



Heist Broker, the Film Treatment
by Stewart Meyer and David Schmidlapp (c) 2011
based on the novel, Heist Broker by Stewart Meyer (c) 2009

Heist Broker takes place between the 1993 attempted bombing of the World Trade Center, and September 11th 2001. It is the story of Nicky Cessario, the very determined South Brooklyn fella who masterminded the 1998 bank robbery in the most fortified building in the free world; the North Tower of the World Trade Center. A creature of wide parameters, Nicky had led a group of office workers out of the bombed North Tower in 1993. But 1998 saw the dark side of Nicky's capacities.

This is a fiction story based directly on actual events, friendships, and the eternal jabber vine that runs through South Brooklyn with the seeping persistence of the Gowanus Canal. It is not based on newspaper or police archives or public records. It was not deeply researched on-line. It is the product of walking talking primary source human material.

New York City in that pivotal period -- the lofty postures of the Great American Era of power and world prestige about to be shaken to the foundations -- is seen through the piercing eyes of a working class patriotic family man with a few secrets. The era is dense with new equations; personal computers, cell phones, easy credit, technology and stock market bubbles. Smart, strong, flowing with the times . . .

. . . Nicky is a deeply conflicted man. He is capable of great bravery and compassion. He is quite competent at armed robbery. His father and strongest influence, Frank, was a brutal hard-drinking man who served as an enforcer for the Colombo Crime Family and ran his household through violence and intimidation. As the oldest of five children, Nicky's primary job was protecting his mother and siblings from his father's drunken rages. Frank died by accident or suicide before the story starts, but remains a major influence on Nicky. Frank schooled his oldest son on how to get by in the world. The primary lesson involved expertly planned bank robberies. A mixture of awe and contempt for his father has caused Nicky to mold himself on a self-created inverse image.

Nicky does not drink. He has never raised his voice in anger to his wife or kids. He has never cheated on his wife. Nicky always keeps his word. Yet below the point of his control, he is his father's son. He has tempered his father's discordant influences to a point, but being a man of action, integrity, and uncontrollable intelligence, Nicky Cessario finds himself speeding head first into his father's pain.

On the dayshift Nicky is a hard-working maintenance and construction supervisor working in the Twin Towers. He is in his mid-forties, married with two kids and a mortgage on his South Brooklyn home, supporting an extended family with endless needs. Anyone with a problem knows they can call on Nicky. Aside from 'the night shift,' Nicky is a model citizen.

Through necessity and design, Nicky supplements his modest income with his gift for the masterful planning of bank robberies. He is old school. In twenty years of operations, not a shot fired, no one ever hurt, no individuals robbed. Aside from the odd truck jacking to fill time between 'campaigns,' bank 'withdrawals' are the rule.

Nicky has his own style. Although respected by local Cosa Nostra in his tough waterfront nabe, Nicky leads an independent crew: friends since boyhood who respect and value each other. No informants, no amateurs. Tolerated on set by tradition, the neighborhood crew constitutes an ironic form of grassroots policing, keeping their little section of gang-infested South Brooklyn safe and under control. All his life Nicky's rigid rule of allowing only his home team in on major secrets has paid off in zero arrests.

Only once does Nicky involve a mob guy in his missions, and this proves a fatal mistake. The film tells the tale of events leading to, during, and after the biggest heist of Nicky's career and one of the most dazzling bank robberies of the late 20th Century. Following Nicky's game plan, three slum bums strolled into the law-enforcement dense North Tower of the World Trade Center, intercepted a Brinks delivery to Bank of America on the 11th floor, and strolled out with over one-point-five-million-bucks.

This brazen act set in motion a blaze of law enforcement anger and determination, and a string of events leading to mass arrests including Nicky's, and the final blow to the only New Jersey Cosa Nostra family. The story concludes at the end of The Great American Era, as Nicky's beloved Towers fall down in a cloud of destruction.

Frank Cessario is Nicky's father. He is long dead when the story starts, having jumped or stumbled in front of a subway train during a drunken spree. His lifestyle and his manner of death have left deep impressions on Nicky. Frank's voice is a constant factor in Nicky's head, as it was Frank who taught Nicky how to survive in the world: how to plan flawless robberies. It's Frank's eyes that Nicky sees through as he is planning the World Trade Center heist. And it is Frank's death that Nicky internally senses in facing his own downfall and arrest.

Philly DeGrandis is an up and coming wise guy with a con man's charm, trying to earn a button in the local Cosa Nostra family and needing one great score. He is a skirt-chasing banchee and his word is worthless. Ambition and betrayal are his calling cards. Yet, after a big score he can be splashy and hilarious; piling up a hotel bed with coked up hookers then sprawling out on top and going to sleep on them, taking off in directions no one else would imagine. Philly is always ready for the wild and wooly. He prods Nicky into sharing his wildest schemes. One of these is targeting the weekly Brinks delivery to Bank of America in the North Tower, which is full of cameras and law enforcement. 'Man, if I told you we was gonna jack the Pope, you'd go for it,' Nicky comments. 'Yeah, Nicky, that's why you're tellin' me, and not somebody who'd think you was crazy.' Philly knows what he brings out in Nicky, and he knows that Nicky feels charged by the limitless blind faith Philly displays in his schemes. Nicky and Philly are drawn together through sheer adrenalin.

