

Black Wednesday
(excerpt)
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DARKNESS.

Footsteps, echoing.

FADE IN:

INT. A HALLWAY. DAY.

SUBTITLE: JULY 17th, 1957. LOS ANGELES

Follow the steps of A MAN, clutching several files in his arms. He hurries through an empty hallway towards a set of double doors.

INT. A CLOSED CAFETERIA.

Polished and closed, its chairs and tables stacked away. The man, JOSEPH LANE (32), a tall, humble guy with calm blue eyes, bursts in.

SENATOR SMITH
Good afternoon, Mr. Lane.

The afternoon light filters through the windows, directing him to lone desk in the center of the room. Joe sets his files down and nervously glances at several OFFICIAL-LOOKING MEN seated in the shadows. The room is hushed, a secret committee.

Their leader, the elegant SENATOR MARGARET CHASE SMITH (50's), raises an eyebrow.

JOE
Sorry I'm late. Senator Smith. Mr. Tolson, it's an honor to meet you.

CLYDE TOLSON (50's) amiably raises a hand, the casual one in the lot of interviewers.

TOLSON
The honor is all mine, Mr. Lane.

SENATOR SMITH
Mr. Lane, it comes to my attention, that you, an FBI agent, works as a mere secretary for a counterintelligence program outside of COINTELPRO. Assistant Director Tolson and I rarely travel outside the duties of Washington.

(MORE)

SENATOR SMITH(cont'd)

But since the death of Senator McCarthy and Head Director Hoover's unwillingness to cooperate, my interests leave me no choice but to come to Los Angeles to hear the facts inside this program itself.

Joe shifts uncomfortably. His eyes are on the stack of files in front of Senator Smith.

SENATOR SMITH

I have reviewed the files on this particular program as well as your employers. Some of these duties which includes unauthorized wiretapping, overriding of state and local authority, theft and assassinations of American citizens...?

JOE

I don't think I can reveal much, Senator--

SENATOR SMITH

Young man. Whatever we like it or not, there is a war going on. I want to know what this undisclosed operation is and I want to hear it from you.

Joe hesitates then grabs the pitcher of water off his table and pours himself a drink. One of the men switches the recorder on.

It's going to be a long story.

DARKNESS.

AS CREDITS ROLL:

MONTAGE: A grainy blip of light flashes in the darkness and blooms into a full blown explosion. Another scratchy footage of a massive cloud billowing into the sky, its form swelling into a mushroom. One clip after another, nuclear bombs in the day and in the night explode, swallowing the heavens with smoke and fire.

TITLE CARD: BLACK WEDNESDAY.

We slowly PULL BACK and the reel of explosions flickers to a stop on a projection screen.

INT. CLASSROOM. DAY.

SUBTITLE: FEBRUARY 25th, 1957 (SIX MONTHS AGO)

Inside a stuffy classroom. A nerdy-looking PROFESSOR, in thick horn rimmed glasses, switches off the projector.

PROFESSOR

Now that we've watched this delightful film, I'd like to see a show of hands who can tell me the social-economic effects of The Black Death during the 1300's.

None of the STUDENTS raise their hands. The professor scratches his ear and scans for a victim....

Next to a window, JACK ABNER SINES (19) is bobbing his head, struggling to stay awake. Unlike his clean-cut classmates, he's dressed loosely in shirt and tie, his black hair ruffled and untidy. But behind his boyish looks and uncanny appearance, there's a sense of resilience in the kid.

Instantly, his forehead drops through his hands and SMACKS onto his desk. Heads turn and the professor targets him.

PROFESSOR

Ahh, Mr. Sines. Always a pleasure to volunteer. Can you name one result The Black Death had on early Europe.

Jack rubs his head then looks tiredly at the professor.

JACK

Death.

The professor gawks at him.

PROFESSOR

Okay. Wonderful. Death has been a result of the plague...

Snorts and giggles from the class and the lecture resumes. A paper airplane sails through the air and pokes Jack in the cheek.

Jack exhales, crumbles the plane, and glances out the window. A tall MAN IN A FEDORA HAT and suit leans against a black sedan and watches him. Jack stares back at him, troubled.

EXT. USC CAMPUS.

JACK emerges from a building of brick and stone and starts walking. Behind him, the BLACK CAR follows, rolling alongside him.

