away.

Chuck checks Harry. Both are good.

CHUCK
. . . the fun. One of us has a
dangerous enemy . . . or . . .

HARRY
W-w-what?

CHUCK
Our exterminator has upped his
game.

HARRY
Haaave yyyou got a ddddrink?

CUT TO:

INT. ACE PI OFFICE -- MORNING

Sally sits at the desk, feet up, reads her novel, machine gun on her lap as a painter patches bullet holes in walls. The window is boarded up.

Chuck, has abrasions, ENTERS, gingerly pushes the partially shredded door and it falls to the floor, walks in, assesses damage. Sally notices his battered appearance.

SALLY
Did you knock the chip off
your shoulder?

CHUCK
Chip?

SALLY
Nope.

CHUCK
I see you checked the closet.

SALLY
Lookin' for a broom. No broom.
(holds up machine gun)
You have a firearms accident?

CHUCK
We'll need a door. Better make
it steel, solid steel. We've
got a new client.

SALLY
Public enemy number one.

CHUCK
(smiles)
There's a vest in the back of
the closet.

SALLY
Vest?

CHUCK
Goes with the hardware. It'll
stop what's been comin' in the
window.

SALLY
Sure.
(to painter)
Fred. That enough for today.

FRED
I don't mind . . .

Sally motions with the machine gun for him to leave and Fred
rushes out the door with his equipment.

SALLY
What's the story?

CHUCK
A guy and his daughter have
enemies, need protection.

SALLY
Definite enemies.

Sally lays the machine gun on the desk, holds up two partially
burned pages that have been burned and ripped from her novel.

CHUCK
Imagine a couple pages!

SALLY
(drops pages in garbage)
What's in it for us?

Chuck dumps five grand on the desk. Sally counts it. Pops it in a drawer.

CHUCK
Winnings and retainers. Expense money will follow.

SALLY
There'll be significant expenses.

Chuck moves to the mirror, sees it's untouched but bullet holes around it. Smiles into it.

SALLY (CONT'D)
What's the plan?

CHUCK
Got 'em safe for now, but things are always changing.

Sally aims the machine gun at the ceiling light fixture.

SALLY
I like the feel of a big gun.

CHUCK
It's yours. I'll get you ammo tomorrow.

SALLY
Thanks.

CHUCK
My gut tells me you're going to need it.

END OF SAMPLE