

PREYING for MANTIS

A

100%Cotton  
(Mike)

ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY.

DRAFT 1: OPENING 10 PAGES.  
1/7/2014

FADE IN TO BLACK SCREEN:

An ABRUPT and THUNDEROUS "*BRUM!*--"

TITLE CARD:

FADES TO:

EXT. UNDERNEATH THE MANHATTAN BRIDGE - NIGHT

The Manhattan Bridge extends across the foggy, black flowing East River, the city skyline illuminated through the dense vapor, in the distance.

The Subway train roars overhead, passing along the bridge--

UNDER THE OPENING CREDITS.

The SILHOUETTE of a MAN stands in the shadows between two street lights in this neglected and derelict area.

One of the lights flicker before going completely out.

The flame of a lighter is brought to the cigarette in the shadowy man's mouth. He wears a suit and fedora like some old-fashioned gangster.

From out of his pocket, he removes a cellphone -- the white light from which ILLUMINATES HIS FACE. His youthful baby face... BABYFACE O'CONNOR, 17.

HIS CELLPHONE: A smart phone with a large screen, the interface shows a clock face giving the time to be two minutes-to-ten.

He sticks a pair of ear buds in.

On the cellphone, he clicks on an APP that looks like an old RADIO.

A NEWSCASTER's voice breaks through the initial unnecessary static--

NEWSCASTER

(V.O.)

Any day now, the jury is expected to hand down a guilty verdict in the corruption case against Brooklyn Borough President and reputed mob boss, Frances "The Mantis" Maroni.

(CONTINUED)

He spots a black alley cat chasing a large rat across the cobblestone street. It catches it. The animals roll around in the darkness, bashing into a metal garbage can and disappearing into the shadows made by abandoned warehouses.

## NEWSCASTER

(V.O.)

Late last year, Maroni was busted for running an illegal gambling ring linked throughout the city and Chicago. In what Judge Hayworth has called the "Greatest Corruption Case Ever," hundreds of political leaders and Justice Department officials have either resigned or faced prosecution. After several months of testimony, thousands of witnesses and members of the gambling ring came forward to testify against the Borough President--

He switches the station and all sound is drowned out by a smooth, JAZZY-TRUMPET COMPOSITION. Even another passing train up above.

At the end of the street, a TAXICAB right out of the 1940's turns the corner and immediately blinds its headlights as it slows through the shadows.

Babyface flicks his cigarette and runs into the street, catching the taxicab as it slowly passes, never stopping. He gets in and closes the door as the car speeds off.

EXT. THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE - NIGHT

THE JAZZ COMPOSITION CONTINUES

as the taxicab drives along the Brooklyn Bridge amongst the other 1940's style vehicles.

INT. TAXICAB - NIGHT

Babyface sits tucked on the floor in the darkness behind the driver's seat in this spacious car. His ear buds remain in his ears. A face of intimidation he musters up as much as possible.

The driver, GENE BOOKKNIGHT, 46, a "colored guy," as it was once put, drives silently pretending there isn't anyone else in his cab.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

3.

He stares out through the windshield as they pass through the fog, the buildings peering through.

BRIGHT LIGHTS.

EXT. CIVIC CENTER - NIGHT

The taxicab comes off of the bridge with the other traffic, passing right by City Hall.

EXT. FOLEY SQUARE - NIGHT

The historic art-deco New York City court houses surround Foley Square where the taxicab drives through, heading uptown.

CLOSE ON the New York City Supreme Court Building. Engraved above the columns, "THE TRUE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE IS THE FIRMEST PILLAR OF GOOD GOVERNMENT"

CUT TO:

EXT. THE CHOPHOUSE - NIGHT

It's a fancy establishment. A famous steakhouse with large, thinly veiled windows -- completely dark on the other side.

CUT JAZZ COMPOSITION WITH A--

CUT TO:

INT. THE CHOPHOUSE - NIGHT

The interior of The Chophouse is a sea of darkness with tables lit only by a single, centerpiece CANDLELIGHT, illuminating the faces of those surrounding it.

A spoonful of creme brulee is shoved into the fat face of the big, bald headed JUDGE JOSEPH HAYWORTH, 57.

JUDGE HAYWORTH

Mmmmmmm!

He washes it down with a sip of the black liquid in his wineglass.

The other two gentlemen he sits with are judges, LARS ERIKSEN, 60, and PHILLIP MORRIS, 49, who have yet to finish their meals. They sit across from the judge, both smoking cigarettes, watching him in disgust.

(CONTINUED)

A waiter steps into the candlelight from the blackness behind Morris, startling him a bit as more wine is poured.

ERIKSON

Ya never see this guy with a smile  
unless he's got a face full of  
desert... or a pocket full of cash.

MORRIS

Ah, he *only* eats like this when  
he's happy.

JUDGE HAYWORTH

I lose weight when stressed.

ERIKSON

You must not get a lot of that,  
then.

MORRIS

He hasn't had much reason to,  
lately.

JUDGE HAYWORTH

Tomorrow's the day, gentlemen. I  
can almost taste it!

He shovels a big spoonful into his mouth.

ERIKSON

Oh? Does it taste anything like  
Juror Number Six?

MORRIS

Lars, I'm willing to bet it tastes  
exactly like her.

Judge Hayworth smirks at them with the last of his desert stuffed into his face, running from his lips.

ERIKSON

She does look very flavorful,  
Morris.

Morris nods in agreement while taking a drag from his cigarette.

The Judge swallows and reaches for his wine as he stands up.

JUDGE HAYWORTH

Speaking of which... I hate to eat  
and run, gentlemen. But I have  
train to catch... As always, it's  
been a pleasure.

(CONTINUED)

He wipes his mouth and reaches across the table to shake both of their hands, rather quickly.

Erikson and Morris turn to each other, again with looks of disgust as both wipe their hands on the table cloth.

JUDGE HAYWORTH

Oh, and this one is on me.

He pulls out a wad of cash and drops a portion of it on the table.

JUDGE HAYWORTH (CONT'D)

Get yourself a couple of tiramasus.  
It's delicious here. I had it last night.

The Judge grabs his brief case and disappears into the darkness.

Erikson shakes his head in disgust as he pulls out his cellphone and begins texting.

Morris watches Erikson for a BEAT before he raises up his glass.

MORRIS

Cheers, Judge Erikson.

Erikson rolls his eyes as he picks up his glass.

ERIKSON

To?

MORRIS

(whispers)

To insects. And the profitability  
of their survival.

The gentlemen CLINK glasses before downing what's left.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE CHOPHOUSE - NIGHT

The door is held open for The Judge as he exits The Chophouse in a rush, his hat and coat held with his briefcase.

Another doorman awaits the next taxicab in line to pull up--

WHEN ANOTHER TAXICAB CUTS IN FRONT.

(CONTINUED)

It tears up to the curb and stops in front of the doorman and Judge Hayworth.

HONK-HONK! The cabbies behind are pissed.

The doorman opens the taxicab's door and The Judge maneuvers his fat ass in, quickly.

INT. TAXICAB - NIGHT

He gets in out of breath, checking his cellphone.

JUDGE HAYWORTH  
Grand Central Station.

Gene nods as he shifts the gear.

EXT. THE CHOPHOUSE - NIGHT

The taxicab pulls away from the front of the restaurant.

INT. TAXICAB - NIGHT

CLOSE ON THE JUDGE'S CELLPHONE: It's a record of bets.

JUDGE HAYWORTH  
And step on it!

CLICK.

BABYFACE  
(O.S.)  
Hey, Your Honor--

The Judge looks down at Babyface sitting between the seats, a HANDGUN pointed right at him.

BABYFACE(CONT'D)  
How 'bout I step on you?

The Judge GASPS under the--

CUE OF A SOFT, YET EPIC INSTRUMENTAL.

EXT. MANHATTAN SIDE STREET - NIGHT

The taxicab makes a sharp turn onto a side street in the slums of the city.

BANG!

A WHITE FLASH

replaces the blackness inside the taxicab for only a second as it speeds through the path between the dark, tenement buildings on either side.

EXT. WEST SIDE HIGHWAY - NIGHT

The taxicab comes off of an on-ramp onto the West Side Highway.

INT. TAXICAB - NIGHT

Through the windshield, over Gene's shoulder, the cab comes upon an EXIT SIGN up above.

"GEORGE WASHINGTON BRIDGE -- 5 MILES"

EXT. NEW JERSEY SWAMP LANDS - NIGHT

The city stands across the Hudson River, the Empire State Building, tall and illuminated in white. It's engulfed in the fog all around. The surrounding black buildings remain submerged. Their interior lighting escapes through the windows, which creates glares through the thick haze.