Anton is Nicky's closest friend. He is likable and has a penetrating instinct for actually seeing what he is looking at. Also a creature of wide parameters, Anton takes home and nurses stray dogs, wounded birds. But he is a shooter, capable of extreme violence. Over the years he has assumed the role of body-guard. He is suspicious of outsiders, particularly Philly who he dislikes. Anton is one of those guys who will push you to the limits then make you laugh so you can't stay mad at him. He typifies the cohesive loyalty of the BigTop Crew.

Marko is more than a neighborhood guy. He is street nobility. Composed, intentional, a made man and master bookie, he has top mouth at the BigTop Social Club. But he does no business with his homies in South Brooklyn and never pulls rank. His business is conducted elsewhere, and is never discussed or referred to. His position as 'a corporate guy,' requires him to wear suits and conduct himself professionally. His presence sets an elevated tone and adds prestige. Like Anton, he does not trust Philly and makes this clear to Nicky.

Rosario is a Spanish speaking black guy from Redhook. He is an expert electrician in Nicky's work crew at the WTC. Rosario and Nicky broke the color line at work. Before their friendship a distinct distance was wedged between white and black and Latino workers. He and Nicky are tight, and often drive in from Brooklyn, lunch, and scheme together. Nicky is his boss but they are equals. They are comfortable working together. Rosario is pulled into the WTC robbery because he is stand-up and trusted. He is capable of knocking out cameras and monitoring activity in the parking area where the Brinks truck pulls in.

Linsey is Nicky's daughter and pride and joy. Beautiful, intelligent, destined for a life beyond South Brooklyn, which Nicky intends to make sure she achieves. An A+ student, she is empowered by her father's love. She also knows his secrets, although nothing is ever stated. Linsey can challenge Nicky and make him consider her position. She knows her opinions register with Nicky.

Nicky Jr is a hard working carpenter who knows his father will not tolerate any thug-like behavior from him. He is a good kid, distanced from the 'night shift,' and knows very little about his father's means of supporting a large extended family. Junior does not run with thugs. Nicky has schooled Junior to walk the straight road. Both kids are very proud of their father's obvious status in the neighborhood.

Rita has been Nicky's wife since she was sixteen and he was seventeen. She and Nicky form a secure household for themselves and their kids. A Sicilian wife, Rita never questions her husband. Rita's parents took Nicky in when he was sixteen and his father threw him out of the home. As Nicky got older and started making big money, he always took care of his in-laws because of that.

'Red' is Nicky's mother. Raising a brood of kids in a waterfront neighborhood with an abusive husband, has only strengthened her resolve. Red has lived through the deaths of three of her children. Nicky has always taken care of her. Unlike Rita, Red knows every move her son makes. She is his confidante.

First Sequence: Events Promote A Robbery Plan

Scene One

Pan of approaching Manhattan skyline from the Brooklyn Bridge, cuts to Nicky Cessario rolling his old caddy off the Bridge on his way to work in the Twin Towers. Although he peeps those towers every day, he is still in awe.

Voice Over: 'Man, nobody ever went up one-hundred-ten stories before, and nobody ever anchored a building six stories down into the bedrock. These fuckin' towers are a testimony to what man can do on this earth.'

Walking through a basement parking level, Nicky spots a Ryder van parked next to a support beam and frowns.

Voice Over: 'That van blocks vision of drivers looking for spots. And why let trucks park near support beams?'

Nicky is distracted from this thought by a co-worker and friend, Rosario, who informs him of an electrical problem on one of the floors. They step into an elevator together.

Just as they step off the elevator on 11, the Ryder van, filled with explosives, blows up in the basement, rippling the Towers like a tuning fork. A visiting electrician takes a whiff of the smoke coming from vents and announces that he's getting his ass out of there.

Office workers pour into the corridors. A woman Nicky knows becomes hysterical and he impulsively comforts her, assures her he will get her out of the Tower. She faints and he hefts her on his shoulder. Other office workers hear Nicky's assurances and he is suddenly thrust into a leadership role. He is a natural. "Now we're gonna form lanes and take stairway B down to the Concourse."

At risk to their own lives, Nicky and Rosario lead thirty office workers out of the North Tower through a smoke filled stairway. On the street, he places the woman down and is catching his breath when an EMS worker places an oxygen mask over his face just as a reporter snaps his picture.

Flash on the word: 'Hero', under the picture of a masked Nicky Cessario.

Scene Two

Nicky is presented with an award during a ceremony honoring the heroes of that first attack on the world trade center.