Jack passes by several windows, glimpsing the car's reflection. He quickens his pace.

The car parallels Jack and he sees the MAN IN THE FEDORA HAT at the wheel. Jack starts running. He dodges a BICYCLIST and veers into a quad.

The car parks at the curb and the Man In The Fedora Hat steps out, pursuing him.

Jack looks back, the man now a distant silhouette, SLAMS into a brick wall, and flops onto the floor. In front of him is a huge mural of blue skies and the towers of a nuclear energy station: "PHYSICS: TODAY'S ENERGY FOR TOMORROW'S FUTURE."

The man takes off his hat with a frown. We now get a better glimpse of him as MR. JONATHAN SINES (44), a refined handsome man with piercing gray eyes and a amiable face.

INT. SEDAN.

JACK is slumped on the passenger seat with a large BANDAGE strapped on his forehead. MR. SINES drives, uncertain what to say. Both of them are silent.

MR. SINES

How are you doing in school?

JACK

(None of your business)

Fine.

MR. SINES

What kind of classes are you taking?

JACK

Archery, Physics, Shakespeare--

MR. SINES

(Hums)

'To be or not to be...'

JACK (CONTINUED)
--English, History of the Roman
Empire...

MR. SINES
You know, Junior, you need to start
thinking about your future.

JACK
Why do you care what I do?

MR. SINES
Because I'm your father, that's
why.

JACK
You sure aren't acting like one--

MR. SINES
Let's just stick with your future,
alright? If my guess is right, you
haven't figured what you want to
be, haven't you?

Jack doesn't answer.

MR. SINES
First, you were thinking about
being a writer. For a newspaper.
Okay. Then you changed into
becoming a doctor. Then you thought
about being a scientist, a
meteorologist...

JACK
You've been spying on me.

MR. SINES
According to your advisor, a cute
lady I might add, you don't seem
like you have a plan of your own
here. Just picking all sorts of
weird classes here and there...

JACK
(Distressed)
Does it really matter to you?

MR. SINES
Of course it does.

JACK
The hell it doesn't!

Mr. Sines frowns.

JACK

(Angry)

I don't know who you are! All my life you told me you were a family friend. Then an uncle. Then you tell me you're my dad. You've LIED to me!

MR. SINES

Well I...

JACK (CONTINUED)

You never even showed up for my birthdays! You weren't there for my graduation! I even wanted to work with you in that mortuary down Barstow and the place doesn't even exist. Now, just when I'm finally living my life, you start stalking me!

Jack glares at his father with the look of murder.

MR. SINES

(Apologetically)

Well today's your birthday, isn't it?

JACK

My birthday was last month. You don't even remember what my birthday is, do you?

There's a tinge of guilt in Mr. Sines' eyes. Jack sulks back in his seat.

MR. SINES

Alright. I'll...take you out to eat then. Where do you want to eat?

The kid has his arms folded.

MR. SINES

Okay. I know a good place somewhere around town with some great pie. I know you like pie, if that's okay with you.

No answer.

MR. SINES
Okay then...

And he turns the wheel.

INT. A DOWNTOWN RESTAURANT.

MR. SINES and JACK, under a shaded patio of a homely diner. Jack is savagely devouring a chocolate pie while Mr. Sines checks his watch then clears his throat.

MR. SINES
May I have a piece?

Jack glowers at him.

MR. SINES
Alright then...
(Calls)
Waitress! A glass of water please?

AGNES (17), a pretty redhead with short hair, swiftly carries a glass to the table.

AGNES
Here you go, sir.

She sets the glass down, the two youngsters awkwardly blushing at each other. Chocolate and cream are crusted on Jack's face.

Mr. Sines grins as she giggles and walks off.

MR. SINES
What a nice girl.

JACK
I'm not really up for dates, Dad.

MR. SINES
A date? I didn't say anything about a date, unless you want for me to arrange one.

JACK
I meant nothing like that...Dad!

Mr. Sines innocently raises his hand again.

MR. SINES
(Calls, playfully)
Oh, waitress! Waitress!

Jack yanks his hand down. The man laughs.

MR. SINES
I was joking, I was joking. You
didn't think she would hear me, did
you?

AGNES (O.S.)
More water, sir?

