

"ALWAYS PLAY SOME BLUES"

Original Screenplay by

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EXT. GLENOAKS, CALIFORNIA - DAY

Smog rises from suburban sprawl - rows of stucco homes, identical but for their diverse geometric garage door trims.

SUPER: Glenoaks, California - August, 1966

A view of picture-perfect, single story Glenoaks High School.

OLDER DENNIS (V.O.)

Well, here's my story - I graduated Glenoaks High in 1967, the Summer of Love. Sounds cool, right? Well, I didn't smoke pot or drop acid and I didn't like psychedelic music. I was an A student and a nerd and a half. I did my homework in the school library before I went home. The librarians were very helpful.

Just beyond is the town landmark: a rock cliff, embossed with the town insignia - a white letter "G" inside a white circle.

At the top of the cliff is a grassy field. Behind scattered trees is a dirt parking lot and an old water tower.

Carved on a tree trunk just above eye level reads:
K.K.K. L.A. 1957 A.T.R.

INT. NICHOLLS HOUSE - DAY

A teenage boy's bedroom, with low-budget furnishings and a single bed. A turntable plays an instrumental SURF SONG.

DENNIS NICHOLLS, 17, plays along on his unamplified electric guitar.

OLDER DENNIS (V.O.)

I wanted to be a guitarist, but not like The Beatles or The Rolling Stones. I wanted to be a surf guitarist, like Dick Dale and The Surfaris.

Dennis puts his guitar down as the song ends. He picks up one of the two windbreakers from his bed. He cuts the lining with scissors to make interior pockets.

OLDER DENNIS (V.O.)

My clean cut facade concealed my juvenile pranks. Actually, I was the mastermind behind them.

EXT. NELSON'S DRUG STORE ALLEYWAY - DAY

VINCE ROMAN, 17, owns his masculinity, smoking hot in a tight T-shirt and clean, new jeans.

OLDER DENNIS (V.O.)

There was Vince, the muscle, who had the coolest haircut and tightest arms at Glenoaks High. Vince thought I was a genius when I kept correcting our science teacher and made him look like a fool. Vince excelled at fist-fighting and was the sharpest dresser in school.

Vince shadow-boxes the air.

BOBBY JORDAN, 18, wears ripped jeans, stained T-shirt and tattered old sneakers. He smokes and spits nearby.

OLDER DENNIS (V.O.)

And Bobby, the slob. Vince hated Bobby as much as he liked me. But with Bobby, that was easy.

VINCE

There's that Bobby stink, again. You shower weekly or monthly these days?

BOBBY

You want me to shower every day?

VINCE

One hour a day, with heavy duty detergent and a scrub brush.

Bobby blows his nose on his T-shirt.

VINCE

Uck, even pigs don't do that!

BOBBY

Pigs don't wear T-shirts.

VINCE

You do!

Dennis approaches, wearing a windbreaker and carrying another. He tosses it to Vince, who puts it on and examines the inner pocket.

VINCE

Nice! A toaster can fit in here.

DENNIS
Don't need one.

All three stare down the alley as Dennis' kid brother MIKEY NICHOLLS, 11 - approaches. Dennis looks at Vince's watch.

DENNIS
Thanks for being late again, Mikey.

MIKEY
That's okay!

Dennis rolls his eyes.

DENNIS
C'mere.

Mikey comes close. Dennis pulls a small plastic bag filled with pennies, dimes and nickels out of his windbreaker and holds it up.

DENNIS
Hey Vince, check this out.

Dennis empties the bag into Mikey's pockets.

DENNIS
Mikey, when the cashier asks you for money, empty your left pocket first. Now remember -

MIKEY
Can I get a Snicker Bar?

DENNIS
If I see you looking at us, you're not gonna get anything! Vince and I go in first, then Bobby. When the door closes, you count to twenty. One-Mississippi, two-Mississippi -

Mikey nods.

DENNIS
Then come in and go to the cashier.

INT. NELSON'S DRUG STORE - DAY

The CASHIER, a middle-aged woman behind the counter smoking a cigarette, sees Mikey come in and looks up from the tabloid magazine she's reading.

Bobby flips through a comic book rack nearby.

In the back of the store, Dennis and Vince stuff candy bars, golf ball packs and other items into their windbreakers.

A bell above the door RINGS. Mikey strides in. He goes to the counter and hands the cashier a note. She studies it.

MIKEY

My mom said to get two packs.

CASHIER

You tell your mother this is the last time! From now on she has to come in herself. Fifty cents.

Mikey empties his pockets onto the counter. Coins and junk spill everywhere. The cashier angrily sorts the change.

Dennis and Vince signal Bobby with a look.

BOBBY

Excuse me, ma'am? Can you tell me when the...uh...the new issue of Fantastic Floor is...uh, out yet?

With the cigarette still in her mouth -

CASHIER

If it's not on the rack, we don't have it!

Dennis and Vince sneak toward the exit. The cashier starts to turn their way when -

BOBBY

Wait! It's supposed to be out today. Are you sure?

The Cashier turns to Bobby.

CASHIER

Whad'ya mean "Am I sure?" Of course I'm sure! I work here, don't I?

The bell above the door RINGS as Dennis and Vince make their escape, unseen.

EXT. NELSON'S DRUG STORE ALLEYWAY - DAY

Mikey tags along behind the older boys.

MIKEY

Can I have my Snicker Bar now?

BOBBY
We didn't get any Snicker Bars.

MIKEY
That's not fair! You said -

BOBBY
Gimme those smokes.

Mikey obediently hands over two packs of cigarettes.

