

The Black Dahlia

Screenplay by
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from the James Ellroy novel

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CREDITS ROLL OVER

Black and white newsreel footage from the 1930s. Clips from prize fights featuring two different boxers against various opponents. One a light heavyweight--pure finesse, a counterpuncher; the other, stouter and stronger, a headhunting puncher.

The intercutting of the two fighters suggests a possible showdown at the end of the newsreel. No such luck.

We freeze on a still photograph of the counterpuncher.

END CREDITS

EXT. BOYLE HEIGHTS - EVERGREEN AND WABASH - DUSK

The palm trees are on fire.

A WORLD WAR II ERA PERSONNEL CARRIER transports twenty silent LAPD officers into the heart of downtown Los Angeles. The sounds of glass breaking and men screaming serves as backdrop for their arrival at a full-scale RIOT:

CAPTION: Los Angeles. 1943. The Zoot Suit Riots.

HUNDREDS OF IN-UNIFORM GI'S use baseball bats and two-by-fours to beat the shit out of ZOOT SUIT-WEARING MEXICANS.

And if you think the cops are gonna jump in and break this thing up...well, you don't live in L.A...

The cops exit the carrier with a surprising nonchalance, most of them mingling in amongst the MP's who stand on the sidelines watching the GI's in action.

MP

(to a Shore Patrol)

Sawbuck on the Private chasin' that skinny one over there! C'mon Private!

ANGLE ON: A zoot suiter ducking the Private's billy club--

COP

Wooie that spic's quick!

MP

Jesus Christ!

Then the Private smashes the zooter with a backhand club.

SHORE PATROL

Double or nothing on that black boy over there...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VOICE OVER

I'd almost finished the Police Academy when the background check turned up my father's German-American Bund membership.

Sailors shatter streetlights and shop windows, a large pane of glass exploding at the feet of LAPD OFFICER BUCKY BLEICHERT, 26. He's one of the last off the carrier and seems clueless as to how to proceed.

We recognize him as our counterpuncher from the newsreels. Up close we see he has BUCK TEETH (hence the nickname).

BUCKY (CONT'D) (V.O.)

Pressured by FBI goons to confirm my patriotism, I gave the Alien Squad Sam Murakawa, a guy I'd gone to middle school with, in order to secure my LAPD appointment.

Bucky's minus his gun but plus a WWI tin helmet and a three pound truncheon. Darkness falls quickly on what Bucky rightly realizes is fucking chaos.

VOICE OVER

The old man never knew any better. Never knew what he'd cost me. Or Sammy, who'd died at the Manzanar internment camp. I was a good fit in the snitch's jacket and with a little alteration I slipped easily into the whole loser's suit.

Bucky sees three or four of his fellow cops edge into the action, taking cheap shots at Zoot Suiters otherwise entangled with GI's.

Suddenly Bucky's RUNNING away from the action...down a side street and onto a

QUIET RESIDENTIAL BLOCK.

He slows to a jog, trying to gather his thoughts. He sees:

EXT. A BUNGALOW COURTYARD - SAME

A POLICE OFFICER has THREE MARINES IN DRESS BLUES and ONE ZOOT SUITER cornered in a center walkway.

The marines swipe clumsily at the officer with their two-by-fours as he bobs back and forth on the balls of his feet, dodging the blows like the ex-fighter he is. Our heavyweight from the fight reels.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The terrified Mexican stands frozen on one side of the big cop, trying to avoid the entire mess as the policeman parries the marines' blows with his own truncheon. Lee sees Bucky.

HEAVYWEIGHT/COP

Bleichert! Code Three Bleichert!

Bucky hesitates, drifting reluctantly towards the scene.

VOICE OVER

I already knew him by reputation, record down pat: Lee Blanchard, formerly a regular attraction at the Hollywood Legion Stadium, 43-4-2 as a heavyweight,

Finally Bucky commits, running into the courtyard and wading in, fending off the marines' blows to jab at them with his stick. He's ineffective with the truncheon, not sure whether he's supposed to be offensive or defensive. One of the marines clips Bucky slightly with a 2x4. That decides it:

Bucky drops his baton and begins wailing on the marines with his fists, connecting hard punches with soft midsections.