TWO SILHOUETTES dig on the dark swampy shoreline, while ANOTHER stands by an old car, smoke billowing from him, that skyline as their backdrop.

CUT TO:

EXT. JUNKYARD - NIGHT

The taxicab sits idly in the middle of a junkyard. The foggy night city stands deep in the distance.

One backseat window is covered in black blood splatter.

A CLAWED CRANE tears into the cab, picking it up and dropping it onto a conveyor belt moving totaled vehicles.



Gene passes him some cash and then shakes hands with the one junkyard worker before walking over to a pristine 1945 Rolls Royce S3.

EXT. NEW JERSEY SWAMP LANDS - NIGHT

A CLOSE UP of Judge Hayworth's fat white head sticking out of the dirt. His eyes are wide open and a small, clean HOLE appears right below his left eye.

Black dirt is shoveled into his face.

EXT. NEW JERSEY SWAMP LANDS - NIGHT

A pair of expensive shoes pat down on the dirt.

A LIGHT suddenly shines over them.

PANNING UP the pin-striped pants and suit-jacket, the shoes are revealed to belong to Babyface, who lifts his chin high to fully expose the face hidden under the shadow of his fedora.

The headlights from the car shine like a spotlight on him. His smooth, fair skin is without blemishes or facial hair. He lights a cigarette and takes big drag before slowly opening his mouth and releasing a white twirling cloud of death from his lungs.

He then spits where he stands and steps forward into the direction of the light.

Babyface gets into the backseat, closing the door behind him. The car turns around and tears out of the area.

FADE INSTRUMENTAL AS SCENE--

FADES TO:

A SERIES OF FRONT PAGE NEWSPAPERS

shoot toward the screen:

1. "CORRUPTION CASE JUDGE GOES MISSING THE NIGHT BEFORE JURY REACHES VERDICT"

2. "GOVERNMENT CORRUPTION CONVICTION IN JEOPORDY AS MOB LAWYERS FIGHT FOR MISTRIAL"

3. "MARONI LAWYERS THREATEN LAWSUITS ON COURTS, MEDIA"

(CONTINUED)

4. "MISTRIAL DECLARED; JUDGE HAYWORTH FEARED DEAD"

CUT TO:

EXT. NEW YORK CITY SUPREME COURT HOUSE - DAY

The media swarms on the steps in front of the Supreme Court House.

THE DOORS OPEN

and out comes FRANCES "THE MANTIS" MARONI, 38. Confidence emits from the bright, classy, petite frame around her black soul. She's every bit as seductive as the smirk she wears across her face as she is approached by reporters and photographers.

REPORTERS

(various)

Frances! Frances! Were you confident a mistrial would be called? Frances, do you know where Judge Hayworth is? Frances, when is the next trial? Did you order a hit on the judge?

Her entourage of men -- lawyers and body guards surround her as she takes her time moving one full, milky white leg in front of the other.

Looking straight ahead, eyes immune to the flashes from the cameras, The Mantis moves like a movie star, a path cleared by her every step. She relishes every bit of this moment.

A black 1940 Packard Stretch Limo awaits her on the curb, in front.

The door is opened for her, but before getting into the car, Frances strikes a subtle pose, showing off her chizzled cheekbones.

Flash. Flash. FLASH--

The shot of her is instilled into a PHOTOGRAPH before--

FADING TO:

INT. OFFICE - DAY

The photograph of Maroni appears in a CLOSE UP on a newspaper WEBSITE with the headline: "THE MANTIS IS FREE WHILE SEARCH FOR MISSING JUDGE CONTINUES"

The laptop showing the article is revealed on the desk of a determined, yet unamused looking man -- SPECIAL AGENT STANLEY ULRICH, 40.

He reads the article attentively, running his fingers through his mustache.

He reaches for his cellphone and begins using it, sitting back in his chair.

CLOSE UP OF CELLPHONE: The Detective types out a text message, which writes in AR BONNIE FONT.

"We're going to need that bugspray, afterall."

SEND.

BUM. BUM. BUM.

On the other side of his desk, a plaque reads: SPECIAL AGENT STANLEY ULRICH, F.B.I.