

BODY RAGS

Written

by

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EST. SHOT

INT. MALIBU MANSION - MORNING

With several telephones ringing incessantly, VENTRY ALNOCH, 53, short, stocky, in designer sports clothes and tortoise-shell tinted glasses, stands in front of a computer keyboard, staring at three different television screens.

ON THE FIRST, A NETWORK NEWSWOMAN is standing in front of a posh Beverly Hills building where angry crowds have gathered.

NEWSWOMAN

A sign on the doors says the office
is temporary closed.

ON THE SECOND SCREEN, A GLOOMY WALL STREET FINANCIAL ANALYST stands in front of a plunging spike chart.

FINANCIAL ANALYST

If the allegations are true,
Alnoch's Ponzi scheme could be the
worst in history.

ON THE THIRD SCREEN, A CLOT OF ANGRY PEOPLE are being held at the end of a driveway by Malibu police officers.

A DARK SEDAN pulls up. Two plainclothes detective get out, one clutching a legal document, and start toward the house.

ALNOCH hits the controls, darkening the televisions.

Stepping over to a photograph of HIMSELF SHAKING HANDS WITH A GRINNING GEORGE W. BUSH under a banner stenciled,

AMERICAN BUSINESSMAN OF THE DECADE

Alnoch presses down on the frame. The photograph slides back, revealing a lever. He lifts it.

The wall slides back, revealing a vault.

He hurries inside, stacking wads of hundred dollar bills into a duffle bag. Glancing around, he takes two gold bars off a stack then reaches for a black box.

Opening it, he removes two gold tags on chains and slips one around his neck.

THE DOORBELL rings.

Startled, Alnoch sets back the box, grabs the bag and steps out of the vault, sealing it.

He hurries out of the den, moving through the opulent living room.

HANDS KNOCK ON THE DOOR.

POLICE DETECTIVE (O.S.)
Mr. Alnoch, Department of Justice.
We have a warrant for your arrest.

Going on to a walk-in fireplace, Alnoch kneels down and presses the top of a log rack.

It flips open.

He holds up the second gold tag, its surface catching the light, revealing A SERIES OF CODED NUMBERS.

Dropping the gag inside the log rack, he closes the lid then hurries to the stairwell, as THE KNOCKING GROWS LOUDER.

POLICE DETECTIVE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
We know you're in there, Mr.
Alnoch. Open up.

Opening a door at the end of the corridor, Alnoch hurries down a staircase into the darkness.

INT. WINE CELLER - MOMENTS LATER

Clutching the duffle bag, Alnoch hurries past racks of expensive wines.

His cellphone rings. He grabs it without slowing his pace; glances at the caller's number, then answers.

ALNOCH
Plane ready? We got enough to make
it straight to Antiqua? Good. I'll
be in Sonoyta in three hours.

Hanging up the phone, he stops at a cabinet filled with temperature and humidity controlling devices.

He tugs on the side and the cabinet opens, revealing a tunnel. Flipping on a switch, Alnoch steps inside and closes the cabinet behind him.

EXT. MALIBU BEACH - MINUTES LATER

As joggers lope along the surf line below a one-story house, a high-powered engine starts inside the garage behind the house.

Momentarily, the garage door lifts and a red Porsche rolls out. At the wheel, now wearing dark glasses is Ventry Alnoch.

Glancing around, he starts up the driveway leading to Pacific Coast Highway.

Pausing at the lip of road, Alnoch gazes up at a MAGNIFICENT MANSION OVERLOOKING THE BEACH.

ALNOCH
(defiantly)
I'll be back.

With a roar of the engine, the Porsche fish-tails out on the highway, heading south toward Santa Monica.

INT. PORSCHE - MINUTES LATER

With the Santa Monica skyline just ahead, Alnoch is fiddling with the radio, scanning every new station he can find.

RADIO ANNOUNCER
We're getting unconfirmed reports
that an executive at Alnoch's own
firm in New York City has leaped
from a window to his death
following disclosure of his
employer's fraud

Alnoch's lips purse in disdain.

ALNOCH
Yeah, right, I pushed him.

Glancing down, he unzips the duffel bag to make sure the money is safe, and momentarily takes his eyes off the road.

BEYOND THE WINDSHIELD,
A POORLY DRESSED BEARDED MAN STAGGERING UP FROM THE BEACH,
VEERS ONTO THE HIGHWAY.

Looking up, Alnoch sees the unheeding man only yards in front of him. Swerving to miss him....

EXT. PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY - SAME TIME

The Porsche careens around the bearded man, missing him by inches, and skids straight into the wall of the tunnel beneath Main Street.

IN A FLASH, THE SPORTS CAR IGNITES IN A BALL OF FLAMES AND SMOKE.

Hearing the explosion behind him, the bearded man whirls around.

EXT. OBLIVION - UTTER DARKNESS

No shape breaks the eternal emptiness. No color betrays the blackness.