MIKEY
I didn't look at you guys one time!

BOBBY
Check it out you guys, a
flamethrower!

Bobby flicks a Zippo lighter in front of a can of hair spray. A bluish flame spits out from the nozzle, singeing the back of Mikey's hair. He SCREECHES, causing a dog to BARK in a distant yard. Mikey rubs his head and starts to cry.

DENNIS
C'mon, don't be such a baby.

MIKEY
But he burned my hair!

BOBBY
Now you don't need a haircut.

Mikey timidly gives Bobby the middle finger. Bobby stops dead in his tracks and stares sternly.

BOBBY
Uh-Oh! Now you did it! That's the most insulting thing you can do to a person. Now I have to burn your wiener off. That's the law! Grab him, men!

Vince and Dennis grab Mikey's arms and legs as he squirms. Bobby moves in, aiming the spray can torch at Mikey's crotch.

BOBBY
Don't worry, kid, this is gonna hurt you a lot more than it's gonna hurt me, I promise.

Bobby ignites the torch, Mikey SCREECHES again. Dennis and Vince drop Mikey on his rear-end. He jumps up and bolts away, blubbering.

MIKEY

I'm tellin' Mom! I am!

The older boys catch up to him. Bobby teasingly rubs Mikey's head and he flinches.

DENNIS

Give him his damn Snicker bar. He earned it.

Vince hands him the candy bar. Mikey looks up at Dennis.

MIKEY

I didn't look at you guys one time!

DENNIS

You did good, Mikey.

EXT. BOBBY'S BACKYARD - DAY

A transistor radio plays a muffled song. Dennis sits on an old car seat, fingering his unamplified electric guitar, mimicking the song.

The backyard is filled with rusted appliances, auto parts and overgrown weeds.

Bobby tosses a golf ball in the air and swings at it with a baseball bat - THWACK! A pop fly disappears behind a tree a few houses away.

EXT. NEIGHBOR'S BACKYARD - CONT.

The golf ball THUDS on the grass and bounces into an old dog's water dish. Chin resting on its paws, it lifts its head, SNIFFS, and then lays its head back down.

EXT. BOBBY'S BACKYARD - CONT.

BOBBY

Why do you always have that dumb guitar with you? You look like one of those hippy dippy freaks.

DENNIS

Check this out, I wrote a protest song!

(sings and plays)

*"Life used to be fun,
And now we ain't got none.*

DENNIS (CONT'D)
*Go to school, get a job,
 Work 'til you retire,
 Watch TV, drink some beer,
 Then get sick and die!
 That'll be your future,
 When you go to Glenoaks High!"*

BOBBY
 (sports announcer voice)
 Ladies and gentlemen, Killebrew
 steps up to the plate!

Bobby tosses up another golf ball and connects with a WHACK!

BOBBY
 A long drive! Way back! And this
 ball is fuckin' outta here! Another
 towering home run by Harmon
 Killebrew, ladies and gentlemen!
 (fakes audience cheering)
 Hey Dennis, you wanna hit a few?

DENNIS
 Nah. I'd rather do something
 stupendulous.

BOBBY
 What the hell does that mean?

Bobby CRACKS a line drive that RIPS through the branches of a tree and disappears. In the distance, a window SHATTERS.

Dennis looks up to see Bobby's older sister ROXIE, 19, trashy-cute, coming out the back door. Dennis puts down his guitar and hops on a rusty old washing machine. He awkwardly brushes the hair off his forehead and takes off his glasses.

Roxie sashays by in tight shorts, make-up, teased hair, and a revealing top.

DENNIS
 Hi, Roxie.

Roxie strolls past, ignoring him.

ROXIE
 Did you steal my cigarettes, Bobby?
 I had a pack sitting on -

BOBBY
 They're in my pocket.

ROXIE
 Well, let me have 'em.

Bobby ignores her.

ROXIE
Gimme my cigarettes!

She reaches for the cigarette pack in Bobby's shirt pocket and he pushes her hand away.

BOBBY
Keep your hands off me, Rah-bur-ta.

ROXIE
Well, give'em here!

Bobby throws Roxie the pack. It bounces off her and falls on the ground. Dennis eyes her as she bends over to retrieve it.

ROXIE
Why don't you grow up and quit being such an asshole, Bobby?

BOBBY
(loud)
I'm an asshole and I'm proud!

Vince enters through the backyard gate.

VINCE
You should be, you're good at it.

Roxie passes Vince.

VINCE
Someone smells nice.

She gives Vince a half smile. Vince strides over. Dennis hops off the washing machine.

VINCE
Hey, did you guys hear what happened to Phil Gleason, man?

DENNIS
Who's Phil Gleason?

BOBBY
No, what happened?

VINCE
Some niggers jumped him over in Booger Town and beat the crap out of him. Todd Duncan told me.

DENNIS

Does he live by the park?

BOBBY

Who cares where he lives? He got jumped! We oughta do something.

VINCE

My brother says if you let them get away with that shit, they'll take over. Then the neighborhood's ruined. Drugs and crime everywhere.

BOBBY

How about if we -

VINCE

Leave that to Dennis, he's the brains.

BOBBY

If he's the brains, and you're the muscle, what am I?

Bobby blows his nose on his T-shirt.

VINCE

I don't know, human snot-rag?

DENNIS

What if I draw a dopey Negro face on the school auditorium?

VINCE

No way, man. You're a good drawer, but this is for real. We gotta open a can o' kick-ass.

DENNIS

You think Tony would loan us that old Dodge?

VINCE

I know he don't like niggers.

BOBBY

I heard there's gonna be one at our school this year.

DENNIS

Nah, not in our school.

VINCE
 If there is, I'm gonna Rocky
 Marciano his Joe Louis ass.

Vince shadow boxes the air.

INT./EXT. OLD DODGE (DRIVING) - NIGHT

The old Dodge cruises along the streets of downtown BAUERTON, a neighboring town with a mostly black population and a mix of dilapidated old shops and two-story apartment buildings.

Dennis drives. Vince rides shotgun. TODD DUNCAN, 17, white, blond and hefty, sits in back with Bobby. Tense silence, juxtaposed with a cheerful JINGLE on the car radio.

SERIES OF SHOTS - DOWNTOWN BAUERTON - SAME

A YOUNG BLACK MOTHER pushes a baby carriage accompanied by a YOUNG BLACK FATHER holding a CHILD's hand.

TWO ELDERLY BLACK MEN sit in front of a boarded up SHOE REPAIR SHOP.

A CLOSED SIGN in the window of a BARBER SHOP.

FOUR YOUNG BLACK MEN drink sodas at a HAMBURGER STAND.

INT./EXT. OLD DODGE (DRIVING) - CONT.

TODD
 What about those guys?

Todd gestures to the four young black men.

VINCE
 It's a fair fight, four on four.

BOBBY
 No way! Same odds Bill Gleason got.
 Four against one!

VINCE
 Who told you that!? And it's Phil,
 not Bill.

Vince looks out the passenger window and targets a LONE BLACK MAN with a conk hairstyle.

VINCE
 Slow down. There's a good one.

The Dodge slowly creeps towards the lone black man.

VINCE

Pull over. When the car stops,
Bobby, Todd and me out, do him
quick and get back in the car.

Dennis pulls over. The boys jump out and chase the lone black man, who runs for his life with the boys close behind.

Dennis' attention is drawn to a golden GUITAR in the display window of a closed MUSIC SHOP up the street and he slowly pulls up to it.

INT./EXT. OLD DODGE (PARKED) - NIGHT

As Dennis gazes at the music shop window, he hears FOOTSTEPS from behind the Dodge. Dennis turns to see the lone black man running up to the car, imploring him for help. Dennis shakes his head "no". The lone man runs off. Dennis watches him disappear around a corner.

Vince, Bobby and Todd run up to the car and pile in.

VINCE

Where did he go?! Did you see him?

DENNIS

No.

VINCE

Let's get out of here!

Dennis starts the engine and drives off.

BOBBY

I think I got one hit in.

VINCE

Bullshit! Non of us got even close.
He must be a running back.

BOBBY

I thought I did.

VINCE

Well you didn't--God-damn, you piss
me off.

INT./EXT. OLD DODGE - (DRIVING) - LATER

Dennis turns on the radio and a POP SONG comes on. A red light flashes in the rear view mirror.

DENNIS
Damn! The cops.

Dennis turns off the radio and pulls over.

VINCE
Everybody stay cool!

INT./EXT. OLD DODGE (PARKED) - CONT.

FOOTSTEPS. OFFICER TERRY, mid 40's, an upright, no-nonsense black policeman, approaches.

OFFICER TERRY
What are you boys up to tonight?

BOBBY (O.S.)
Did we do something wrong, Officer?

Officer Terry shines his flashlight into the back seat.

OFFICER TERRY
I don't know. What were you doing?

DENNIS
We're just out driving, sir.

OFFICER TERRY
Let's see your license.

Dennis gets out his wallet and offers his learner's permit.

OFFICER TERRY
That isn't a driver's license. Any
body else have a license?

Nobody responds.

OFFICER TERRY
Step out with the registration.

Vince hands Dennis the registration from the glove box and Dennis gets out. Blinded by the headlights from the cop car, Dennis hands Officer Terry the registration.

OFFICER TERRY
You know you need to have a
licensed driver in the car, right?

DENNIS
I forgot, sir.

OFFICER TERRY
You're facing trouble here, son.

Officer Terry studies the young man carefully.

OFFICER TERRY
What's that in your pocket?

DENNIS
Guitar strings sir.

OFFICER TERRY
May I see them?

Dennis hands them over.

DENNIS
I play a little surf guitar.

OFFICER TERRY
Oh, like The Beach Boys.

DENNIS
No, uh, like Dick Dale and The
Surfaris.

OFFICER TERRY
You attend Glenoaks High?

DENNIS
Yes, sir. We start back next week.

OFFICER TERRY
Some of those Glenoaks kids like to
come to Bauerton to buy reefer.

DENNIS
No sir, not us. We're not hippies.

Officer Terry appraises Dennis, who stands at attention.

OFFICER TERRY
Is it going to be a problem if we
get your parents involved?

DENNIS
My Dad would be disappointed in me.

Officer Terry thinks for a moment, then hands Dennis his
registration and permit.

OFFICER TERRY

I want you to take this car right back where it belongs and park it. No sight-seein', no stoppin' for sodas, no nothin'. Is that clear?

Dennis relaxes his posture.

DENNIS

Yes, sir. Perfectly clear.

OFFICER TERRY

Next time I stop you without a licensed driver, you're gonna have a world of sorry to deal with.

DENNIS

Thank you, sir, but that's not going to happen.

Dennis gets back in the Dodge.

INT. OLD DODGE (DRIVING) - LATER

Dennis focuses on the road, both hands on the wheel.

BOBBY

Dumb ass nigger cop! What's with all that sir, yes sir shit?