Nicky sits in an assembly, bored shitless as awards are presented. His wife and children glow with pride. His mother figits. Something about the setting makes her uncomfortable. Junior sits next to Nicky, who hates long speeches and makes sarcastic comments. Names are called. Awards presented. Lindsey and Rita are beaming as Nicky is honored.

That evening Nicky and Junior are sitting in their backyard and Nicky explains to the kid why the bomb did not topple the Tower. "The blast blew down instead of up. Whoever placed that van couldn't read blueprints or they'd've known the ceiling above was a truck-loading platform. It was so thick the explosion couldn't release upward. It blew six stories down, but not upward."

Flicker of images:

Twin Towers jutting up above the building line.

Shot of rippled plaza between Towers after Ryder van exploded.

EMS workers charging into North Tower.

Shots of the clean-up - the broken glass and debris in passage between Concourse stores.

Shots of Twin Towers entry bustling with daily workers back on the job.

Nicky goes into an inspired description of the Towers for Junior, mentioning the central iron backbone allowing both Towers to flex in the wind load off the river. "Every floor is suspended from that iron core." Nicky confesses to being in awe of the buildings and feeling a thrill every time he walks into his job.

Junior asks why would anyone want to do a thing like that.

Nicky explains, "That was Mr. Death makin' a statement."

As Nicky's philosophy leaks out, images in a cluster:

Saddam Hussein & Donald Rumsfeld shaking hands.

Gulf War ships at sea (could be cargo & navy ships, oil tankers).

Bill Clinton debating Bush Senior debating Ross Perdue.

Construction workers with USA flags on helmets.

Headlines: Industrial China Emerging!

“See, you got all kinds of criminals. Bank robbers just want the money. They get it, they become gentlemen. If they’re pro, nobody gets hurt. Then you got idealists. Man, they’ll kill a million people for the good of mankind. If they’re religious idealists, blood will flow.”

Nicky’s daughter Linsey walks briskly into the yard, obviously on a mission. Still dressed from the earlier award ceremony, she looks like a little kid in adult clothes and makeup.

“Daddy, Anton is waiting for you upstairs, ” Linsey lets out in a stern little girl’s voice.

Scene Three

“Dad! Dad!” Linsey’s voice is more mature. She has been jumping rope with her friends in front of the house. She stops and runs up to her father. Linsey is now a teenager, almost a woman. As always he looks at her and his potentially hard face melts with open admiration and love.

“Anton’s upstairs, Dad. He’s been waiting a while. Your dinner’s on the stove.”

“It’s a school night, little Miss Poopsie. That means nine-thirty you’re in the house.”

“Eww, don’t call me that,” she lets out as her face scrunches with delight. She issues a defiant glare, but when Nicky turns away she looks very pleased at how much he cares about her and worries.

Upstairs, Nicky greets Anton, who is holding a phone and waiting for a television preacher to get to him. He is livid with mischief. “So that’s why the phone was tied up,” Nicky barks. Anton responds: “That jerk Philly kept callin’, so I got on line with Brother Bob just t’goof. I’m on soon so watch my play.”

Anton asks Brother Bob to pray for his grandmother because she won't eat. "I keep throwin' food at her but she won't eat it." Brother Bob makes a foul face and announces that it's Satan on the line.

Nicky goes in the bathroom, turns on the shower, sits naked on toilet and calls Philly before stepping in.

In a gaudy living room, Philly is posed ass-up over a chair and being spanked by a dominatrix. A cell phone rings. He tells her, "This is important we have to stop a minute," and flips open the phone. Dominatrix shrugs indifferently and flicks an ash off her cigarette onto Philly's red ass.

On a split screen we see Philly and Nicky make plans to meet in Park Slope. Philly mentions with a chuckle that he's on one of those 'new' cell phones Nicky cloned for him.

Scene Four

Nicky is sitting at a table in an outdoor café in Park Slope with Philly. Anton is double-parked, watching Philly suspiciously.

"Nobody can put t'gether a score like you can, Nicky. You're blue chip on that shit. Don't think some big people haven't noticed," Philly bolts out.

Nicky is modest and self-protective. "I don't want big people t'notice, Philly.' I just wanna quietly put my daughter through college and make sure my family's livin' without a struggle."

Philly pressures Nicky to come up with a big score, as he needs a cash infusion. Philly is very animate, in what could be a coked-up frenzy. "C'mon! C'mon! You'n me can do anything! Over the top!"

Nicky: "If I said we're gonna jack the Pope, you'd jump on it."

Philly yelps with enthusiasm: "Now y' talking , Nicky. Let's do the big one!"

Nicky smiles coyly. "I got a monster idea and you are crazy enough t'push me into doin' it but . . ."

Philly yelps! "Now I hear you. Now I hear you!"

Nicky drags it out, confesses first to a worry. "You pop your rocks on the number'm talkin' you're gonna reach for a button. Two hundred wops will know your secrets. I don't need the profile."

Philly swears he isn't thinking that way and he will consult Nicky before reaching out for a button. Philly suspects Nicky's friend Marko has been speaking against him, causing Nicky to hesitate.

Nicky assures Philly that Marko is indifferent to him. Nicky orders two shots of espresso to beef up their coffees.

Nicky lets it out in whispers. "I'm talking about a huge score. A bit over the top, but heavy return on our efforts.

Philly can't contain himself. "It's the long shots that make you rich, Nicky. Give it to me"

Philly knows how to ignite Nicky into spilling it, and he does.

Nicky finally confesses. "Well, I been workin' in the Twin Towers for almost twenty years now, Philly. I know what goes on in that complex. And for the past few years I been clocking the Brinks truck that make weekly deliveries to Bank of America in the North Tower."

Philly eyes bulged and twinkled, "Alright! My ears are fillin' up with angels!"

Nicky tells Philly how the place is full of cameras but if you know where they are nothing is impossible.

Philly: "How much? How Much?"

Nicky: "More than one man can carry. These are Brinks guys, Philly. They got guns and training."

Philly: "Hey ain't those towers full'a law?"

Nicky: "The building's fulla cops; that's why the Brinks guys're sleepwalking. Security up the gazoo, but the Towers are so fuckin' vast. They're porous.

Three guys could slip in and out. It's a matter of timing and knowin' where everything is. The right guys."

Philly: "I got the fuckin' guys! Let's meet with'm!"

Nicky: "Not yet. Keep your dick in your pants, Philly. I'm not sure this is such a great idea. I'm just playin' with it in my head."

Philly wants to set a calendar but Nicky wants to give the Brinks matter further thought. They agree not to be seen with each other. Nicky tells Philly to stay out of his "nabe" and avoid calling his house. They agree to meet in a coffee house in the village in two weeks after work.

Philly hits Nicky up for a loan. Nicky loans him a few hundred bucks but warns him it's coming from Linsey's college money and he wants it back soon.

Scene Five (Nicky initiates the plan)

Nicky and a co-worker, Rosario, are walking through the underground garage when the Brinks truck enters and rolls past them. They both stare.

Nicky: "Tasty, hey?"

Rosario: "Tasty but impossible."

They share a laugh. Nicky's two-way goes off and he is called upstairs. He follows the brinks guys into the elevator and starts chatting. He casually taps the moneybags and checks out the surveillance cameras and positioning of men and moneybags.

Later that night . . .

Nicky and Rosario are walking along the waterfront in Redhook sharing a reefer as they pass the big ships.

Rosario's wife walks in front of them, pushing a baby carriage.

Nicky: "It's time t'bang the Brinks truck, Rosy. Think you could knock out a few cameras for me?"

Rosario: "What? All those cops in that building? They'd have a fookin' fit. You're pullin' my chain, right?"

Nicky: "You know me. If I say it's a go, it's been worked out. You in?"

Rosario: "Vida loca but yeah. I'm in."

Scene Six

Nicky walks over to the local storefront social club, the BigTop. As he nears, he sees Philly walking out of the club. Nicky is pissed. Philly tries to tell him that he has the right man for the job. Nicky abruptly, "I told you to stay out of the neighborhood. One more slip and I nix the job." He walks past Philly and into the BigTop. He is met with hostility from Anton and Marko, who do not trust Philly and are pissed that he walked into their club like he owned it. Anton gets confrontational. Nicky explains that he makes money with the guy. Marko diffuses the situation by telling 'the eyeball story,' as a distractive measure. The story concerns Marko as a young lad being called to the table and facing an acting boss, a stranger, who pulled out a glass eye, placed it on the table, and began talking to it.

Things chill out and Marko leaves with Nicky.

He warns Nicky. "That guy's gonna fuck you up."

They exit frame in opposite directions. The World Trade Center sitting in the Brooklyn harbor is pulled into focus.

Voice Over - a phone conversation between Nicky and Philly.

Philly, "I got the perfect guy for the job. You already know him - Robbie Razors."

Scene Seven

Early Morning. Philly leads Nicky up the steep slope of Sunset Park. Robby Razors is the boss of the crew Philly has engaged. Robby sits on a bench awaiting them.

Robby and Nicky shake hands. "You still work as a plumber?" Nicky asks. Robby tells Nicky he works for Philly, who often renovates old buildings.

Philly says, "You're both from the nabe but maybe travel in different circles, 'cause Nicky ain't a junkie." This embarrasses Robby and he glares at Philly.

Nicky assures Robby that he knows the man to be straight-up, junk or no junk. Robby used to hang with Nicky's younger brother who was a junkie. Nicky confirms Robby's good rep on the street. They can work together.

Robby asks for specifics. All Philly has told him is that the job is being planned by the great Nicky C.

Nicky tells Robby about the Brinks delivery, and how it can be done. He wants the crew to use revolvers with the firing pin over an empty chamber. Nobody gets hurt is rule number one. He warns Robby that pulling this kind of move in a building full of law enforcement is going to draw serious fall-out after the fact. Robby shrugs off the warning. He can deal with it.

Robby does hesitate for a minute though.

"I don't know how my crew will feel about this. It's ten times bigger than our usual moves. I have to table the idea."

Nicky understands. They make plans to do a walk-through of the Concourse and Security areas, so Robby can observe the layout and debrief his crew correctly.

End of sequence: The Plan Is In Motion

Second Sequence: Betrayal Begins

Scene One

Visuals of WTC with V.O. Nicky: "Just clock the mood, the tone on a normal day as you pass through the security areas."

Robby intersects with Nicky in the North Tower's Concourse. They act like they don't know each other but Robby follows Nicky as he walks the corridors, passes Security, into the elevator area, then out onto the street. Robby walks off without gesturing.

Robby and Philly are sitting in Philly's big shiny car on a South Brooklyn side-street. A building is being renovated nearby and Robby is in work clothes. "My guys nixed the job, Philly," Robby informs. "Nice idea, sure. Great for dreamin' around the cooker while fixing on a cold night. But it's not gonna work. Too many cops'n cameras. Better tell Nicky it's off." Philly is furious. "I'll handle Nicky. You stay away from'm. If you do speak, you tell him everything's just fine. Now get another crew together and quick. You owe me, Robby. Do what I tell you."

Scene Two

Desperate for a crew, Philly forces Robby to enlist two street junkies who often do demolition on slum buildings Philly buys, renovates, and flips over. "They already work under you," Philly tells Robby. "Just tell'm what to do. The plan is the thing here, and it's a Nicky C blue chip special."

Robby reluctantly agrees. He is overwhelmed by Philly's bullshit and by a sense of debt, which Philly encourages by loaning him money for drugs once in a while. Chippy and Donnie are now in the game.

Robby takes Chippy and Donnie out on a mission to see how they work together. They stick up a reefer store in East New York. It is a successful score but on their way out Donnie gets shot in the ass.

Robby calls Philly, who instructs him to drive to the office of a 'doctor' he knows who will fix Donnie. They get to the address and note a sign announcing 'vegetarian.' The doc protests, but when he hears they work for Philly he interrupts his performance upon a vomiting cocker spaniel and resigns himself to removing the bullet and getting rid of them quickly.

Scene Three

Nicky is in the North Tower, checking a repair job in the Bank of America offices. He is in WTC uniform looking very professional and transparent, but his inner voice is coming right out of his father's eye. 'What's that wall made out of? Where're the cameras? Drop ceiling? Broom closet? Exits? . . .

. . . Better time the elevator.'

Scene Four -- Robbery

Nicky walks into his mother's house with coffee and pastry. They sit at the kitchen table.

Mother: "You're early this morning, Nicky."

Nicky: "Gotta go in early t'day'm robbin'a bank."

Mother: (blows the comment off). "Don't be cute."

WTC robbery. Three gunmen dressed as electricians are sitting on a bench in the graveyard of St Pauls Church. WTC in the background. They get a chirp on the two-way and go into motion. Flashing fake i.d. cards they enter the North Tower, make their way up to the eleventh floor to intercept the Brinks delivery to Bank of America.

Elevator chimes, guns out masks on. Door opens on Brinks guards, elevator operator, cleaning lady, secretary. Robby, as point man, directs the performance. Hands up against the rear wall, everyone bound in plastic handcuffs, gagged. Moneybags spilled into duffel bags. The three exit, sending the elevator up to 22 where Rosario has arranged for it to get stuck.

The gunmen walk out of the Tower with almost two million dollars. Minutes later, alarms go off and the Complex explodes with police activity but it is too late. The robbers are gone.

During robbery on split screen:

Nicky's mother at kitchen table hair in rollers, cigarette, coffee mug, looking through a shopping catalogue.

Rita working up a sweat doing family laundry.

Linsey at her desk in school listening to a lecture on criminal law.

Nicky in WTC uniform smoking a cig, looking out window, perfectly still except maybe tapping a finger on the sill.

Philly sitting on a spare tire in back of getaway van, trying to keep his clothes from getting dirty as he adjusts himself into a comfy position. When 'my angels,' show up with the moneybags he leaps with joy and rolls in the filth of the stolen getaway van.

They drive to a safe house in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. Philly notes that most of the money is in Japanese yen, which is more than a shock. After a dramatic shitfit over the yen, he distributes cash to the robbers and tells them to leave the City at once.

Scene Five

Nicky is sitting in his Caddy listening to the evening news. The heist is splashed all over the media. Every newscaster in NYC is blabbing full steam about this incredibly brazen bank robbery, this cold affront to local and even federal law enforcement. The Federal Bank Robbery Task Force is promising to go deep in their investigation. For a second Nicky looks worried, as if wondering if he maybe pushed things a little too far robbing a bank under their noses. Then a famous bank robber known as 'The Gent,' who is cooling his heels in a Federal zoo, is interviewed. "Whoever planned this heist," says the Gent, "is the real thing." Nicky glows with pride, in contrast to the boredom he exuded when getting the medal for exceptional service.

Nicky visits his father's grave to gloat, confess, and accuse. "See what I did, Frankie? You happy now? They ain't gonna let this one slide so easy." Slipping out of normal consciousness, he walks under the elevated subway to confront his fear of trains. Nicky feels the strong presence of Frank Cessario around him.

On the eve of the robbery, nothing is mentioned or implied in the Cessario home, although there is a feeling in the air that Nicky's mother is very aware of. Even Rita has a hard time appearing oblivious. Rita goes downstairs to her parent's apartment to watch a favorite show with her mother.

Mom sits with her son at the kitchen table for a few minutes, looking at him strangely.

Nicky: What Mom? What?

She looks away. "I'm goin' home now, Nicky. It's dark out. Maybe ask Junior to walk me around the corner."

End of Sequence: The robbery is accomplished.

Third Sequence: The fallout, to climax.

Scene One

Anton and Marko are sitting in a car outside the BigTop Social Club. They are listening to news of the spectacular robbery on car radio. The announcer does not hide his admiration for the precise planning, the skill and daring of the robbery. He mentions that the world famous bank robber, 'The Gent,' has expressed respect for the sheer audacity of the man who planned this campaign. They look at each other knowingly.

Anton: "Nicky?"

Marko: (frowns, shrugs) "This neighborhood's maybe gonna heat up a little now."

Nicky and everyone else on building staff is interrogated by the Federal Bank Robbery Task Force.

Agent: "Do you think the man who planned this robbery was brilliant or crazy?"

Nicky: "Could be neither, maybe both."

It is a light session and he handles it well.

Just home from work, Nicky is sitting in his old Caddy outside his house, about to turn off the engine when he gets a call from Rosario. Word is out that cameras caught faces of two of the gunmen.

Sequence of flashes:

Newspaper headlines: Donnie Donuts Goofs Again!

Hidden camera shot of Donnie Donuts in hallway

Big Nuts Little Noggins

Unibomber arrested

Robber Posed For The Camera

Did Clinton Lie about Monica?

The Saturday Night Live Skit of the Heist:

“Cops are looking for three Brooklyn guys rolling their balls around in wheel barrels.”

Scene Two

FBI Bank Robbery Task Force descends on Philly’s home in Staten Island.

One of the robbers gave him up. Philly is facing triple digit time due to previous arrests.

Agent: We want Vinny Rivers, not you. Talk, and you get a break.

Philly is told that a sweep is being aimed at the DeCavalcante Crime Family, and he just happened to provide a window into it. Philly agrees to become an informer. Over the coming seventeen months, FBI wired cell phones Philly passes out gathers information for the government’s decimation of the DeCavalcante Family.

Agent: “ And who is this Nicky you pal around with?”

Philly wears a wire while meeting with Nicky and discussing the heist. He plays it very cool. “Good thing the President’s banging that chick knocked us off the front page.” Philly assures Nicky that the three gunmen don’t know who he is, so there is no way it will get back to him. Also, the money is safely buried. “We’re sitting on the golden goose.”

Scene Three

Nicky is interviewed again by the feds, but this time they know he planned the robbery. They are building a bigger case in the background, targeting a mob boss named Vinny Rivers, so they merely scratch the surface with Nicky at this point. General questions.

“Anything unusual that day on the two-ways?” “Any temporary workers in the area that day?” etc.

Later, Nicky and Rosario are driving home from work in Nicky’s Caddy.

Nicky: Don’t worry man, those guys don’t even know me. I was workin’ through a point man.

Rosario: Let’s hope it don’t go further.

Nicky: Even if it goes to me . . . no one knows about you except me and that’s a brick fuckin’ wall right there.

Rosario: It’d never dawn on me t’worry about you.”

Scene Four

Philly calls Nicky at home. It is Saturday night but Nicky is in bed with his wife, not out on the town like Philly. Philly tells Nicky he has something for him, and drags him out of the house to meet him at the Wild West, which is a South Brooklyn waterfront bar left over from the crazy days when the Brooklyn docks were vibrant with activity. Nicky goes because he thinks Philly might have converted some of the foreign money. But no, Philly just wants to give him a present, a cell phone, and introduce him to his goomie, a very beautiful dominatrix. Nicky is impatient with Philly but stays to watch the dom dance.

The dom’s dance is rich with train images as she moves to the beat of Little Eva’s ‘Locomotion.’ Her breasts become headlights. The music sounds like a train. She tilts an engineer’s cap onto her head and tosses her hair.

Choo . . . Choo.

Nicky squirms a little, , his aversion to trains becoming apparent.

But he likes her and is friendly. When Philly suggests that Nicky is quite the lady's man, Nicky corrects him. "My wife gave me two great kids. I never cheated on her and never will." The dom is impressed. Philly presses Nicky to take a 'cloned' cell phone. As Nicky's walking off the dom mouths, 'Don't use it,' placing her hand to her profile like a phone.

Nicky is disturbed by this, but is not sure it has any significance. He admits to some doubts about Philly. He tosses the phone into a sewer.

Nicky is climbing into bed beside his wife, who is sitting up smoking and watching the end of a movie.

Rita: It's a good thing you don't have to get up early tomorrow.

Nicky: Who says? I gotta take m'moms shoppin', come back home, get dressed, go in half a day. That was the arrangement. I'd skip the afternoon too but I gotta clock somebody in.

Scene Five

Some time passes. Nicky passes Marko on the street. Marko nods understandingly. Nicky hasn't been hanging over at the BigTop and Marko knows why. A conversation leads to business. Marko's bookie business is good but the shylock end is being adversely impacted by easy credit. Banks throw money at you. Credit cards arrive spontaneously in the mail.

Marko: "Every mutt's got ten credit cards."

This conversation leads Nicky to get a home depot loan for a second bathroom. What the hell, the heist money's gonna be safe to use soon so . . .

Junior and Nicky start up-scaling the family bathroom. Rita delights in the renovation. Nicky builds a desk and bookshelves in Lindsey's bedroom. Anton comes over and gives a hand. Mother Red enters and starts asking when will they remodel her place.

Scene Six

The one demon that dwells is the demon inside. Frank Cessario. His father's presence in his head remains strong.

Nicky is driving home from work and decides to go out of his way to ride Shore Road. Windows down. Catch the breezes along the Narrows. He meets an old face from his father's crew, a guy named Armond. He is shocked at first, as he'd heard that Armond had died years ago. Turns out he just wanted to leave the neighborhood with no loose ends.

They talk and Nicky learns a few things about his father. 'He was an enforcer, tough as nails. But proud of you, kid, 'cause you never backed down, not even from him. He threw you out of the house 'cause you clocked'm over the head with a lamp'n'knocked him cold. But he was beatin' your mom and you did the right thing. He knew that. That's why he kept takin' you out and schoolin' you on how t'hit banks.' Nicky expresses mixtures of pride and outrage at this information. Nicky begins to wonder if his old man might also be alive. All he really saw when he identified the body was a mangled unidentifiable corpse with Frank's wallet and ring. Armond nixes that idea. "Sorry kid. Generally dead means dead."

Scene Seven

Back at work. Everything feels normal. Nicky is called to his boss's office. He thinks he is about to be reprimanded for failing to make his men wear bowties during a Presidential visit to the Towers. Federal Bank Robbery Task Force men are waiting for him and arrest him.

Nicky displays no emotion and shows only a poker face. Unlike Philly, Nicky just clams up, even after the FBI play incriminating recordings of him and Philly talking about the robbery. Nicky wonders if Philly knew they were being recorded, if he set it up. Nicky will not inform on anyone and is utterly inflexible.

An FBI agent baits Nicky. "Who are you protecting?"

"I'm protecting the way I see myself. You got me, I'm down. That's that."

After extended efforts to flip him, the FBI men actually become respectful. Old school integrity is not something they see every day.

Scene Eight

Nicky is brought to a federal holding tank stuffed with angry men. Nicky looks around for a familiar face. They are almost all familiar. It is like a giant summit meeting of the DeCalvalcantes with a few Colombos thrown in for spice. Nicky looks for Philly but can't find him. He turns and finds himself facing Tiny Garabaldi, an old school cigar from Staten Island who was tight with his father.

Nicky shook his head in puzzlement. "I know why I'm here. What else is going on?"

Tiny's lips curl with bitterness. "Philly DiGrandis is the guy who put us here." "Fuck! You Sure?" This makes it clear Philly knew he and Nicky were being recorded.

Tiny's eyes were rich with rage. "Vinny Rivers wants to speak with you."

Nicky approaches the head boss of the New Jersey mob. His sidemen part for Nicky and allow him through.

Vinny tells Nicky how Philly's cell phones brought the entire family down.

Forty-three men were jabbering on those cell phones, including three bosses.

"I trusted that fuck," Vinny Rivers spits. Nicky winces, guilty of the same sin.

Back in South Brooklyn, Nicky's friend Estebano Luna has paid a criminal lawyer to get Nicky out of the holding tank, which is accomplished due to a bail bond and a life-threatening medical condition the Feds don't want to pay to treat. Nicky pleads guilty. Thanks to a dangerous blood clot, he will await his sentencing hearing at home wearing a tracking device.

Scene Nine

Junior picks up Nicky in the old Caddy.

Junior: "It's been strange in the house without you."

Nicky: "I know Junior. but it's time t'be strong. You gotta be the man while'm away. If somethin's up you can't handle go to Anton or Marko or Estebano.

But don't bother nobody with shit you can take care of on your own."

“Don’t worry about me, Pops. You taught me good enough, I know how t’pull my load”

“No cute stuff Junior. The only thing I taught you good is t’learn carpentry and that’s what you’re doin. Show up, do your work right. Get your ass in the union. I don’t wanna hear about no funny money shit.”

“Yeah, okay.” Junior looks a touch evasive. “Is there any chance you ain’t goin’ away?”

Nicky shrugs. “It don’t look good , kid. My ass will be inside but I’ll be feelin’ good about you bein’ here takin’ care of the moms and your sister.”

A thin normality prevails at home. Nicky’s wearing an ankle bracelet. He goes over the bills with Rita. He prepares her for his absence. Anton and Marko stop over in the evenings. Estebano shows with shopping bags and cooks dinner. Guests enter through Nicky’s in-law’s apartment downstairs, because many of them have police records and Nicky is not allowed to associate with or be in the presence of felons. Nicky looks out the window and sees the old Caddy in front of the house waiting for him, but he can not hop in and drive off.

At Nicky’s sentencing hearing the Federal judge is impressed by the fact that Nicky was a hero during the evacuation of the Towers following the attempted bombing of the World Trade Center. Mrs. Doyle, the woman who Nicky saved, stands and delivers a touching character testimony. The judge is impressed, but . . . “I am here as a Federal Judge. Guns were used in this crime.” Nicky expects the worst, but is only given seventy-two months. It is the lower middle of the Federal guidelines.

Nicky receives this news without batting an eyelash. His expression does not change, even as he hugs his mother, wife, children, friends, and says goodbye. Estebano looks back and sees the marshals placing shackles on Nicky. Estebano ushers Red out the door before she sees this.

Scene Ten

Nicky is in Fort Dix Federal Correctional Facility. He is talking to Rita over the phone. “Best you and the kids don’t come here anymore. Seven-two months ain’t long. It has already been twelve.”

In the background follow inmates are chumming it up with their families in the middle of visitation.

Nicky is in his bunk sleeping. Two dreams . . .

First dream: Nicky is sleeping on a hammock in the back yard. Rita comes out and places Linsey – who is about the size of a football – on his chest. Linsey is climbing over his face with a dirty diaper.

Nicky wakes up smiling, then realizes his cellmate just took a smelly dump, which triggered the dream.

Second dream: Nicky is walking under the elevated train on McDonald Avenue, right where he was the night of the heist, after visiting his father’s grave. Flicker of approaching train, roaring, shaking. Suddenly he is up on the elevated track and the train is coming full speed. He mans-up, looks right at it. The train hits him but without impact. It merely passes through him.

As it roars through him he holds his composure. The train passes completely through him and continues its journey across the flat lands.

Nicky awakens. He realizes a generator noise from the cellblock probably made him dream of the subway train. Nicky lies on his bunk smoking, wondering what the second dream might mean. Suddenly . . .

“Nicky! Come quick man you gotta see this!” It is Shmoolie, an Israeli Nicky often plays handball with. He is very excited.

Nicky follows Shmoolie into the television room. No one is talking or looking away from the television screen. Guards and inmates oddly united, transfixed. The sight that fills Nicky’s eyes is surreal, beyond comprehension.

A big flaming hole has been torn in each tower of the World Trade Center. Smoke bellows from these wounds.

“What the fuck? Is this some kinda action movie?” someone asks.

“Action movie my ass,” a guard responds. “ This is real shit”

Fellow inmate: “Didn’t you work in The Towers, Nicky?”

Other inmate: “Yeah, Nicky saved a bunch’a people back in ’93.”

Third inmate: “Hey Nicky! The Feds saved your ass man. You’d be a dead fuck if you was at work t’day!”

Nicky Cessario is frozen, watching the external but going deep inside himself.

Images of fellow workers slowly fill a split screen. First it seems to be images from the first bombing in 1992; Rosario leading people down the stairways, Mrs. Doyle screaming, then the FBI guys running wildly, which seems like it could be from the robbery! The Moslem coffee guy surrounded by smoke and fire as he looks out a window. The glass shatters. The flames are growing higher as the smoke and heat gain intensity.

Sirens wail through narrow lower Manhattan streets, crammed with shocked people.

In silent disbelief, Marko and Anton are viewing the destruction of The Towers from the Brooklyn side of the Harbor. Rita and her brother are in his car riding home, listening to the radio. Junior has paused from tiling a roof to watch great billows of smoke rise above the Manhattan skyline. Lindsay with schoolbooks held across her chest, standing and watching a tv news show in a student’s bar. Nicky’s mother is at her kitchen table watching the screen.

Back to Nicky Cessario. He is wearing his usual dark glasses. The camera zooms in to catch a tear rolling down under his glasses and over his cheek as the reflection of flames flicker across the lenses.

Nicky Cessario has been penetrated. End.



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