ALCOCH (O.S.)
Where am I?

Without resonance or echo, his words are swallowed by the darkness.

VOICE(V.O.)
(resonating)
Where there is no where.

ALNOCH (V.O.)
(growing panic)
What happened to me?

A throbbing silence.

ALHOCH (V.O.)
Where is everyone?

VOICE (V.O.)
There is no one.

ALCOCH (V.O.)
What happened?

VOICE (V.O.)
You ended.

ALHOCH (V.O.)
(terrified)
Ended? No, I'm dreaming.

Deep within the blackness, appears A DROP OF LIGHT.

Like a length of long white string, THE PALE PROFESSION moves forward, approaching.

ALNOCH (V.O.)
What's that?

VOICE (V.O.)
Your life.

As the procession moves closer,
A STAGGERING NUMBER OF PANELS appear on the side:

Like rooms in the midst of nowhere, the white cubes glow, almost blinding, framed by the surrounding darkness.

Inside each panel is a seminal incident in Ventry Alnoch's life.

IN ONE, A SMALL BOY IN ALTAR BOY carrying a collection plate, reaches the back of a church filled with people. Glancing down, he slips a five dollar bill under his frock, then joins the congregation in singing a hymn.

ALNOCH(V.O.)
(gasp of recognition)
That's....

IN THE NEXT PANEL, A COLLEGE STUDENT takes money from another student than hands over the answers for an exam.

ALNOCH (V.O.) (CONT'D)
That's....

IN THE NEXT PANEL, A YOUNG ALCOCH IN BUSINESS SUIT in an a book-lined den, eavesdropping on a telephone conversation. Scribbling down the information he hears, he hangs up the phone then goes to push a beverage cart toward panel doors.

Opening them, he steps into an atrium where an elderly man in a wheelchair is watching stock prices on a television set.

ALNOCH (CONT'D)
...me.

VOICE (O.S.)
It was...you.

ALNOCH
Huh?

IN A BLUR, THE PANELS SHIFT TO THE SIDE, LEAVING ONLY THE LAST ONE.

INSIDE,

GRIMACING FIREFIGHTERS zip up a body bag beside the smoldering rubble of a car.

VOICE (O.S.)
You died.

ALNOCH (O.S.)
No, it can't be. This isn't real.

The silence throbs.

ALNOCH (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(parenthetical)
No, I'm not dead.

His scream is muffled by the darkness.

THE PROCESSION starts moving away.....into the distance now revealing A LONG GRAY LINE, moving closer.

At it does, A FAINT SOUND grows louder and louder until it resembles A ROARING WATERFALL.

A VAST CATARACT APPEARS.

FROM NOWHERE, HUNDREDS OF IDENTICAL WHITE PROCESSIONS APPEAR, DRIFTING TOWARD THE GRAY LINE, THEN PLUNGING OVER THE RIM OF THE CATARACT.

ALNOCH'S PANEL OF EXPERIENCES DRIFTS FORWARD THE EDGE, SLOWING AS OTHER PROCESSIONS TILT AND PLUNGE OVER THE SIDE.

ALNOCH (CONT'D)
What's that?

VOICE (V.O.)
Oblivion.

ALNOCH (V.O.)
No, I don't want to die.

VOICE (V.O.)
You have already died.

ALNOCH (V.O.)
Then what's this, me talking?

VOICE (V.O.)
The echo of you...that will end when you go over.

LIKE PALE CANOES, THE PALE PROCESSIONS PLUNGE OVER THE RIM AND DROP INTO DARKNESS.

ALHOCH
What's down there?

VOICE (V.O.)
Nothing.

ALHOCH
What will happen there?

VOICE (O.S.).
Nothing. Forever, you will be alone.

ALNOCH (V.O.)
No, don't do this to me, please.

From beyond the gray cataract, another procession appears, this one ONE LONG ROW OF LIGHTED PANELS.

Inside each, people are seen.

IN ONE GRID OF LIGHT, A DISTINGUISHED OLDER MAN IN A SUIT IS SLICING HIS WRISTS OVER A WASTE BASKET IN AN OFFICE,

IN ANOTHER, A MIDDLE-AGED MAN SITTING IN A PARK, WAITS UNTIL CHILDREN RUN PAST, THEN REMOVES A PISTOL FROM HIS POCKET AND HOLDS IT TO HIS HEAD: FIRES AND SLUMPS TO THE GROUND.

IN THE NEXT, AN ELDERLY COUPLE WATCH MOVERS CARRY FURNITURE OUT OF A HOUSE. BEYOND A WINDOW, A FORECLOSURE SIGN STICKS IN THE LAWN.

VOICE (O.S.)
Why, you never did anything for anyone else. You thought only of yourself.

AS THE PANELS MOVE CLOSER, more scenes of misery appear:

A CHARITY ORGANIZATION has its office equipment offered up at an auction.

A YOUNG BLACK WOMAN stands crying in front of a bank branch guarded by police, while federal examiners move beyond the window.

ALCOCH (O.S.).
Who are they?

VOICE (O.S.)
 All the people you have hurt,
 ruined and destroyed with greed and
 selfishness.

IN THE DISTANCE, PROCESSION AFTER PROCESSION GOES OVER THE
 RIM.

ALCOCH
 (sobbing)
 I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt
 anybody

IN ONE OF THE WHITE PANELS, AN ELDERLY WOMAN talking on the
 telephone, shakes her head, drops the phone then takes one
 step and faints.

VOICE (V.)
 You want the last thought you will
 have for eternity to be a lie?

The panels disappears, leaving only the gray line and the
 lone white procession of Ventry Alnoch's procession teetering
 at the rim.

ALNOCH (V.O.)
 No! Please, wait. I was wrong. Give
 me a chance.

VOICE (V.O.)
 Too late. You had too many chances.
 You took and took and never gave.

The procession starts to go over the rim.

ALNOCH(V.O.)
 Don't send me down there. Give me a
 chance, to show you I can give,
 just give me a day.

SILENCE.

ALNOCH (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 (breaking down)
 Oh, God, I'm sorry. Don't send me
 to Hell.

VOICE (V.)
Hell is you.

MORE OF THE PROCESSION GOES OVER THE SIDE.

A MOMENT MORE, IT WILL DROP OUT OF SIGHT.

ALNOCH (V.O.)
Yes, yes, me. But just give me a
day to show you I can give.

VOICE (V.O.)
You wouldn't be giving to give, but
to save yourself. No, you need to
be given what you have never gotten
with all your money. Get someone to
tell you the three words you have
never heard since she spoke them.

ALNOCH (V.O.)
(confused)
Huh, who?

ONE PANEL SHIMMERS AND ENLARGES UNTIL IT FILLS THE DARKNESS.

A YOUNG BOY HOLDING A SUITCASE STANDS CRYING IN THE COURTYARD
OF A BOARDING SCHOOL OVERLOOKING THE SEA COAST.

WITH A UNIFORMED CHAUFFEUR WAITING BESIDE A LIMOUSINE, A
FRAIL WOMAN LEANS FORWARD TO WHISPER IN THE BOY'S EAR.

ALNOCH (O.S.) (CONT'D)
(stunned)
That's my mother. She died in the
hospital a week later. I never saw
her again.

SILENCE.

AS THE BOY HEARS WHAT HIS MOTHER HAS SAID, HE HUGS HER,
BEFORE SHE STEPS AWAY.

ALNOCH (CONT'D)
Those were the last words she ever
said to me.

A FLASH.

A ROAR

EXT. PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY - DAY

TOM BANNER, 33, A TALL, BEARDED AND HUSKY, IN TATTERED, DIRTY CLOTHING stands motionless, watching an ambulance race away, its lights flashing and siren cutting through the air.

He turns, watching firemen hose down the last plume of smoke from the blackened chassis of a burned Porsche.

Behind the fire truck are two Highway Patrol cars with officers conferring beside them.

MORNING TRAFFIC inches past the scene of the accident.

SUDDENLY, TOM jolts forward as if snapped from a reverie. He moves toward the hulk of the expensive sports car.

A YOUNG FIREFIGHTER MOTIONS HIM BACK, then leans in to pick up a bushel of what looks like blackened leaves.

YOUNG FIREFIGHTER

(to his partner)

Hey, Tony, think the bank will take these hundreds back?

A MUSCULAR BLACK FIREMAN working the passenger door open with an ax, pauses to glance up.

MUSCULAR BLACK FIREMAN

Fool tried to take it with him.

Seeing something, the muscular fireman WHISTLES LOUDER.

MUSCULAR FIREMAN

Look at this shit. Fucker must have had gold bars....melted down, 1,056 degree, baby.

Tom steps up beside the black firefighter. He peers into the gutted interior, scanning what is left of the floor boards, covered with a yellow patina.

The muscular firefighter glances over, taking in Tom's sorry appearance.

MUSCULAR FIREMAN (CONT'D)

No aluminum cans here, pal.

TOM

No, no, I'm looking for the chain I had on.

The fireman gapes at Tom.

MUSCULAR FIREMAN

Chain?

TOM

Yeah, with a little medallion on it.

He taps his chest.

TOM (CONT'D)

I had it on right here before I crashed.

Seeing the other firefighter look up, the black firefighter makes a circular motion with his index finger against his head.

He points out at the long strip of beach.

MUSCULAR FIRE FIGHTER

Yeah, well, then you go look over there. I'm sure you're gonna find it.

With a last glance at the smoldering Porsche, Tom starts walks against the traffic up the beach walk toward Malibu.

EXT. PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY - MINUTES LATER

Almost numbly, Tom walks along the sidewalk, not paying any attention to the traffic whizzing past.

As he starts past a snazzy new car, Tom glances over, stunned to see his reflection.

Gaping in amazing, he feels his beard then leans over to study the unfamiliar face -- and activates the car's anti-theft alarm.

CAR VOICE

(threatening)

Get back or I'll call the police?

Get back or I'll call the police.

Tom staggers back as the wooden gate of a beach house opens, and A MAN IN LEISURE SUIT peers out. Beside him, a barking dog appears.

MAN IN LEISURE SUIT

Get out of here or I'll have the sheriff here.

Holding his hands up that he doesn't want trouble, Tom continues on.

EXT. PACIFIC COAST HIGHTWAY - MINUTES LATER

Coming past a parking lot, Tom sees the YOUNG ATTENDANT WATCHING A SMALL TELEVISION IN THE BOOTH.

Tom steps closer to the booth, staring at the scene on the screen over the shoulder of the surfer-dude attendant.

A MALE REPORTER IS STANDING IN FRONT OF A BUILDING INSCRIBED COUNTY CORONER.

MALE REPORTER

The body was too badly burned to be identified, but DNA tests should reveal if it is in fact Ventry Alnoch.

Sensing someone behind him, the attendant turns and sees it is only a harmless homeless man.

TOM

I don't believe it.

The attendant shakes his head.

ATTENDANT

Yeah, heavy, huh. All that fuckin' money gone, man, and nobody knows where.

TOM

I know where. I'll give you a thousand dollars if you drive me to Malibu right now.

The attendant gapes at Tom then starts laughing.

ATTENDANT

You better lay off the booze, man.

TOM

I mean it. I gotta get to Malibu. I'll give you the cash when we get there.

A car full of teenager girls pulls up to the ticket booth. Seeing them, he attendant starts outside.

ATTENDANT

Sure, man. In the next life.

Disgruntled, Tom walks on.

EXT. PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY - LATER DAY

In the hot sun, Tom is hitch-hiking. Waves of cars pass, swirling dust around Tom. No one slows.

As soon still in shock, Tom walks on, holding his left thumb out while he walks.

A top-down convertible with two young guys inside pulls to the side of the road. They wave to Tom.

Trying to run, he hurries toward the idling car.

With a burst of laughter, the driver pulls away, pelting Tom with a barrage of gravel.

For a moment, he stands motionless, staring down at his shadow on the ground, as engines races past.

He gazes up at the sky.

TOM
Why like this? This isn't me. Give
me a chance.

For a moment, all is silent.

Tom glances around, seeing the cars racing by without a sound.

Grudgingly, he walks on, still holding out his thumb.

EXT. PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY AND CHAUTAUQUA - LATER DAY

With a forlorn look, Tom stands at the traffic light, trying to hitch a ride.

A HORN BEEPS.

Tom glances over, seeing a Hispanic man in farm clothes motioning toward him from a battered pickup.

Tom hurries toward the pickup. As he reaches the front door, he sees a young woman holding a baby.

TOM
I'm tryin' to get to Malibu.

The driver nods, motioning for Tom to get in the back.

Tom starts to get into the back, then stops.

The entire bed of the pickup is filled with dry cattle manure.

Gingerly, he gets in, trying not to step on the fresh fertilizer.

With a lurch the pickup pulls away.

Pinching his nostrils against the smell, Tom nestles against the side.

He glances over....seeing A GOOD-LOOKING YOUNG COUPLE IN A BMW looking over at him with a look of pity and contempt.

He turns away, ducking his head down, then stuffing his hands in his pocket. Feeling something, he takes out a long cash register receipt, stamped Luna LIQUORS - BAY & MAIN, SAN MONICA.

A LONG LIST OF ITEMS APPEARS, WITH A MAN'S SIGNATURE BESIDE EACH TOTAL.

He stuffs the receipt back in his pocket and stares down at the cargo of dried dung.

EXT. MALIBU - LATER DAY

Waving good-bye to the driver, Tom starts up a winding road toward a row of houses in the distance.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - MINUTES LATER

Coming down the street toward a mansion, Tom stops, staring in shock as sheriff's deputies carry computers and hard drives out of the house and load it into the back of squad cars parked on the street behind two news trucks.

At the bottom of the driveway, mixed in with an irate group of bilked investors, reporters try to get one of the deputies to stop to be interviewed, but they keep moving back and forth without stopping.

Tom steps close to the onlookers, stopping beside a FLORID-FACE MAN IN HIS SIXTIES, dressed in golf clothes.

FLORID-FACE MAN
(to anyone who hears him)
I hope he burns in hell for what he did.

Several onlookers mutter their approval. ONE MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN clutching a miniature poodle calls out to an deputy.

MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN
Did they find their find all the
money?

The florid-face man scoffs.

FLORID-FACED MAN
Alnoch wasn't stupid. He wouldn't
have kept it here. He'd have it
hidden in a Swill bank.

Without thinking, Tom turns toward the man.

TOM
You crazy. The Swiss turned over
all their codes to the SEC after
Madoff. No good hiding it there.

Startled by the remark, the man takes in Tom's dedraggled appearance.

FLORID-FACED MAN
Sure, mister. How much he get you
for?

Tom looks sadly at the mansion and the deputies carrying out the photograph of Ventry Alnoch with President Bush.

TOM
Everything.

The florid-faced man starts to chuckle, then sees a police van pull up.

Two men in police overalls climb out, go around back to open the rear of the truck. Then remove a high-powered steel drill and start toward the house.

ONLOOKER (O.S.)
What's that?

Seeing the high-pressure drill, Tom starts down the driveway.

TOM
(to himself)
To open his safe.

Reaching the sidewalk, he watches the two officers carry the drill inside the house.

Instinctively, he reaches out to feel the coded tag around his neck, then realizing it is gone, he drops his hand and starts walking down the hill.

EXT. BEACH - LATER DAY

Incongruous in his tattered clothing, Tom walks along the tide line, amid bathers: sexy girls in thongs, children playing with sand pails, and couples walking hand-in-hand. From everyone he draws a glance.

Seeing an OLDER MAN reading a newspaper in a beach chair, Tom approaches him.

TOM
Excuse me, mister, you have the
time?

With a sigh, the man stares another instant at the newspaper headline then lowers it.

OLDER MAN
It's the end whatever time it is.

Tom glances down at the FRONT PAGE:

ALNOCH'S BLACK HOLE. BILLIONS LOST.
MILLIONS WILL LOSE THEIR JOBS.

Without a word, Tom continues down the shore.

Remembering Tom's question, the man looks at his wrist watch.

EXT. BEACH - SAME TIME

Tom strides down the sand toward Santa Monica.

OLDER MAN (O.S.)
It's one-twenty, mister.

Holding up his hand to acknowledge, Tom hurries on.

TOM
(frustrated)
One day, starting when!

EXT. MAIN STREET SANTA MONICA - SUNSET

Getting directions from a meter maid, Tom nods his thanks and continues down the street.

EXT. BAY & MAIN STREET - MINUTES LATER

Tom pauses, staring at the Luna Liquor store on the corner. Two men lean against the side of the entrance. Momentarily, another man emerges, carrying a brown bag.

Lifting out a quart of wine, he unscrews the cap and takes a gulp before the two men come forth to drink their share.

The trio wander off, laughing, as Tom walks up to the entrance. Just as he is about to step inside, he sees

HIS SCRUFFY REFLECTION IN THE WINDOW.

TOM
(to the reflection)
Who the hell are you?

JULIO (O.S.)
Get the fuck out of here, pendejo.

Tom looks up.

STANDING BEHIND A CASH REGISTER BEHIND THE COUNTER, IS Julio SALANGA, 31, wiry, moustached. Above him, a Mexican television channel is broadcasting the news. The store is decorated with tacky Valentine's Day liquor advertisements.

Tom steps in the door, taking out the receipt he found.

Julio holds up a blackjack.

JULIO (CONT'D)
I mean it, mother fucker. You start anymore shit, I'm gonna kill you.

TOM
(more sad than angry)
You can't kill a dead man.

Julio comes out from around the counter.

JULIO
Stop that Rambo shit with me. All you fuckers are alike. I don't care if you captured Saddam yourself, you don't come in here no more. You want your Popoff, you get your buddies to get it.

As he comes closer, Tom steps outside, holding up the receipt.

TOM
Look, you gotta help me. I hit my
head.

Julio scowls.

JULIO
Quit your shit. Get out of here.

TOM
I mean it. I don't remember who I
am.

Lowering the blackjack, Julio takes one look at Tom then
laughs.

JULIO
Must be your lucky dad, man.

He grabs the slip of paper and holds it up in front of Tom.

JULIO (CONT'D)
See, that's your name there....all
the way down the sheet. Tom Arden,
Tom Arden, Tom Arden.

Julio pauses, studying the remaining amount on the bottom of
the receipt.

JULIO (CONT'D)
You better slow down if you want to
make it to the first of the month.

TOM
First of the month?

Hearing something strange, Julio tilts his head.

JULIO
What are you running on me, when
you get your disability check.

Tom takes the slip, staring at the figures.

TOM
Look, I gotta get a cab to Beverly
Hills. Can you give me twenty.

Shaking his head, Julio starts back into the store.

JULIO
You know Darla don't allow no cash-
backs. Booze or food, that's it.

Tom runs toward Julio, touching his shoulder. Whirling around, Julio raises the blackjack.

JULIO (CONT'D)
You wanna die, man?

TOM
I already am.

With an unbroken gaze, he looks imploringly at Julio.

TOM (CONT'D)
I only got till tomorrow morning.
I'm begging you.

Undone by the desperation in Tom's face, Julio lowers the blackjack.

JULIO
Al right, man, I'll give you
twenty, but I'm marking it down as
forty for all this shit you put me
through. Come on up to the register
to sign the slip.

As Julio goes around the counter to get the money, Tom glances up at the television screen:

SEVERAL WEEPING MEXICAN WOMEN are standing in front of a Beverly Hills bus stop.

TOM
What are they saying?

JULIO
Adios, dinero, baby. They lost
there jobs because of that prick
who got killed this morning,
Alnoch, fuckin' jew ripped
everybody off.

TOM
He wasn't Jewish.

About to handle the money to Tom, Julio stops.

JULIO
How the fuck you know?

Tom takes the money and signs the slip of paper on the counter.

TOM
I just know.

He glances over at the shelves of alcohol, then sees several rows of miniature bottles

TOM (CONT'D)
Give me two of those little Chevis
Regal.

Julio shakes his head and takes them down. He quickly takes the slip and changes the total.

JULIO
Since when you started drinking the
good shit, man? You been drinking
Popoff since I know you.

Stuffing the bottle into his coat pocket, Tom steps back.

TOM
Gotta change.

Julio laughs.

JULIO
Not you, amigo, not you.

TOM
How do you know?

JULIO
Ten years at this counter, I know
more than any shrink. Nothing
personal, but you hit bottom, man,
and you're gonna stay there till
the end.

TOM
You're wrong about that.

Glancing up at the clock, Tom hurries out of the store.

EXT. LIQUOR STORE - MOMENTS LATER

Coming out, Tom unscrews the bottle of vodka and takes a take of swig.

Angrily, he crosses the street between traffic, then stops, gazing down at the ocean.

TOM
I don't believe it. This isn't
fair.

Brandishing the bottle, he thrusts it up toward the darkening sky.

TOM (CONT'D)
I don't deserve this! I need to be myself to make it, not some drunken bum.

He takes the bottle and hurls it into distance.

Turning, he veers back to the corner, flagging down a taxi with a vacant sign on the roof.

As the cab slides to the curb THE TURBANED DRIVER leans over in the passenger seat and rolls up the window.

TURBANED DRIVER
Where you go?

TOM
The White Swallow in West Hollywood.

The driver eyes Tom's shoddy appearance.

TURBANED DRIVER
You have money?

With a look of disgust, Tom holds up the twenty-dollar bill.

TOM
Satisfied.

Sitting up, the driver hits the unlock button on the doors.

EXT. WEST HOLLYWOOD - LATER NIGHT

Tom gets out of the cab in front of a gay nightclub done up to celebrate St. Valentine's Day.

Starting toward the entrance, Tom draws plenty of looks from the customers queueing to get past TWO BRUISING BLACK BOUNCERS IN SUITS AND TURTLE NECKS JUST AS DARK.

BOUNCER WITH GOLD EARRING
Soup kitchen's downtown, sport.

TOM
I want to see the boss.

The two bouncers share a glance.

BOUNCER WITH GOATEEE
 Must be Halloween somewhere, you
 showup like Mr. Homeless, less you
 be playing your self, man. Now get
 lost.

The man makes a menacing step toward Tom.

TOM
 Tell Sal that a friend of Ventry is
 here to see him.

Hearing Tom say the boss's man, the bouncers soften. The one
 with the gold disappears inside the club, while the other one
 continues checking for ID's and hidden bottles.

EXT. CLUB - MINUTES LATER

SAL CELLINI, 50, in a white linen suit, black shirt,
 alligator shoes, sporting a flashy gold devil's root around
 his neck, steps out, looking around.

SAL
 Where is he?

The bouncer nods toward Tom.

SAL (CONT'D)
 What the fuck?

He turns around to enter the club.

TOM
 Sal, wait.

Sal whirls around, going crimson.

SAL
 Hey, you wino, who the fuck told
 you my name?

Tom braces himself then steps over to the angry owner.

TOM
 Ventry Alnoch did. He said you'd
 help me.

Sal is momentarily speechless, then recovers.

SAL
 That scumbag....he fucked sme out
 of so much money with his scum.

Sal eyes Tom up and down.

SAL (CONT'D)
Where the fuck did ever meet him?

Tom pauses, looking down at the sidewalk.

TOM
Pacific Coast Highway, I was there
when his car crashed.

Sal is impressed.

SAL
Yeah, I'd like to have had a ring-
side ticket to that. What happened?

TOM
He went off the road and hit the
wall of the tunnel. I tried to get
to him, but the car was in flames.

Sal looks down at Tom's hands.

SAL
How come no bandages?

TOM
I told you, it was too late. I
tried to reach him through the
broken window. I don't know why he
did it. Maybe some last act of
goodness....but he

Sal steps closer to Tom.

SAL
(whispering)
He tell you where he hid his
billions?

Tom shakes his head.

TOM
No, he just said have Sal at the
White Swallow give you the ten
thousand he owes me for....

Knowing what he is going to say, Sal slaps Tom across the
mouth, then turns as the second bouncer comes of the club.

SAL
Get this scumbag away from my club.
Tried to scam me like Alnoch.

As the bouncer starts toward him, Tom steps into the street, holding up his hands that he doesn't want trouble.

SAL (CONT'D (CONT'D)
 Fuckin' bum, you should have burned
 up with him, too.

Turning on his heel, Sal walks into the club, leaving Tom stands forlornly in the street.

A honking car snaps him awake. He scans the faces of the line of customers. More than a little pity.

With a smile at the shared gesture of kindness, Tom walks away in the night.

EXT. BEVERLY HILLS RESIDENTAIL STREET - LATER NIGHT

Aimless, Tom wanders past one posh home after another.

No cars pass. The sidewalks are deserted.

A PANEL OF FLICKERING COLOR beyond a large window draws his attention.

Mesmerized, Tom crosses the lawn, watching the SMUG FACE OF VENTRY ALNACH grow larger and larger.

Stopping beside the window of the darkened living room, Tom stares over the heads of an unsuspecting middle-aged couple, watching

AN INVESTIGATIVE NEWS PROGRAM is airing an interview with Ventry at the height of his wealth, arrogance and power.

ON THE SCREEN

Ventry Alnoch, clad in an open-neck white linen shirt, beige slacks and penny-loafers, is holding forth to a group of spellbound investors; sitting in awe around him as disciples did listening to the word of Jesus.

An elderly lady has just put down her hand, when Ventry nods earnestly

VENTRY
 A good question, Mrs. Phillips. I assure all of you there is no way you can ever lose your investment through me. Aside from 15-years of steady profits, the SEC oversees every dimension of my funds. Although, to be honest..

He pauses, to let his audience dangle for the punch line.

VENTRY (CONT'D)
Some of my best friends are with
the SEC.

The audience roars with laughter and bursts into applause.

A SPOTLIGHT BEAM HITS TOM full blast. He turns to see

A BEVERLY HILLS POLICE CAR AT THE CURB. While the driver is holding a lamp on him, HIS TALL, BLONDE, SLENDER PARTNER, advances across the grass, hand on his holster.

PARTNER
Step away from the window.

SEEING THE LIGHT ON TOM, THE COUPLE IN THE LIVING ROOM, jump up, frightened, turning on the light.

TOM
I was just looking.

PARTNER
No shit. That's why we stopped. But
at what?

TOM
Me....I mean, the TV.

PARTNER
Where you's car?

TOM
I walked.

PARTNER
Nobody walks in Beverly Hills.

THE FRONT DOOR opens and A PUDGY, BALD MAN in a silk robe peers out.

OWNER
Everything okay, Officer?

PARTNER
Yes, sr, we'll take him downtown
and run his records, to see if he's
been arrested for prowling before.

OWNER
We have a teenage daughter,
officer.

PARTNER
Don't worry, sir. We'll check the
sex offenders, too

The officer motions Tom down to the squad car, where THE
DRIVER ,a blonde, slender clone of his partner, is coming
around to the sidewalk.

DRIVER
What'd you get?

PARTNER
Say he was just watching TV.

The driver walks over to Tom.

DRIVER
Let's see some I.D.

TOM
I don't have any.

PARTNER
What's your name and address?

TOM
Ven....ah, Tom, I think. I was
living in Malibu.

The two cops study Tom's dishevelled appearance.

DRIVER
Sure, which Dipsy Dumpster?

The driver reaches for his cuffs.

PARTNER
Turn around.

Tom steps back.

TOM
I didn't do anything wrong.

Both cops are tensing.

DRIVER
Trespassing on private property if
we wanna push it. Now turn around.

Reluctantly, Tom turns around as the partner goes forward to
frisk him down and cuff him.

PARTNER
You have any weapons or anything
sharp on you?

TOM
No....listen, officer.

Seeing the officer lifting up the handcuffs, Tom veers to the side, turning around.

TOM (CONT'D)
I can't afford to lose time. You
can't take me in.

Both cops pull out taser guns.

DRIVER
Turn around, or you're gonna get
tasered.

Seeing Tom hesitate, both raise their Tasers.

Signing, Tom turns to be cuffed.

TOM
(more to himself)
One of my investors invented it.

The two cops glance at each other: is he nuts or what?

INT. BEVERLY HILLS POLICE STATION - LATER NIGHT

His hands still cuffed, Tom stands between the two cops while being interrogated by an exasperated SERGEANT.

SERGEANT
No I.D. No address. Nobody to vouch
for you. We're gonna hold you till
we run your prints.

TOM
Look, I've got to find someone
before tomorrow morning.

SERGEANT
Who?

TOM
That's the problem, I don't know.

The sergeant looks at the other two officers.

SERGEANT
This guy owe you money?

Tom shakes his head.

TOM
No, no, it's not about money, it's
about saving me, about getting me
back.

Again, the cops share a look.