DENNIS

All those yes sirs is the reason we're not on our way to jail.

VINCE

Dennis, remember that dopey-looking Negro face you were talking about? Could you do a drawing for me?

DENNIS

Yeah, I guess I could.

EXT. BAUERTON STREET CORNER - NIGHT

Officer Terry, leaning against his patrol car, takes notes in his police log as the agitated Lone Black Man with a conk tells his story.

EXT. TERRY HOUSE - DAY

The TERRY FAMILY - Officer Terry, his wife and teenage daughter - carry boxes from a Glenoaks moving van into their new suburban home.

EXT. BOBBY'S BACKYARD - DAY

A radio plays muffled ROCK-N-ROLL. Vince lays on a weight bench pumping a dumbbell with one arm. Bobby, smoking a cigarette, counts Vince's reps.

BOBBY

Twenty, twenty one -

Bobby stops counting to blow his nose on his T-shirt. Vince drops the weight on the ground with a THUD.

BOBBY

I can't help it. I got a cold!

VINCE

You know what? From now on you stay three feet away from me at all times. When you get too close, my clothes stink the rest of the day.

Dennis enters with a drawing of a black minstrel's face.

DENNIS

What do you think of this?

Vince takes the drawing from Dennis and studies it. They all snicker at the racial stereotype.

BOBBY

Yeah, that's exactly how they look.

VINCE

I'm gonna show this to Tony. He might want it painted on the cliff for everyone in Glenoaks to see.

INT. GLENOAKS HIGH SCHOOL/HALLWAY - DAY

White STUDENTS chatter on their first day back to class.

BRENDA TERRY, 17, the first and only black student at Glenoaks High - pretty, vivacious and well-dressed - walks among them confidently with good posture, holding a book.

Dennis rounds a hallway corner, shouting over his shoulder -

DENNIS

Yeah, my summer was a blast!

Dennis bumps into Brenda, knocking the book out of her hand.

BRENDA

Sorry.

He picks up her book and hands it to her, momentarily taken aback.

DENNIS

Oh, it was my fault.

With a snooty tone -

BRENDA

Maybe you should watch where you're going then, don't you think?

Scowling, Brenda turns to leave. A few steps down the hall, she looks at Dennis over her shoulder, her scowl turning into a warm smile. She waves goodbye with a wink. Dennis' eyes follow her down the hall.

A bell RINGS. Sprightly MUZAK on the P.A. system signals classes are changing. Bobby approaches.

BOBBY

Have you seen her?!

DENNIS

I just bumped into her.

BOBBY

See? I told ya one was coming!

DENNIS

I never thought it would be a girl.

INT. GLENOAKS HIGH SCHOOL/CAFETERIA - DAY

Dennis sits at a table, watching Brenda at nearby table. Brenda sits across from LINDA, JEANIE and MARGARET, three high school seniors with teased hair, who ignore her.

LINDA

I have Mr. Wagner for Social Studies. Who do you have Jeanie?

JEANIE

Mr. Seibert. He's such a creep.

MARGARET
I'm taking drama with Mr.
Premerini.

Brenda smiles at Margaret, attempting to break the ice.

BRENDA
Me too!

Margaret smiles back. The other girls give Margaret a look.

BRENDA
(to Margaret)
That's a very pretty ring.

Linda leans behind Jeanie's back and whispers to Margaret.

LINDA
What did she say?

MARGARET
She likes my ring.

JEANIE
You better keep it on your finger!

MARGARET
Where else would I keep it?!

Dennis watches as Brenda picks up her lunch tray and leaves.

EXT. GLENOAKS HIGH SCHOOL/BASKETBALL COURT - DAY

Two rows of MALE STUDENTS in blue gym shorts and white T-shirts do jumping-jacks, led by their COACH. Dennis is a row in front of Bobby and Vince.

COACH
Six - two - three - four...
Seven - two - three - four...

BOBBY
(loud whisper)
PSSST! Your hangers!

Dennis looks down to see his boxer shorts exposed below his gym shorts. He quickly stuffs them in, out of view.

COACH
Ten - two - three - four...

They stop jumping.

COACH

Okay, shake it out! Nicholls!

Dennis looks up at the coach.

COACH

Didn't we have this problem last year? No - boxers - in - class!

DENNIS

Sorry Coach, I forgot to bring my jockey shorts.

COACH

How about this? Take you and your sorry boxers over to the track and give me five laps.

EXT. GLENOAKS HIGH SCHOOL/RUNNING TRACK - CONT.

Dennis casually jogs his first lap.

The center of the track is filled with FEMALE STUDENTS wearing red gym uniforms, engaged in athletic activities.

Brenda, sets up hurdles off by herself. As Dennis approaches her, she waves. He jumps over a hurdle.

BRENDA

Nice form, Dennis!

DENNIS

How do you know my name?

BRENDA

I probably shouldn't be telling you this but... we can read minds. It's an African thing.

Dennis looks confused.

DENNIS

Oh...

Brenda touches her temples.

BRENDA

For instance, right now you're thinking, "Hey, wait a minute!"

DENNIS

Actually, it was, "No they can't!"

They laugh.

BASKETBALL COURT - SAME

Vince and Bobby glare at Dennis and Brenda laughing.
Vince is anxious.

RUNNING TRACK - CONT.

BRENDA

I think you made a good impression
on my father.

DENNIS

Your father?

BRENDA

Officer Ralph Terry.

DENNIS

Really? Well, I guess he made a
good impression on me too.

BRENDA

He said I should invite you to our
house for dinner.

DENNIS

He did?