VOICE OVER (CONT'D)

And he knew me, Dwight "Bucky" Bleichert, light-heavy, 36-0-0, ranked tenth by Ring magazine in 1937 fighting no-name opponents in a no-man's-land division.

And now Blanchard moves in, lashing vicious truncheon blows to the shoulders of the marines, sending them one by one into a heap.

VOICE OVER (cont'd)

In our first year at Central Division Station we'd never spoke.

The marines reduced to rubble, Blanchard turns his attention to the Zooter: the Mexican puts his hands in front of him, happy to be handcuffed. Lee motions for Bucky to follow. Lee turns back to the marines:

LEE

To the halls of Tripoli, shitbirds.

One of them flips Lee off. The Zooter kicks him in the chest as Lee pulls him away from them, laughing.

The three men start back towards the riots. Gunshots can be heard. Palm trees blaze up into the night.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

BUCKY

Who's this?

LEE

(re the Zooter)

Officer Bleichert, meet Senor Tomas Dos Santos, subject of an all-points fugitive warrant for manslaughter during the commission of a Class B Felony.

BUCKY

Meaning?

LEE

Snatched a purse off an old lady in the Mid-Wilshire and she keeled of a heart attack.

Lee grabs Dos Santos roughly by the neck and leads him down a quiet street.

BUCKY

You come all the way down here to roust--

LEE

I came down here same as you.
 (jerks a finger to the riots)
 Keep from gettin' killed. Happened to see jarheads beatin' on a good collar--
 (nudging Dos Santos)
 Habla Ingles, Tomas?

The man shakes his head "no". Blanchard's head is on a swivel, casing houses as he walks. Bucky follows...

LEE (cont'd)

He's dead meat. Manslaughter Two's a gas chamber jolt for spics. He'd have been better off getting a couple cracked ribs from our Privates First Class back there.

Lee pulls the Zooter up onto someone's porch. KICKS IN THE DOOR. Bucky's about to say something when he spies a pile of uncollected newspapers in the corner of the porch.

LEE (CONT'D)

(re Bucky's unasked question.)
 We'll never get him booked tonight.

CUT TO:

INT. THE KITCHEN - LATER

A "Home Sweet Home" needlepoint sampler hangs over Tomas Dos Santos cuffed by his ankles to a radiator. The three men are on their second fifth of Cutty Sark swiped from the kitchen cupboard.

Dos Santos sings a drunken Spanish version of "The Chattanooga Choo Choo" before slumping to his side and passing out. Bucky covers him with a blanket.

LEE

Nice hook you got.

BUCKY

Well, you know, old habits.

LEE

My girlfriend saw you fight a couple times over at the Olympic. Said you were somebody.

BUCKY

Big fish, small pond. Never made it up to the big boy's division like you.

LEE

(dismissive)

Aaah. My first twenty fights were stumblebums handpicked by my manager. I was lucky to survive.

(re the zooter)

More'n I can say for Tom here. My ninth hard felon of the month. Six weeks he'll be sucking gas. There's a Jewboy Deputy D.A. over in Central Warrants wets his pants for fighters. Promised me the next spot he can wangle.

Bucky nods, doesn't know what to say. Lee looks on the window at the flaming city.

LEE (CONT'D)

We'll take 'em in the morning.

BUCKY

You'll take him.

LEE

He's half yours.

BUCKY

No thank you.

TO BE CONTINUED

CONTINUED:

Lee shrugs.

DISSOLVE TO:

A CLOSE UP OF TOMAS DOS SANTOS' FACE

screaming in silence.

AS WE PULL BACK TO REVEAL

Tomas Dos Santos dying in the porthole of a GAS CHAMBER.

