

The Neutral Man

1 EXT. CASABLANCA - NIGHT

A sea of neon flickers in the Moroccan haze. The city pulses with tension and secrets under a velvet sky. Foreign soldiers prowl the crooked streets. Black market deals are whispered in shadowed corners.

2 INT. LE CHAT NOIR BAR - NIGHT

Smoke coils in heavy clouds. Glasses clink. A battered piano moans an old tune. The crowd is a mosaic of uniforms, accents, desperation.

At the center of it all: JAMES HAWTHORNE, early 40s, sharp-suited but weary-eyed. He leans on the bar, indifferent to the chaos he commands. Every glance is calculated, every word weighed—until a fight breaks out.

A GERMAN OFFICER shoves a gaunt FRENCHMAN. Chairs scrape. A knife flashes.

James's voice slices through the din.

JAMES
(calm, cold)
Put it down, or you'll both be
outside feeding the rats.

The room hushes. The Frenchman lowers the knife. The German grins, venomous. James gives a nod; his huge Algerian bouncer, MURAD, materializes, dragging the men apart.

James pours whiskey for a jittery REFUGEE at the bar. The man slides over a stained passport.

REFUGEE
They say you can get anyone out. For
a price.

James studies him, unreadable, then pockets the document.

JAMES
Everything has a price. Even hope.

A gunshot echoes somewhere distant. No one flinches. The piano resumes, softer.

3 EXT. LE CHAT NOIR ALLEY - LATER

James exits, lighting a cigarette. He inhales, watching the smoke swirl—lost in thought.

Murad appears beside him.

MURAD

(quiet)
You have a good heart, brother. You
just hide it well.

James exhales, bitter.

JAMES

Hearts get you killed in this city.

He flicks the cigarette into the gutter.

4 INT. LE CHAT NOIR BAR - LATER

The doors swing open.

In walks ISABELLE MARCHAND, late 30s, fire behind her eyes, dressed like someone who's spent too long on the run. Beside her, a haunted, bloodied RESISTANCE LEADER.

James freezes. Everything in his face breaks and rebuilds in an instant.

Isabelle locks eyes with him—pain, longing, history.

A hush falls over the room.

ISABELLE

(soft, edged)
Hello, James.

James can barely speak.

JAMES

(a whisper)
Isabelle...

The Resistance Leader stares at James, desperate.

RESISTANCE LEADER

(urgent, low)
They say you sell freedom here. For
people like us.

James glances from Isabelle to the wounded man. The piano collapses into silence.

Murad steps closer, wary.

Isabelle's voice shakes, but her gaze is steady.

ISABELLE

Maybe freedom isn't something you
can sell, James. Maybe it's some-
thing you fight for—or you lose it,
forever.

James looks away, jaw clenched. The room feels smaller, the
air heavier. Outside, sirens wail.

The world just changed.

5 INT. LE CHAT NOIR BAR - NIGHT

James signals to Murad with a subtle tilt of his head. Murad
leans in—silent muscle, always watching.

James slides two glasses down the bar for Isabelle and the
Resistance Leader, no words. He glances at the crowd—spies,
soldiers, hustlers—all eyes on the new arrivals.

AT A SHADOWED TABLE

A BRITISH INTELLIGENCE OFFICER murmurs in rapid French to a
veiled ARAB WOMAN, barely glancing at the drama. She passes
him a folded scrap of paper; he palms it and sips absinthe.

IN THE CORNER

A pair of WIRY TEENAGERS—Moroccan pickpockets—scan the
room for marks, eyes lingering on the Resistance Leader's
bloodstained sleeve.

BEHIND THE BAR

James wipes down the same spot, staring blankly at the
cracks in the wood. Isabelle sits, eyes restless, tracing
the rim of her glass. The Resistance Leader winces as he
shifts, blood seeping through his bandage.

ISABELLE

(quiet, urgent)

He needs a doctor. Safe passage. I
told him you could—

JAMES

(cutting in, cold)

You told him wrong.

A tense beat. Isabelle's jaw tightens. The Resistance Leader
coughs, pain etched deep.

MURAD

(leans in)

If the Gestapo come searching, no one
is safe. Not even you, James.

James's face shows nothing. He signals a WAITRESS, who
delivers a bottle and vanishes.

ACROSS THE ROOM

LIEUTENANT KLAUS RICHTER, SS, thin-lipped, wolfish, sweeps
in with two GERMAN SOLDIERS. He surveys the room as if he
owns it.

RICHTER
(loud, to James)
Any trouble tonight? Or just the
usual rats?

James forces a smile, pours a drink for Richter.

JAMES
Just thirsty men, Lieutenant. You'd
know.

RICHTER
(smiling)
Thirst and loyalty cost dearly these
days.

He narrows his gaze on Isabelle and the wounded man. James
steps between, blocking his line of sight.

RICHTER (CONT'D)
And who are your new guests?

James shrugs, plays indifferent.

JAMES
Tourists. Passing through.

Richter laughs, low and dangerous. He lifts the glass, mock
salute.

AT THE BAR

Isabelle's hands tremble. James slides her a napkin with a
name scrawled in ink—"Dr. Arif, 12 Rue des Oliviers."

JAMES
(under breath)
Go. Back door. Murad will take you.

RESISTANCE LEADER
(hushed, desperate)
Will you help us?

James looks away.

JAMES
I sell escape, not miracles.

6 INT. BACK HALLWAY - NIGHT

Isabelle and the Resistance Leader hurry after Murad. The corridor is narrow, lined with crates and the stink of spilled gin.

ISABELLE
(pleading)
He was your friend once, James!
Remember Paris?

Murad glances over his shoulder, wary.

OUTSIDE ALLEY - NIGHT

A battered truck idles. Murad hoists the Resistance Leader inside, nods to Isabelle.

MURAD
If James sends word, you'll know
where to wait.

Isabelle hesitates, watching the bar. Her silhouette is a portrait of regret and hope mingled.

7 INT. LE CHAT NOIR BAR - CONTINUOUS

James returns to the bar. Richter is watching him, predatory.

RICHTER
(strategic)
You should choose your company more
carefully, Mr. Hawthorne.

JAMES
(sour)
In Casablanca, we're all just company for the shadows.

Richter smirks, sips his drink.

AT A NEARBY TABLE

A SCRUFFY SPY slides a coded note into a cigarette case, glances at James. Their eyes meet. The bar is a hive of secrets—James is the keeper of all, belonging to none.

BEHIND THE BAR - LATER

James locks the till, counting francs. The night's chaos ebbs, but his hands shake.

He gazes at the door where Isabelle disappeared. Old pain flares. He pours a shot and stares into the glass, as if searching for the man he used to be.

MURAD (O.S.)

You can't run from who you are,
brother.

James says nothing. He drinks.

The neon sign outside flickers, half-broken.

In the smoky gloom, whispers rise—of escape, betrayal, and war pressing in.

James steels himself, eyes hardening. The city pulses—danger and possibility, wine and blood.

He is alone at the center of a storm he cannot control.

8 INT. LE CHAT NOIR - NIGHT

A new TENSE BUZZ. Richter's soldiers mutter into a radio. Something's wrong.

AT THE BAR

James turns as the British Intelligence Officer quietly sets a silver coin on the counter.

BRITISH OFFICER

(low, urgent)

Two friends of yours. They have minutes, maybe less—Gestapo checkpoints are going up.

James's jaw goes slack—a fraction.

JAMES

(cool, as always)

Tell your handler I want double now.

The Officer vanishes into the crowd.

9 EXT. LE CHAT NOIR BACK ALLEY - NIGHT

Murad drives the battered truck deeper into the maze. The shocked Resistance Leader moans, feverish.

Isabelle clutches his shoulder, whispering courage.

Suddenly, a spotlight arcs across the alley. GERMAN JEEPS block the far end—soldiers leap from the vehicles, weapons raised.

Murad curses, throws the truck into reverse as gunfire SPLINTERS the wood crates lining the alley.

10 INT. LE CHAT NOIR - NIGHT

James, at the bar, hears DISTANT GUNSHOTS. Only his eyes flicker. Richter looks up too, then smirks.

RICHTER
Casablanca's nights are never dull.

JAMES
Nor its company.

James's hand curls tight around the bottle.

AT THE DOOR

The veiled Arab woman glides out, sliding past two Gestapo thugs who rush in.

GESTAPO #1
(haunted, shouting)
Nobody leaves! Where is she? Where is the French woman?

People freeze. All eyes turn to James.

BEHIND THE BAR

James makes a choice. He flicks the light three times—a coded signal. The bartender's boy, barely twelve, dashes for the cellar stairs.

IN THE CELLAR

The boy slips behind stacked crates, pulls a lever. A section of wall shudders open, revealing a cramped tunnel.

11 INT. TRUCK (MOVING) - NIGHT

Murad roars past burning trash barrels, soldiers in pursuit. Isabelle tears her sleeve, presses it to the Resistance Leader's bleeding side.

ISABELLE
(frantic, to Murad)
Rue des Oliviers—faster!

Murad's eyes flash in the rearview: headlights closing in.

BACK IN THE BAR

Gestapo ransack bags and coats. Richter circles James, circling like a shark.

RICHTER
You hear anything, Mr. Hawthorne—you come to me.

James gives a shallow nod—mask slipping, defiant.

AT THE SIDE DOOR

The piano man slips out, weighted by a battered satchel. He glances once at James, then melts into darkness.

IN THE TRUCK

A tire BLOWS—Murad loses control, skidding to a stop.

12 INT. LE CHAT NOIR - OFFICE

James flicks through passports, sweaty hands betraying his calm.

Murad's voice crackles through a hidden radio.

MURAD (V.O.)
We're hit. Corner of Bernhardt and Dumas! They'll find us any minute!

James slams the radio down, pacing.

He throws open a drawer: forged visas, a loaded revolver, RELEASE PAPERS for a ship bound for Lisbon. He hesitates, then grabs them.

BAR FLOOR

The pickpocket teens slide up beside the Gestapo, palming wallets. One slips something—a folded note—beneath James's drink.

It simply reads: "ARIF. Now. Hurry."

James's decision is made in that instant.

13 EXT. STREET - NIGHT

James slips out the kitchen, trench coat flapping. Around him, sirens wail. He pulls his collar high.

AT THE TRUCK

Gestapo close in, rifles raised. Murad helps Isabelle and the Resistance Leader into a narrow alley as glass shatters behind them.

14 INT. BACK STREETS - NIGHT

James is running. He weaves through shadows, flashes of memory: Isabelle laughing under Parisian rain, her hand in his. Guilt lances across his face.

He nears Rue des Oliviers, heart pounding.

ACROSS THE BROKEN BOULEVARD

A German patrol approaches. James ducks into an archway. He sees Isabelle and Murad—trapped against a wall with the Resistance Leader. An officer shouts.

Isabelle meets James's eyes—an urgent, silent plea.

James steps out of the shadows, raising his hands.

JAMES
(bravado, loud)
You want prisoners? You take me
first.

The Germans pause, recognizing him. Richter's wolfish eyes glint from the patrol car.

An impossible moment—James weighing safety against salvation, neutrality against courage.

His old life falls away with every step toward them.