BRENDA

He's concerned about me making
friends. You know how parents are.
My daddy's a great guitar player.
He told me you play, too.

DENNIS

Really? He mentioned that?

BRENDA

He wants to show you his guitar. My
locker is number 329. Just drop a
note with your phone number in it
if you want to come for a visit.

(beat)

You don't have to feel bad if you'd
rather not. Really, I understand.

She turns to leave, then turns back to say -

BRENDA

My friends call me Brenda.

Brenda confidently walks away while a few of the girls stare and gossip. Dennis watches her leave.

DENNIS
(to himself)
Nice to meet you, Brenda.

INT. NICHOLLS HOUSE/KITCHEN - NIGHT

MRS. NICHOLLS, mid-40's, in a simple dress and apron, clears the table. Mikey helps. MR. NICHOLLS, in his maintenance work outfit, sits with his coffee and cigarette, reading a paper.

Dennis hangs up the kitchen wall phone.

DENNIS
Dad? I'm invited for dinner Friday to someone's house. If you give me a ride over, they said they'll give me a ride back. They live over by the golf course.

MR. NICHOLLS
Whose house for dinner?

DENNIS
Just this girl from school.

MRS. NICHOLLS
What's her name? Tell us about her.

Dennis, wanting to avoid their questioning, lets out a sigh.

DENNIS
Her name's Brenda.

MR. NICHOLLS
She good lookin'?

MRS. NICHOLLS
Carl!
(to Dennis)
So what's she like? She's a nice girl?

DENNIS
It doesn't matter!

Dennis gives an anguished look to his perplexed family.

MRS. NICHOLLS
Well tell us a little about her.

DENNIS
(exasperated)
She's colored, okay?

MR. NICHOLLS
You mean she's a Negro?

MRS. NICHOLLS
I heard the school has a Negro
student this year.

DENNIS
So can you give me a ride or not?

MR. NICHOLLS
I don't think it's a good idea to
get too friendly with them.

EXT. TERRY HOUSE - NIGHT

Officer Terry is cleaning some graffiti off the side of his house with rags. He watches as Dennis parks at the curb. Dennis gets out of the car. Mr. Nicholls slides to the driver's seat, watching warily as Officer Terry approaches.

OFFICER TERRY
Just cleaning up after some poorly
educated neighbors. Hi, Dennis.

DENNIS
Hi, Mr. Terry.

Mr. Nicholls gets out of the car. Officer Terry offers his handshake.

OFFICER TERRY
Ralph Terry.

MR. NICHOLLS
Carl Nicholls.

MR. NICHOLLS
Dennis tells me you're a police
officer.

OFFICER TERRY
For fifteen years.

MR. NICHOLLS
I was an M.P. for a year in Korea.

OFFICER TERRY
What branch?

MR. NICHOLLS

Army. Uh, my wife's making dinner
so I better be going.

OFFICER TERRY

Did you ever play pool, Mr.
Nicholls?

MR. NICHOLLS

Sure. We had a pool table at the
U.S.O. in Seoul.

OFFICER TERRY

I have a new table. Why don't you
stop by for a game of pool
sometime?

MR. NICHOLLS

That sounds good. I think I will!

Mr. Nicholls gets back in his car and drives off.

INT. TERRY HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

A KNOCK at the door. MRS. TERRY, mid-40's, a gracious black
woman in a stylish dress and hairdo, opens it.

MRS. TERRY

You must be Dennis. On time, too!

Dennis and Officer Terry enter.

Dennis looks around the room as he enters, surprised by the
well furnished mid-century modern home.

MRS. TERRY

Brenda's helpin' me in the kitchen.

OFFICER TERRY

Dennis, how'd you like to shoot a
game of pool?

DENNIS

Sure!

INT. TERRY HOUSE/DEN - NIGHT

Dennis makes a particularly nice shot. He gives Officer Terry
a sly smile. He's having a good time.

OFFICER TERRY

Dennis, were you surprised I asked you to come over tonight?

DENNIS

A little.

OFFICER TERRY

Go ahead and take your shot.

Dennis looks around the pool table.

OFFICER TERRY

That night after I let you go, a Bauerton man told me he was chased by four white boys in an old Dodge.

Dennis misses the shot.

OFFICER TERRY

We know who those boys were, right?

Dennis gives Officer Terry a nervous look.

DENNIS

I, uh -

OFFICER TERRY

You'd be smart to keep your mouth shut for a minute and listen.

Dennis is stunned by Officer Terry's quick change in tone.

OFFICER TERRY

If I had stopped you later, you guys would still be in jail. How'd you like that?

Officer Terry calmly sinks an impossible shot.

DENNIS

But I -

OFFICER TERRY

Don't deny it. He gave me your plate number. I thought you were a decent kid when you said you didn't want to disappoint your father.

BRENDA (O.S.)

Dinner's ready!

OFFICER TERRY

We're comin', Sugar!

DENNIS

Mr. Terry, I -

OFFICER TERRY

I don't wanna hear it. You and your friends just watch your step, cause I'll be watching you. Now let's go eat. You like friend chicken don't you?

INT. TERRY HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - LATER

Dennis and the Terry family sit after dinner, conversing over coffee and dessert.

MRS. TERRY

Dennis, have any college plans?

DENNIS

I'm not sure yet. I'm thinking about it.

OFFICER TERRY

When I was your age I wanted to be a police officer, just like my Dad. You know, he once arrested Huddie Ledbetter.

DENNIS

Huddie Ledbetter? Who's that?

OFFICER TERRY

Leadbelly! You haven't heard of him? He's a Blues legend!

Officer Terry gets up off the sofa.

OFFICER TERRY

I'll play you one of his records.

BRENDA

No, Daddy, sing him a song.

Officer Terry goes to the stereo and flips through records.

OFFICER TERRY

I don't wanna introduce him to Huddie with my caterwaulin'.

BRENDA

Caterwaulin'? What are you talking about? Mom, make him sing!

Brenda jumps up from the sofa and rushes down the hallway.

MRS. TERRY

Oh, go ahead and sing, Ralph.

OFFICER TERRY

I ain't singin' by myself.

Officer Terry sits in his chair. Brenda returns with a guitar and hands it to her Dad. She joins her mom back on the sofa.

BRENDA

Let's do "Rock Island Line".

Officer Terry does a quick tuning.

DENNIS

Wow, that's a nice guitar.

OFFICER TERRY

After Leadbelly got famous, he gave this guitar to my father.

Officer Terry plays the intro, while his wife and daughter get ready to join in.

OFFICER TERRY

(sings and plays)

*"Oh, the Rock Island Line,
It's a mighty good road,
Oh, the Rock Island Line,
It's the road to ride.
If you want to ride,
You got to ride it like you
find it,
Get your ticket at the station,
On the Rock Island Line..."*

MRS. TERRY/BRENDA

(joining in)

"Jesus died to save our sins..."

MR. TERRY (IN BASS VOICE)

*"Glory to Glory gonna meet him
again..."*

The Terry family finish the song, holding the final chord in harmony. Dennis applauds enthusiastically.

DENNIS

Wow, that was great.

OFFICER TERRY

You mentioned you play guitar.

DENNIS

I used to, in a surf band. We played house parties. No pay, but we got free chips and sodas.

MRS. TERRY

Brenda's in the Drama Club and pursuing a career in Theater Arts.

DENNIS

You should enter the Glenoaks talent show.

BRENDA

I heard about it, but I wouldn't want to do it by myself.

MRS. TERRY

Maybe Dennis could be your partner.

Officer Terry clears his throat.

OFFICER TERRY

I don't think Dennis -

DENNIS

I could come up with a few ideas. My dad says you can do anything with planning, preparation and perseverance. We could do this.

BRENDA

That would be really groovy!

Brenda raises her glass in a toast. On the wall behind her is a framed photo of Martin Luther King, Jr.

BRENDA

To paraphrase Dr. King, "we have a dream"!

Brenda hands Dennis his glass, and they all clink. Everyone is in a celebratory mood except Officer Terry.

EXT. NICHOLLS HOUSE - NIGHT

A Cadillac pulls up to the curb. Dennis jogs out of his house and gets in the back seat.

INT./EXT. TONY'S CADILLAC (DRIVING)/GLENOAKS - NIGHT

TONY ROMAN, 27, in auto mechanic's uniform, slick pompadour and pinkie ring, commandeers his 1950's Caddy with his Confederate flag steering knob. Vince, also in mechanic's uniform, rides shotgun. Dennis and Bobby sit in back.

DENNIS

What's up?

Vince gives Dennis a serious look. The Cadillac slows to a crawl as it passes the burned out shell of the old Dodge.

VINCE

It was torched last night.

TONY

And don't think we don't know who did it. Gonna be some nigger blood spilled over this.

Vince gives a concerned look to Dennis.

INT./EXT. TONY'S CADILLAC (DRIVING)/BAUERTON - CONT.

Tony spots FIVE BLACK TEENAGERS leaving a store across the street, laughing. One of them is bouncing a basketball. Tony pulls over.

INT./EXT. TONY'S CADILLAC (PARKED) - CONT.

Tony steps out of the Cadillac and shouts at the teenagers -

TONY

C'mon! Five against four! You guys got the odds. Let's go!

From across the street, the teen bouncing the basketball says calmly -

BLACK TEEN

No thanks, we don't play that game.

Dennis, Vince and Bobby watch from the car as Tony glares at the teenagers. He has a small towel under one of his arms.

VINCE

I think Tony might be packing!

DENNIS

Packing what?

BOBBY

He's got a gun! He's gonna get us
killed!

Tony pulls out the towel - it's wrapped around his handgun as a silencer. He shoots the basketball, which falls to the ground. The teens scatter. Tony gets back in the car and slams the door.

VINCE

I can't believe you did that.

TONY

Nobody got hurt, I just shot their
basketball. Don't panic!

He hands the wrapped gun to his brother.

TONY

Stuff it under the seat.

Tony quickly takes off.

INT./EXT. TONY'S CADILLAC (DRIVING) - CONT.

TONY

Now, what were you guys talking
about?

DENNIS

The face on the cliff.

VINCE

Remember that drawing I showed you?
With that colored girl at our
school now, we're lookin' for a way
to chase her out.

TONY

I'll kick her ass if I have to.

DENNIS

But then they'll pity her.

Tony jerks the car over to the curb.

INT. TONY'S CADILLAC (PARKED) - CONT.

An enraged Tony glares over his shoulder at Dennis in the
back seat -

TONY

I want that face on the cliff! I'll pay for anything you need to get it done - just fuckin do it!

INT./EXT. MR. NICHOLLS' CAR (DRIVING)/GLENOKS - DAY

Dennis drives his father's car with both hands on the wheel. MR. NICHOLLS, mid 40's, Dennis' blue collar dad in his maintenance work outfit, sits in the passenger seat. Dennis brakes for a stop sign.

MR. NICHOLLS

Get used to making full stops like that and you won't get a ticket.

DENNIS

Dad, remember when everybody thought the neighbors were gonna sell their house to colored people?

MR. NICHOLLS

They were, but the coloreds couldn't get a bank loan.

DENNIS

How come everybody hates colored people so much?

MR. NICHOLLS

We just don't want them to move in our neighborhood. It ruins property values. Their houses and yards are a mess. Usually.

Mr. Nicholls lights a cigarette with his Zippo lighter.

DENNIS

Are they all like that?

MR. NICHOLLS

Well, there's some good ones - Nat King Cole...Willie Mays.

DENNIS

What if one of them moved on our street?

MR. NICHOLLS

I don't think either one of them are moving on our street.

Mr. Nicholls turns to Dennis in exasperation.

MR. NICHOLLS
Why are you asking me all this?

DENNIS
I don't know.

Mr. Nicholls looks at the dashboard.

MR. NICHOLLS
What's the speed limit here?

DENNIS
Uhh -

MR. NICHOLLS
It's thirty-five and you're speeding. When you're driving, pay attention to driving. Make a left.

Dennis turns left at the corner.

INT. NICHOLLS HOUSE/LIVING ROOM - DAY

Dennis sits on the sofa playing guitar. The doorbell RINGS. He puts his guitar down and answers the door. It's Vince.

VINCE
Hey, Dennis! What'cha up to?

DENNIS
Just playing my guitar.

VINCE
Hate to interrupt, but I got something really cool to show you.

EXT. NICHOLLS HOUSE - CONT.

Dennis and Vince come out to see Tony's Cadillac, parked by the front curb. Bobby's in the back seat, holding a five foot aluminium ladder, sticking out of both rear windows.

VINCE
It's twice as strong as wood and twice as light. Thirty two bucks. We got ropes and spray cans too.

Mikey appears from around the side of the house.

MIKEY
Hey, where you guys going?

VINCE

We're gonna go up to the cliff.

DENNIS

Now? You gotta be kidding.

Tony calls from the car.

TONY

What's the holdup? Get in the car.

MIKEY

Can I go too?

TONY

All of ya, get in the damn car!

They all pile in.

EXT. GLENOAKS CLIFF/PARKING AREA - DAY

Vince, Dennis and Bobby carefully unload the ladder, a spray can and ropes from Tony's Cadillac.

TONY

Alright, do what you have to do and I'll be back at three fifteen.

Tony drives off.

EXT. TOP OF CLIFF - DAY

Vince and Bobby stand guard by a rope tied around a tree going over the edge of the cliff. Mikey, off to the side, digs up stuff in the dirt.

EXT. SIDE OF CLIFF - SAME

Dennis stands on a dangling ladder suspended by the rope. He shakes a can of black spray paint. He stares with apprehension at the rock face.

EXT. TOP OF CLIFF - SAME

Mikey picks up a big rock near the cliff edge.

BOBBY

Watch out for spiders!

Startled, Mikey drops the rock. It rolls off the cliff edge.

EXT. SIDE OF CLIFF - CONT.

BOBBY/VINCE (O.S.)
Watch out, Dennis! Look out!

The rock whizzes past him. Dennis deliberately drops the paint can. It bounces down the cliff.

VINCE (O.S.)
You okay, Dennis?

DENNIS
It knocked the paint can out of my hand!

VINCE (O.S.)
You have another can don't you?

Dennis drops the second paint can..

DENNIS
I tried but I dropped it. I think my finger might be broken.

Dennis punches the wall a couple times bloodying his hand.

BOBBY (O.S.)
Tony's not gonna like this! You really did it now, Mikey!

VINCE (O.S.)
Don't blame it on Mikey. You're the one who scared him about spiders.

DENNIS
Just tell him the rope knocked it loose.

EXT. TOP OF CLIFF - CONT.

Bobby and Vince yank Dennis up as he reaches the top.

EXT. TERRY HOUSE - NIGHT

A camera FLASHES - Mrs. Terry photographs Brenda and Dennis under a shady tree as Mr. Terry watches. They resemble attractive young stars from the cover of a teen magazine - except for the interracial couple thing. Dennis looks sharp in a jacket and tie, Brenda elegant in pearls, embroidered beaded sweater and skirt.

Mrs. Terry leans in to her husband -

MRS. TERRY
Don't they make a cute couple?

MR. TERRY
What are you saying that for? Don't encourage them!

MRS. TERRY
(ignoring his comment)
Have fun, kids!

DENNIS/BRENDA
Thanks! We will! Bye!

Dennis and Brenda walk off to the garage.

Mr. Terry remarks with annoyance to his wife -

MR. TERRY
They're just doing research for their show. It's not an actual date!

INT./EXT. BUICK (PARKED)/TERRY GARAGE - NIGHT

Dennis and Brenda walk over to Mr. Terry's shiny Buick.

DENNIS
You look nice. I like your sweater.

BRENDA
Thank you. You look nice too!

Dennis, embarrassed, stuffs his hands in his pockets. Brenda smiles, flattered by his shy response.

BRENDA
You don't mind that I'm driving?

DENNIS
You have a driver's license, right?

BRENDA
Well here's the thing. I don't but don't tell Daddy. And if there's trouble, God forbid, there's a handgun in the glove box.

Dennis is surprised. He opens the driver's door and Brenda gets in. He walks around and gets in on the passenger side.

DENNIS

You're kidding, right?

BRENDA

Of course I have a driver's license. And I don't expect any trouble, so we probably won't be needing the glove box.

DENNIS

That was pretty funny! I like the way you think.

BRENDA

Thank you.