IN THE FRONT ROW

Lee watches. Barely.

IN THE HALLWAY OUTSIDE THE GAS CHAMBER

Bucky loiters by himself, unable to go inside. Finally the doors open. Lee exits first, his face a blank mask. He's quickly engulfed by other cops and politicians who shake his hand and brush imaginary lint off of his NEW SUIT. Lee glances to Bucky briefly before Bucky retreats to daylight...Lee mouths something to him:

LEE

No thank you...

EXT./INT. RADIO PATROL CAR - MOVING

Bucky drives as a ROOKIE chatters in the seat next to him.

ROOKIE

Yep, three years in the Canal Zone. Nothin' but skeeter bites and drunk fights over three-dollar skank tail...yeah not much action there but lots of action there if you get my meaning...You get my meaning?

BUCKY

I...get your meaning.

INT. THE CENTRAL MUSTER ROOM - DAY

The rookie prattles on as Bucky fills out a form.

ROOKIE

...where were you stationed again?...

BUCKY

I wasn't.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROOKIE

Right. Keep forgettin'...

AN OLDER OFFICER

walks by the rookie and rolls his eyes. Catching Bucky's look, the cop throws him a shadow punching one-two. Bucky smiles thinly. Returns to his paperwork. Then another cop passes by and breaks into a bob-and-weave. Bucky looks puzzled and annoyed.

He grabs a third cop walking by.

BUCKY

What's' up?

COP

Don't you know? Brass is bringin' back the inter-departmental boxing team.

BUCKY

So?

COP

So.

(off Bucky's look)
You know Lee Blanchard--just got bumped to Central Warrants?

Bucky nods.

COP (CONT'D)

His partner's toppin' his twenty and goin' for early retirement. Word is the Deputy D.A.'s lookin' to fill the spot. Christ knows why but it's down to you and Johnny Vogel.

Bucky takes a surreptitious peek across the room at JOHNNY VOGEL, fat, slick-hair and bad skin.

BUCKY

Isn't his old man Fritzie a Central Dick?

COP

(chucking Bucky on the chin)
But who was on the cover of Ring Magazine, eh, Buckaroo?

Bucky shakes his head, dismissing the whole thing.

INT. THE RADIO PATROL CAR - ANOTHER DAY

Bucky drives on as the rookie talks and talks...

ROOKIE

Thing about the locals in the zone, see, is they treated their women like shit and it wasn't nothing to pull a girl in with a nickel flower and a dime beer...

VOICE OVER

Warrants was local celebrity as a cop. Warrants was plainclothes without a coat and tie and a mileage per diem on your civilian car. Warrants was chasing real criminals and not rousting winos and wienie wagers in front of some Midnight Mission.

INT. BUCKY'S APARTMENT GARAGE - NIGHT

Bucky rummages through a junk box. Finds AN OLD SPEED BAG.
VOICE OVER

I told myself I didn't care.

He hooks the bag up. He taps at it. Once. Twice. Again.

INT. THE CENTRAL MUSTER ROOM - DAY

Bucky walks in and a desk officer snags him.

DESK OFFICER

They want to see you at city hall.

INT. CITY HALL - CHIEF OF DETECTIVES OFFICE - LATER

A secretary leads Bucky into an office with CHIEF OF DETECTIVES THAD GREEN etched on the pebble glass door.

INSIDE THE OFFICE: Lee Blanchard, ASST. D.A. ELLIS LOEW, and CHIEF THAD GREEN. They all sit in matched leather chairs.

SECRETARY

Officer Bleichert.

She exits. An awkward silence.

LEE

(getting to his feet)
Gentlemen, this is Bucky Bleichert.
Bucky, Chief Thad Green, Deputy District Attorney Ellis Loew.

CONTINUED:

Bucky shakes their hands, nodding to each. Chief Green gestures for him to sit.

CHIEF GREEN

Read this aloud, Dwight. It's running in Sunday's Times.