Agnes stands over their table.

MR. SINES
A bottle of your *Les Tressor*,
please.

AGNES
Sure.

She nods and heads inside. Sines buries his head in his
hands.

JACK
Why do you torment me?

MR. SINES
I'm not tormenting you. I'm helping
you out here.

JACK
I never asked for your help.

Mr. Sines frowns. The boy has a point.

MR. SINES
I'm going to be frank with you,
Junior--

JACK
(Corrects him)
It's Jack.

MR. SINES
I care about you. I always have.
But my work can't involve you.
You've always known that?

JACK
You mean that job where burying
dead people? Or that other secret
one with the FBI catching all those
communists that don't even exist?

A few of the customers overhear this.

MR. SINES
(Sternly)
Junior...

JACK
All you worry about is Communism.
Russia. War. Takeover. Good people
are getting hurt because of you and
you know what? Maybe is we didn't
bomb Hiroshima in the first place,
none of the arms race would've
happened--

Mr. Sines calmly slams a fist on the table. Jack shuts up.

MR. SINES
We bomber Hiroshima to save
American lives.

JACK
Tell it to the thousands of people
who died minding their own business
on that island.

Mr. Sines exhales with a frown.

MR. SINES
I wish you could understand. That
everything I do in my job, is to
protect your future. Maybe I have
missed those events in your life,
but that shouldn't influence you,
right?

Jack pouts a dull stare at him.

MR. SINES
Alright, forget me. You've grown
into a fine young man. An adult.
You can't depend on me to give you
a future, not even Barstow. What
you really need is to set your own
path and find other people like
yourself, just like that pretty
waitress, who can really help you.

JACK
I can get by just fine--

MR. SINES

Then why did you move to Los Angeles? Are you passing classes to make yourself a future, digging up a treasure? You don't look excited. You look disappointed.

(Sincere)

The choices you make, Junior. Don't do it to impress anyone. Do it for yourself. I'll always be proud of you one way or the other.

Jack nods. Mr. Sines pats him on the head. He leans back and with the sunlight hitting him, he gives him a warm, but sad smile.

MR. SINES

I love you, son--

SPLAT! A BULLET splits into the back of Mr. Sines head and his face slams into his plate. Jack blinks and gapes at the bits of blood and pulp bleeding into the tablecloth.

JACK

(Horrorified)

Dad...

Another shot ZINGS by, splintering glasses and plates. Jack falls backwards off his chair and scrambles through the maze of tables and screaming customers. A hail of bullets slice into the patio, its shooter nowhere to be seen.

Jack spots the entrance door of the restaurant. He dives in, avoiding a shot customer.

INT. RESTAURANT.

PATRONS and EMPLOYEES, cowering on the ground. Jack flees across the room and bursts into--

INT. THE KITCHEN.

--where several COOKS shout at him amid the hiss and heat of the stoves. JACK evades them and runs out the back door.

EXT. ALLEY.

JACK pants against a wall...and glimpses notices several SHADY MEN in suits, hats and glasses at the end of the alley. They dash for him and Jack runs.

Jack flees, hightailing out the end of the alley and into the sunlight.

EXT. A BUSY INTERSECTION.

The SHADY MEN race out into the open sun and scan the area, lost in the bustling of traffic. One of them, the heavy-looking DIRTY MAN, smears the sweat off his face.

DIRTY MAN
Where the fuck is he?

A BUS hisses and slowly rolls off. JACK is inside. His fearful eyes meet theirs as the bus turns a corner.

INT. BUS.

JACK breathes and sinks in his seat. Several rows behind him, a WOMAN with jet black hair and sunglasses watches him.

EXT. DORMATORY. NIGHT.

The brick buildings of the college dorms in the dead of night. JACK glances around then darts across the yard for the entrance.

INT. JACK'S DORM.

JACK bursts into his room, a narrow cell filled with books, papers, and MODEL PLANES hanging from the ceiling. In the dark, he yanks his drawers open, stuffing piles of clothes into his bag.

His eyes catch something at the window and he sees--

HIS POV: THE LAWN.

--Several SHADY MEN stalking across the lawn.

JACK

Panics, frantically looks around for a hiding place.

JACK
Shit, shit, shit!

He snatches his bag and dives under his bed.