Brenda hands Dennis a boxed record collection on the seat between them.

BRENDA

I got this at the library. It was put together by John Hammond.

He studies the cover.

BRENDA

He's a famous historian of Negro music, and, he's a white man. It has Leadbelly on it, and other folk and Blues music.

DENNIS

This looks cool!

Brenda starts the car.

DENNIS

Where are we going?

BRENDA

I told you, it's a surprise!

INT./EXT. BUICK (DRIVING)/BAUERTON - NIGHT

Dennis is immersed in the boxed record liner note booklet.

BRENDA

Where we're going tonight is part of our research for the talent show. Oh - Daddy said he'd teach you some Blues guitar songs.

DENNIS

Really? He did?

BRENDA

You don't have to be scared of him.
I think he likes you. He's asked
about you several times.

DENNIS

Yeah right.

BRENDA

What kind of guitar do you have?

DENNIS

A cheap electric guitar, but it
doesn't work. I need a job so I can
buy a good acoustic guitar -

Dennis looks out the car window and notices the music shop
display window with the GOLDEN GUITAR.

DENNIS

- like that one.
(looks around)
Hey, are we in Bauerton?

BRENDA

Yes, and here we are at The Gold
Ring!

Brenda pulls up to THE GOLD RING music club.

INT. GOLD RING - NIGHT

Dennis and Brenda enter the one-room coffeehouse/music club.
It's crowded and noisy with CONVERSATION from a multi-racial
hipster AUDIENCE milling about an improvised LOBBY area.

BLUES MUSIC plays from the speakers. Rows of folding chairs
are set up by a PLATFORM STAGE. Tables are set up with
literature and pamphlets. On the walls are blues, soul and
jazz posters of the era.

Dennis and Brenda contemplate a poster of a B&W handshake
with the caption UNITY THROUGH DIVERSITY.

DENNIS

I think that poster is cool, but
most of Glenoaks wouldn't think so.

BRENDA

Maybe your friends would think it's cool if you played guitar while I danced for the talent show.

DENNIS

My friends don't know what's cool.

BRENDA

That's not cool. I'll get coffee.

Brenda leaves.

MORRISON STEIN, early 40's, and his wife MARLO STEIN, late 30's, a Bohemian white couple - stand nearby. Morrison - soul patch, black turtleneck, tweed jacket with elbow patches. Marlo - long black hair, black leotards, beret.

MORRISON STEIN

Your girlfriend's very pretty.

DENNIS

Oh, we're not - we're just friends.

MARLO STEIN

We think you make a lovely couple.

Brenda returns, handing Dennis a coffee. He nods toward the Steins.

DENNIS

They thought we were boyfriend and girlfriend.

BRENDA

(to Marlo)

No, we've been married for years!

Marlo plays along.

MARLO STEIN

How nice! Any children?

BRENDA

Just the twins so far.

DENNIS

Yeah, one's black and one's white.

BRENDA

No silly, it's the other way around!

They all laugh.

MORRISON STEIN

I'm Morrison, and this is my wife
Marlo.

Friendly handshakes all around.

MARLO STEIN

You remind me of us when we were
young. We're a mixed couple, too.
I'm Catholic, and he's Jewish.

Brenda and Dennis laugh.

DENNIS

I guess that is mixed.

MARLO STEIN

It was pretty taboo back then. It
wasn't illegal though.

MORRISON STEIN

Did you know the Supreme Court is
hearing a case on interracial
marriage this year?

Brenda and Dennis shake their heads no.

MARLO STEIN

Mixed marriage should be legal.
It's 1967 for crying out loud!

Dennis looks over at an anti-war poster on the wall.

MORRISON STEIN

I hope the Supreme Court will look
into ending that stupid war too.
It's illegal. All those young men's
lives wasted and for what?

DENNIS

If I get drafted, I don't know what
I'll do. I'm not sure how I feel.

MORRISON STEIN

Here, just in case.

Morrison hands Dennis a business card, which reads: "End This
Illegal War Now - Morrison Stein, Attorney at Law."

The houselights FLICKER. The MUSIC goes quiet. Dennis, Brenda
and the Steins shuffle with the audience to their seats.

ONSTAGE

AN ANNOUNCER stands in the SPOTLIGHT. The crowd quiets down as he speaks into the mic.

ANNOUNCER

Welcome to the Gold Ring. Tonight we're proud to bring you some Blues history. Our guest has been performing since before the Great Depression. Please welcome...
L'il Albert McGee!

The announcer walks off as the lights dim. Big APPLAUSE from the audience. The SPOTLIGHT comes up shining on veteran Blues singer -

L'IL ALBERT MCGEE, 70's, wearing a cheap, well-worn suit and an air of authenticity. He's seated in a wooden chair, holding his faithful acoustic guitar, smiling broadly. L'il Albert fingers some Blues GUITAR notes.

L'IL ALBERT

You know, I was so poor before the Depression, I didn't even know there was one.

The crowd LAUGHS.

L'IL ALBERT

Now it's thirty years later, and I'm still broke!

More LAUGHTER. His voice drops an octave.

L'IL ALBERT

I had me some bad times and some good times too. Even back then, we had women.

Some LAUGHS from the crowd.

L'il Albert performs "Always Play Some Blues":

L'IL ALBERT

*"Sometimes you get your heart broke
And everything looks bad
Then when things start lookin' up,
That's when you lose your job.
But just remember this, my friend,
Sometimes you win,
Sometimes you lose,
Just make the best of things and
You can always play some Blues."*

L'il Albert stops his guitar dramatically.