BUCKY

(monotone)

"Before the war, the City of the Angels was graced with two local fighters, pugilists with styles as different as fire and ice. Lee Blanchard was a--

Lee grabs it, dissatisfied with Bucky's lack of enthusiasm.

LEE

(moving past the Bucky part)

"Mr. Fire and Mr. Ice never fought each other, but duty brought them to the Los Angeles Police Department." Blanchard cracked the Boulevard-Citizens bank robbery case in 1939 and captured thrill-killer Tomas Dos Santos;

(Lee eyes Bucky)

Bleichert served with distinction during the '43 Zoot Suit Wars--"

Bucky looks at his shoes.

CHIEF GREEN

Skip to the end.

LEE

On Election Day, voters are going to be asked to vote on a bond proposal to upgrade the LAPD's equipment and provide for an eight percent pay raise for all personnel. Keep in mind the examples of Mr. Fire and Mr. Ice. Vote "Yes" on Proposition B."

CHIEF GREEN

Whattya think?

BUCKY

Subtle.

Blanchard and Green smile; Loew frowns.

CONTINUED: (2)

ELLIS LOEW

Prop. B's a loser right now. But if we can drum up some publicity we may be able to get it passed in next month's election. We need to build up morale in the department. Impress voters with the quality of our clean good men. *Wholesome.* Our boxing team.

Bucky looks to Lee. To Loew. He's puzzled.

LOEW

Are you hearing me, Bleichert?

LEE

Fire and Ice.

LOEW

Ten rounds. The Academy Gym. Three weeks from now. Before the election. All the gate to charity. After that, we bring back the boxing team.

CHIEF GREEN

Are you in, Bucky?

LEE

It's not like you'll last ten rounds.

Bucky eyes Lee quickly, assessing his larger but slightly softer physique. All the remaining eyes are on him.

BUCKY

I'm in.

Back slaps all around. Loew leans in to Bucky.

LOEW

I'm betting on great things from you, Bleichert.

BUCKY

Yes sir.

EXT. THE CITY HALL PARKING LOT - MINUTES LATER

Bucky exits and sees Lee leaning against an unmarked car talking with a striking woman in an auburn pageboy. Bucky stops at their car.

LEE

Bucky I'd like you to meet Kay Lake.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BUCKY

Hello.

KAY

Hello.

LEE BLANCHARD

I was just telling Kay about our new hobby.

BUCKY

Oh, you a fight fan?

KAY

Lee used to drag me. I was taking art classes so I'd sketch.

Lee puts his arm around her.

LEE

Made me quit fighting the smokers. Didn't want me doin' the "vegetable shuffle."

BUCKY

I promise not to hurt you.

A flicker of amusement in her eyes.

LEE

That won't make Loew very happy.

BUCKY

He's got money on me?

LEE

Seems that way. You win you get warrants.

Bucky shakes his head. Turns to Kay.

BUCKY

What do you think of all this Miss Lake?

KAY

For civic reasons I hope the LAPD gets ridiculed for perpetrating this farce. For personal reasons I hope Lee wins. And for aesthetic reasons I hope you both look good with your shirts off.

Bucky and Lee laugh. Bucky sticks out his hand. Lee takes it.

BUCKY

Luck short of winning.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LEE

You, too.

Bucky tips his hat to Kay and turns to go.

KAY

Luck, Dwight.

He stops at hearing his real name. But he knows she's waiting to see his reaction so he keeps walking...

BUCKY'S BOXING MONTAGE

--Bucky hits the heavy bag in the police gym while Lee spars in the background

VOICE OVER

The 77th Street desk sergeant tapped as official LAPD bookmaker had Lee as an early 3 to 1 favorite...

--Bucky runs through Elysian Park with two pound weights on his ankles.

VOICE OVER (cont'd)

...while the real bookie line had Mr. Fire favored by knockout at 2 1/2 to 1, and decision by 5 to 3.

--Bucky spars with a fighter, peppering him with jabs.