A pair of shoes blocks the light underneath his door. The doorknob rattles, twisting and squeaking. Slowly, the screws loosen and with a final CLICK, the doorknob drops to the floor.

Jack cringes, clinging his bag tightly.

The door opens and the SHADY MEN step in, guns and flashlights at their sides. A TALL MAN, a large formidably scarred man, looks around.

DIRTY MAN
(Amused)
Anyone home?

The men wander around, tossing books and clothes aside. One rummages through Jack's closet. Another looks under a table before motioning the OTHER MEN waiting on the lawn outside.

The Tall Man kneels to look under the bed--and sees a solid wood panel, a barrier between him and Jack. He taps it then gets to his feet.

Jack heaves a huge sigh of relief.

TALL MAN
Forget it. He isn't here.

DIRTY MAN
Tony said he just ran here.

TALL MAN
I'm not breaking into every room
just to find him--

He freezes. On the lawn are his men, dead.

DIRTY MAN
Shit!

They grab their weapons. One of the men bursts out of the room but is immediately shot down in the hallway. The others take cover behind the bedroom wall, weapons loaded.

DIRTY MAN
What the hell is going on!

INT. HALLWAY.

THE WOUNDED MAN, his throat gushing with blood. He gurgles loudly at the sight of a FIGURE steadily approaching him.

INT. JACK'S DORM.

JACK, nervously holding his breath. A GUNSHOT(O.S.) silences the wounded man.

DIRTY MAN
(Whispers)
Who the hell is it?

Shots rip through the wall, killing them. Jack covers his mouth, hyperventilating. He sees the bodies on the floor while the sound of footsteps approaches...

A HAND yanks him out of his bed. Sines yelps, finding himself face to face with a slender and alluring woman with jet black hair: JILLIAN HARPER (26). Jack stares at her eyes: one of her irises is a discolored milky white.

HARPER
Are you Jack Sines?

JACK
Huh?!

HARPER
(Urgent)
Are you Jack Sines?!

Harper glimpses several men racing across the lawn. She immediately reloads her pistol and yanks Jack out the room.

EXT. HALLWAY.

Dazed STUDENTS peer out from their doors as several MEN tear up the stairs and FIRE on HARPER and JACK. Harper drags Jack across the hall, returning shots, before bursting into a student's room and locking the door.

INT. STUDENT'S ROOM.

JACK and HARPER, interrupting a YOUNG NAKED COUPLE, humping madly in bed. One look at HARPER'S gun and they flee into the bathroom.

HARPER
Fucking kids, get out of here!

She barricades the door with a chair and thrusts Jack out the window.

HARPER

Come on!

Rounds puncture the door and the SHADY MEN break into the room. They spot the bathroom, locked, the whimpers inside growing louder. The men blast the door off.

EXT. DORMITORY.

A SCREAM (O.S.) then GUNFIRE. HARPER hauls JACK off the fire escape and runs for the street. His clothes spill out of his bag and flutter across the lawn.

A GUNMAN races along the bushes and fires at HARPER. She dodges behind a tree, a bullet splintering its trunk. Sighting their DRIVER and his car, HARPER shoots him dead and pushes Jack in.

INT. SHADY MEN'S CAR.

HARPER lands into the driver's seat, grabs a second gun and thrusts it into JACK'S hands.

HARPER

Take it and use it.

JACK

I don't know how to--

A THUG charges for Jack, his window open. Harper snatches Jack by the wrist and fires the gun in his hand. A bullet smacks into the thug's head and he topples to the ground.

HARPER

(Scolds)

Use your Goddamn archery!

Through the window, she sees more men running for them.

EXT. DORMITORY.

The car screeches off the curb and disappears.

The leader, A MAN WITH A GOATEE and a cane, walks into the street, watching the taillights fade. The rest of the Shady Men gather behind him.

INT. SHADY MEN'S CAR.

HARPER, on drive, glances at her rearview mirror.

HARPER
I'm going to ask you again, kid.
Are you Jack Sines?

She glances at JACK and sees him cowering in his seat.

HARPER
Kid! Come on, answer the question!
Are you him or not--

Suddenly, gunfire shatters the windshield. Blinded by headlights, Harper hits the breaks as the car SMASHES into another vehicle.

WASH TO: