Midnight Cowboy

Screenplay by
Waldo Salt

Based on the novel by
James Leo Herlihy
INT. EVERETT'S BAR - DAY

JOE sits at the bar, staring morosely at his image in the mirror, already quite drunk, oblivious to the assorted types hiding from daylight in the barn-like saloon, waiting for night to fall.

RATSO'S VOICE
Excuse me, I'm just admiring that colossal shirt...

RATSO studies Joe across the corner of the bar -- a sickly, child-size old man of twenty-one -- hopefully nursing an empty beer glass, contemplating the money on the bar in front of Joe.

RATSO
That is one hell of a shirt. I bet you paid a pretty price for it, am I right?

JOE
Oh, it ain't cheap. I mean, yeah, I'd say this was an all right shirt. Don't like to, uh, you know, have a lot of cheap stuff on my back.

Ratso spits as JACKIE leans on the bar next to Joe -- a feminine young person, heavily made-up, hair teased, wearing earrings and a lace-trimmed blouse over shocking pink levis.

JACKIE
Got a cigarette, cowboy?

RATSO
(a stage whisper)
More goddam faggots in this town.

Reaching for a cigarette, Joe glances at Jackie, startled as Jackie twitches his pink levis angrily and turns away.

JOE
Shee-it...
(shakes his head)
Kee-rist, you really know the ropes. Wish to hell I bumped into you before. I'm Joe Buck from Texas and I'm gonna buy you a drink, what do you say to that?

RATSO
Enrico Rizzo from the Bronx. Don't mind if I do.
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JOE
(slaps bar)
Same all around! For my friend, too!

Jackie actively ignores Joe and Rizzo, flirting with a tall farm boy with who watches the TV over the bar.

RATSO
Screw them. Come on.

Ratso moves to a booth now. Joe takes the beers and a couple of glasses and follows.

LATER:

Joe is refilling Ratso's beer glass as he speaks.

JOE
So this broad, she got a penthouse up there with color TV and more goddam diamonds than an archbishop and she busts out bawling when I ask for money!

RATSO
For what?

JOE
For money.

RATSO
For money for what?

JOE
I'm a hustler, hell, didn't you know that?

RATSO
How would I know? You gotta tell a person these things
(shakes his head)
A hustler? Picking up trade on the street like that -- baby, believe me -- you need management.

JOE
I think you just put your finger on it, I do.

RATSO

(MORE)
RATSO (CONT'D)
In the whole goddam metropolitan area. A stud like you -- paying! -- not that I blame you -- a dame starts crying, I cut my heart for her...

JACKIE'S VOICE
I'd call that a very minor operation...

Ratso grabs the neck of a bottle, sliding back in the booth. Joe scowls as Jackie appears with the tall farm boy.

JACKIE
...in fact, you just sit comfy and I'll cut it out with my fingernail file. You won't even need Blue Cross, Ratso.

RATSO
The name is Rizzo.

JACKIE
That's what I said, Ratso.

JOE
(suddenly)
Hey now, you heard him.

RATSO
That's okay, Joe. I'm used to these types that like to pick on cripples. Sewers're full of 'em.

JACKIE
May I ask one thing, cowboy? If you sit there and he sits way over there, how's he gonna get his hand into your pocket? But I'm sure he has that all figured out...

(to Ratso)
Good night, sweets.

JOE
Listen, mister...

Jackie exits, blowing Ratso a kiss

RATSO
...it's ok, Joe.

JOE
Ain't no call to be...
RATS0
(changing the subject)
...See, with these chicks that want
to buy it, most of 'em are older,
dignified, right? Social register
types. They can't be trotting down
to Times Square to pick out the
merchandise. They need a middleman,
right? That's O'Daniel.

Ratso points toward a well-dressed young man sitting at the
bar. Ratso waves jauntily at the young man, raising his thumb
and forefinger in a circle, leaving the young man baffled.

RATS0 (CONT'D)
Him I placed with O'Daniel just two
weeks ago. And look. Not much of a
stud either, what I hear...

JOE
Hey, listen, how about you take me
to see this Mister O'Diddle bird
right now?

RATS0
Well, Joe, you're a nice guy, and
I'd be doing you both a favor, but
why? What I wanna be dragging my
bum leg all over town for? It's no
picnic and what for, for me myself,
what? Tomorrow when some piece'll
be scratching your back in a Fifth
Avenue townhouse, where'll your pal
Rizzo be? Nedicks.

JOE
Hold it, just hold it. You think
I'm that kinda sombitch? Just name
your cut, whatever you want, you
got it right now. Five? Ten, how's
that?

Joe peels a ten from his wallet and offers it to Ratso.

RATS0
Joe, please. You know what I'd ask
anyone else? Oh hell, tell you what
I'll do, I'll take the ten...

(he does)
but when I hand you over to Mr.
O'Daniel, I'll have to have another
ten, Joe; just to like cover
expenses...

END