VOICE OVER (cont'd)

Even the dicks in Ad Vice had suspended bookie shakedowns because Mickey Cohen was raking in ten grand a day and kickin' back five percent to the advertising agency promoting the bond.

Bucky slips in late to roll call; people pretend not to notice. He sees Lee. Lee nods and smiles.

VOICE OVER (cont'd)

Fire and Ice. I was local celebrity.

EXT./INT. BUCKY'S CAR - LINCOLN HEIGHTS - DAY

Bucky pulls up in front of a small ugly house in a tired neighborhood. He exits the car carrying a cardboard box full of canned goods and girlie magazines.

ON THE PORCH OF THE HOUSE

a bony old man sits in a broken chair, aiming a BB pistol at some balsa wood airplanes scattered in the yard.

ON BUCKY'S FACE

disgust and sadness.

This is DOLPH BLEICHERT, Bucky's father. Bucky approaches, pulling a chair up next to his father. Up close it's even worse: white skin stretched tight over blue veins, yellow rimming his rheumy eyes. Flecks of dirt and vomit on a filthy shirt.

BUCKY

Papa?

DOLPH

Guten tag, Dwight.

BUCKY

English, papa.

DOLPH

Englisch ist Schiesse! Amerikanisch ist Scheisse!

He aims the BB gun and fires at an airplane: the gun's empty.

Bucky enters the house. Half-eaten cans of beans on the dining room table, an entire legion of broken balsa wood airplane kits. Alley cats wander in and out of the kitchen, nosing their faces into open tuna fish cans...

Bucky sees AN AGED FRAMED PHOTO OF A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN. He picks it up and brushes it off, puts it on the table.

BACK ON THE PORCH

Dolph leans on the porch rail. Bucky returns.

BUCKY

Say something, Papa. Tell me.

Bucky grabs his father by the shoulders, angry.

BUCKY (cont'd)

How you can fuck this place up so bad in one month?

DOLPH

Du, Dwight? Du?

CONTINUED:

BUCKY
Speak...English.

DOLPH
Fuck. Kikes.

INSIDE THE HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Bucky on the phone.

BUCKY
...I think maybe he's had another stroke.
If you could just come by and clean the
place up and keep an eye on him for a
week or so...I know I still owe you from
last year...No more than ten days. I
promise. I do. Thank you.

Bucky takes in the house. It's so...unrepentantly pathetic.
Irreversible. And Bucky knows it. He starts to clean up the
house.

INT. THE POLICE BOXING GYM

Bucky leans against a wall watching Lee spar. Studying him.
Mentally fighting the sparring partner's fight.

VOICE OVER
He was better than I thought. It made
what came next easier.

EXT. THE GOOD LUCK BAR - NIGHT

Bucky stands across the street, watching. A man comes
outside, throws a lit cigarette on the ground and grinds it
out. Goes back inside. Bucky crosses the street to the bar.

INT. THE GOOD LUCK BAR - NIGHT

Bucky slides into a booth across from PETE LUKINS, the man
who signaled Bucky with the cigarette.

PETE
I'm surprised but I'm not so surprised. I
hear you been lookin' good. Better'n
people think.

Bucky pushes an envelope across to Pete. Full of cash.

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CONTINUED:

PETE (cont'd)

I guess what I hear is correct. Then you'll be wantin' to place this with Mickey Cohen's indie. He's got Blanchard 2 to 1--

BUCKY

I'm not bettin' on me, Pete.

PETE

(a beat)

Oh.

(another beat)

Then as a friend I feel it's my duty to tell you this: make it look good.

BUCKY

Knockout between rounds eight and ten.

Pete nods his head, thinking.

PETE

Dragna's got a guy really sold on you. Even money. Best you're gonna get.

BUCKY

Thanks, Pete.

Pete sticks out his hand.

PETE

Luck.

BUCKY

Short of winning?

PETE

Luck.

Bucky takes his hand.

EXT. DOLPH BLEICHERT'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Bucky watches from across the street as AN OFF-DUTY NURSE tries to get Papa Bleichert to eat a sandwich.

VOICE OVER

I was trading Warrants for a close-out on bad old debts, the eight grand I was gonna clear was enough to maintain the old man in a good clean rest home for three years;

(MORE)

CONTINUED:

VOICE OVER (cont'd)
the late round tank job enough to
convince myself I wasn't a complete
coward.

INT. THE BOXING GYM - DAY

Bucky watches as Lee tucks his elbows too tight and opens up his ribcage...Kay approaches Bucky, breaking his reverie.

KAY
At least he looks good with his shirt
off.

She waves to Lee between rounds. He blows a kiss back. He sees Bucky and points his glove at him, good-naturedly pretending to intimidate.

BUCKY
Where's your sketch pad?

KAY
I was never any good. Ended up with a
Masters in History.

BUCKY
Education's an expensive habit.

KAY
Lee paid for it.

BUCKY
He shouldn't have quit fighting.

KAY
I asked him to. Besides, police work
gives him a sense of order. You have a
girlfriend, Dwight?

BUCKY
Saving myself for Rita Hayworth.

A roar from the gym onlookers. Lee's sparring partner hits the deck, blood spraying from his mouth. Lee steals a quick look towards Bucky and Kay. Bucky nods appreciation.

BUCKY (cont'd)
Quits fighting for you. Puts you through
school. Quite a guy. Quite a pair. Why
aren't you married?

Kay shrugs, keeps watching Lee.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BUCKY (CONT'D)

Shacking's against the regs. Probably cost him a stripe. So where's the diamonds and the bassinets?

KAY

(a throwaway)

Well you'd have to sleep together for that, Dwight.

(smiles)

I have to go, Dwight. Good luck tomorrow night.

She walks out. He just stares...

INT. BUCKY'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

A half-eaten steak and two beers gone. It's six hours later and Bucky's still thinking about Kay's exit line. Restless. He grabs his jacket.

INT. HEARST BUILDING - HERALD-EXAMINER MORGUE - NIGHT

Bucky and a late-night clerk in the newspaper's morgue. The clerk thumbs the volumes of newspapers.

CLERK

Boulevard-Citizen's bank robbery...

BUCKY

Whatever you got.

CLERK

I "got" it all.

BUCKY

So. All of it.

INT. THE MORGUE - LATER

Bucky flipping through old papers. We finally see one:

"Boxer Cop Blanchard breaks B-C Bank Job...Kills One, Captures Other in Shootout.

ECU: A photo of Lee inside a small beach apartment holding up A BANK GUARD UNIFORM and a BANK BAG. In the background we see A BODY UNDER A SHEET.

Another photo: a hatchet-faced man in handcuffs.

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CONTINUED:

VOICE OVER

One of Lee's snitches fingered Bobby DeWitt, a small-time pimp with a yard long rap, as the brains behind the job.

Bucky examines ANOTHER CLIPPING: Lee leading Kay from the courthouse.

VOICE OVER (CONT'D)

DeWitt never spoke the entire trial, never coughing up the dough, even after damning character testimony from some of his "girls", including one Katherine Lake, formerly of Sioux Falls, South Dakota and looking to go straight.

A yearbook-type photo of KAY with the caption "Prosecution Witness Katherine Lake"

BACK TO PRESENT: Bucky walks through downtown L.A., hands stuffed in his pockets like James Dean...

VOICE OVER (cont'd)

DeWitt got ten to life in San Quentin; Lee got Kay, or maybe it was the other way around.

INT. THE ACADEMY GYM DRESSING ROOM - THE BIG NIGHT

Bucky sits on the corner of a table, an old fight hack wrapping his hands. The trainer pulls on the gloves, laces them up. Bucky buries his head in the gloves, smelling the leather.

Ellis Loew, sticks his head through the door, salutes to Bucky...Just outside the door, the slightest hint of women dressed to the nines...

INT. THE PACKED ACADEMY GYM - LATER

Cops and mobsters sit shoulder to shoulder, cigar smoke like L.A. haze as Bucky weaves his way through a snaky path up to the ring.

Lee's already there, playing to the crowd. Bucky climbs into the ring. The referee beckons the two men to the center of the ring. They touch gloves, Lee winking at Bucky.

The bell rings and WE FIGHT...

The first few rounds begin tentatively but quickly build to flurries of brutality, the bigger Lee wading in on Bucky and head-hunting him with wild rights and big left hooks.

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CONTINUED:

Bucky's quicker and spends most of the middle rounds trying to slip Lee's haymakers and counterpunching deftly to the ribs and the head. The classic confrontation between boxer and puncher.

All the while, Bucky keeps an eye on the round count, waiting for the eighth to come, trying to get in some good shots on Lee but not so many as to slow him down too much. For that matter it doesn't seem like anything's gonna slow Lee down. He's not as fit as Bucky, but he's determined--playing to the crowd and winking at Bucky while all the while trying to take Bucky's head off...

DING! And finally the EIGHTH ROUND...

And Bucky slowly makes his way to the middle of the ring, maybe appearing a little more fatigued than he really is...he trades punches, moving in closer and closer, starting to go toe to toe.

This is new for him, the crowd sees it...The buzz amongst them is louder now, anxious. Bucky seems determined to fight and not box...He takes one big punch to the ribs, another. Swings wildly back at Lee but misses. A flurry of savage exchanges between them, and BUCKY OPENS UP HIS CHIN TO LEE--not much but just enough...

LEE THROWS A WICKED RIGHT UPPERCUT TO BUCKY'S JAW AND SUDDENLY BUCKY'S MOUTHPIECE FLIES FROM HIS MOUTH ALONG WITH HIS BIG FRONT TEETH.

The crowd screams as Bucky HITS THE CANVAS.

INT. BUCKY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Bucky lies in bed, radio playing jazz. He looks horrible--face swollen, lip split, stitches across his broken nose. He sips whiskey from a bottle through a straw.

OFF SCREEN VOICE

All right, open up and try this...

The scene widens and we see A DENTIST sitting at Bucky's bedside. In his hand is A BRIDGE. He slides into Bucky's mouth, fitting it into the gap where his front two teeth used to be...

DENTIST

Gimme a smile.

Bucky painfully opens his mouth. The bridge fits perfectly. And guess what? The buck teeth are gone. He's a NEW MAN...

INT. A REST HOME - ANOTHER DAY

Bucky, bruised but somewhat better, stands in the hallway of a very nice rest home. He surreptitiously watches his father as the old man tries to grab at a nurse.

EXT. THE REST HOME - MINUTES LATER

Bucky exits. The scene widens behind him and we see the sign on the facility:

KING DAVID VILLA

Jewish stars adorn the sign. Bucky smiles widely this time.

INT. BUCKY'S APARTMENT - DAY

Bucky stands in front of his mirror clipping at his stitches with scissors. He hears a voice outside his window.

VOICE OVER

Hey. Canvasback!

Bucky recognizes the voice and goes to the window.

EXT. THE COURTYARD - SAME

Lee Blanchard, his own bruises fading, stands in the yard leaning on a 1943 Indian Motorcycle.

LEE

You gonna hide in there another week?
Ain't you bored yet?

BUCKY

Gettin' there.

LEE

(re bucky's teeth)
Nice chompers. So. Wanna work Warrants?

BUCKY

What? I lost. Loew's deal--

LEE

Don't you read the papers? The bond
passed yesterday. Want the job?

Bucky's taken aback...After a second...

BUCKY

Tell me one thing: Why'd you really quit
fighting? You're better'n I thought.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LEE

(matter of fact)

Benny Siegel bought out my contract,
scared off my manager. Said he'd get me a
shot at Joe Louis if I'd take two dives
for him. I said no, joined the Department
'cuz Jew syndicate boys won't kill cops.

(beat)

Tell me one thing: how much you get for
takin' your dive?

Bucky's face drops.

LEE BLANCHARD

You're *much* better than I thought.

(beat)

Never mind. We'll just keep that between
partners, won't we? Partner?

Lee smiles a devilish smile.

VOICE OVER

Mister Fire. Mister Ice. The straw champ
and the canvasback snitch.

INT. CENTRAL WARRANTS - MORNING

A door marked "DETECTIVE'S MUSTER ROOM". Bucky, wearing his
best SPORTS COAT AND SLACKS, shoots his cuffs and pushes
through the door.

INSIDE THE MUSTER ROOM

Full of the LAPD's plainclothes hotshots. All stand and give
Bucky a standing ovation. Lee's there, too, playing to the
crowd. Lee even makes a point at showing everyone Bucky's new
teeth...

On the blackboard at the front of the room: 8%!!!

CAPTAIN JACK TIERNEY is at the podium.

TIERNEY

(as introduction)

Officer Bleichert, the men of Central
Dicks, Homicide, Ad Vice, Bunco, et
cetera. I'm Captain Jack Tierney. You and
Lee are the white men of the hour, so I
hope you enjoyed your ovation. You won't
get another one until you retire.

Everyone laughs. Tierney raps the podium and speaks again.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TIERNEY (cont'd)

Enough horseshit. This is the felony summary for the week ending November 14, 1946. First, two liquor store stickups...Broadway and 7th, Hill Liquor in Chinatown, that one comes with a pistol whipping my personal favorite...

Bucky's eyes wander the room, taking in his new surroundings...Older men, coats and ties...

INT. THE MUSTER ROOM - LATER

The meeting's breaking up. A tall, elegant man (RUSS MILLARD) and a squat disheveled man (HARRY SEARS) approach Bucky.

RUSS MILLARD

(introducing himself)

Russ Millard, homicides. Wife and kids thank you for the raise, Officer.

Bucky smiles a dumb smile, not knowing what to say.

RUSS MILLARD (cont'd)

(re the other man)

My partner, Harry Sears.

HARRY

(stuttering)

Y-y-y-yes. Th-th-thanks Officer B-B-Bleichert.

Before Bucky can answer two large unpleasant looking men (FRITZ VOGEL and BILL KOENIG) approach.

FRITZIE

Officer Bleichert. Fritz Vogel. This is Bill Koenig. You know my son Johnnie from your previous duty--

(And you fucked him out of this job). But just now ELLIS LOEW grabs him by the elbow and leads him away.

ELLIS LOEW

Officer Bleichert. Welcome to Central Warrants--

When he gets him out of ear shot:

ELLIS LOEW (cont'd)

You shouldn't have slugged with him. You were ahead on all three cards.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BUCKY
I lost my head, sir.

ELLIS LOEW
And some of your patron's money. You want
to play things smarter. Don't blow this.

Bucky's about to respond when Lee saves him--

LEE
Ready to roll, canvasback?

He grabs Bucky and they head out the door. As they do Harry
Sears pulls Lee over...Still stuttering...

HARRY
And Lee--(an aside) I heard something you
oughta know--I was over at County Parole--
Bobby DeWitt got an "A" number. He'll be
released to LA around mid-January.

Lee bobs his head slightly as Harry moves off.

BUCKY
"A" number?

LEE
It means you get paroled sooner rather
than later. (switching quickly) You want
pot roast tonight?

EXT. A BEAUTIFUL DECO HOME - NIGHT

Lee and Bucky pull up in front of the house.

INT./EXT. THE CAR - SAME

LEE
Don't say anything about DeWitt. It'll
upset Kay.

They exit the car and Lee leads Bucky up the walk. Bucky's
impressed with the house.

INT. LEE AND KAY'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

A doll's house of Danish Modern furniture, fresh flowers and
polished mahogany wainscoting.

BUCKY
Nice place.

(CONTINUED)