The sergeant turns to the partner.

SERGEANT
You frisk him down good?

He shakers their heads.

PARTNER
Just a pat-down.

The sergeant nods toward Tom.

SERGEANT
See what he's got on him.

The partner start reaching into Tom's pockets -- retrieving the crumpled Pacific Liquor receipt -- then miniature bottle of Chevis Regal, and setting it on the counter in front of the sergeant. He tosses the receipt aside.

PARTNER
That's it, Sarge.

SERGEANT
You haven't got a dime, and you're
drinking Chevis?

Tom looks incensed.

TOM
For your interest, I own twenty-
percent of Chevis stock.

The three cops grin....they're liking Tom more and more.

SERGEANT
Just slumming tonight, huh?

Tom drops his head, mumbling to himself.

SERGEANT

Speak up!

TOM

I said I'm trapped in this man's
body.

The partner slaps his hand over his eyes: oh boy.

The sergeant's had enough.

SERGEANT

Book him then put him in the
holding cell till we can run his
prints in the morning.

With a look of terror, Tom veers back against the wall.

TOM

No! Yu can't. If you keep me here,
I'm doomed forever!

The sergeant motions for the two patrolmen to grab him.

As they takes his arms, a white card falls from one of his
out-turned pockets.

Still holding Tom, the partner kneels to pick up the card.

SERGEANT

What's that?

The partner looks at the card:

DR. JANAN DARWAZA
PSYCHIATRIST
VETERANS ADMINISTRATION HOSPITAL
11301 WILSHIRE BLVD. LOS ANGELES, CA 90073
(310) 382-3391

Gripping Tom's arm, the partner walks over him over to the
counter and hands the card to the Sergeant.

SEGEANT

You know this doctor?

Tom shakes his head.

SERGEANT

Right, well, let's see if this
shrink knows you, pal.

Leaning to the side, the sergeant picks up the phone and punches in the numbers on the card. Waiting as the phone rings, he studies Tom's bedraggled appearance.

Someone answers.

SERGEANT

Hello, This Sgt. Burlin, Beverly Hills Police Department. We need to check on a man we picked up. He's got the card of one of your doctors. Dr. Leeland-Hanson. Yes, ma'am, I'll hold.

The sergeant looks at the two cops holding Tom.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)

You notice it's always when things are real quiet that some nutball comes rolling in?

A woman's voice comes on the line.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)

Yes, Doctor. Sorry to bother you, but we've got a guy her with your business card. Says he doesn't remember his name....oh, about six-one, with brown hair and a full beard, in his mid-thirties. And he's not dressed too well. Huh? Wait, we'll check.

The sergeant stands up behind the counter.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)

(to the two officers)
Get his right sleeve up and see if has anything on his wrist.

Tom doesn't struggle as they pull up his coat sleeve and tug his shirt back.

A CIRCULAR SCAR appears.

PARTNER

Bingo, Serge. A bullet hole scar if I ever saw on.

The sergeant relays the information then listens momentarily to the doctor.

Hanging up, the sergeant gazes at Tom with an somber expression, almost saddened expression.

SERGEANT
Get the cuffs off him.

The two cops looks surprised.

DRIVER
Huh, serge?

SERGEANT
You heard me, Tyler.

Coming around the counter, the sergeant walks up to Tom and stares him in the eye. No anger, just more sadness.

SERGEANT (CONT'D)
Come on, Captain, we'll get you
where you belong.

INT. SQUAD CAR - LATER NIGHT

With the same two cops pulling up the long driveway of the VA hospital, the partner looks over the seat.

PARTNER
Sorry about the mix up, Captain.

His hands freed, resting on his lap, Tom nods tiredly.

TOM
I understand, what's a bum doing in
Beverly Hills besides no good?

DRIVER
(over his shoulder)
Shit, you just went for a walk,
Captain. Nothing wrong with that.

As the patrol car pulls up, the partner starts to get out to let Tom out.

PARTNER
Say, Captain, where'd you get
clipped?

Tom leans forward, staring right into the young cop's eyes.

TOM
I have no idea.

The driver nudges his partner, lighten up.

PARTNER
Right, well, here you are, captain,
curb side service.

Getting out, he opens the back door.

DRIVER
Take care, sir.

Tom can only shake his head at the remark.

EXT. VA HOSPITAL ENTRANCE - SAME TIME

The partner holds out his hand to Tom.

PARTNER
No hard feelings.

Tom looks down at THE EXTENDED HAND being offered him.

TOM
God, if only that were true.

Without a word, he starts up the steps.

The partner starts to get back into the patrol car.

PARTNER
Guy's got it real bad, man.
Probably got tortured by those
fuckin' Iraqis. Let's go hassle
some rag heads.

EXT. ENTRANCE - MOMENTS LATER

As the squad car pulls away, Tom pauses as DR. JANAN DARWAZA, a slender woman, with olive complexion, in her late-30's, wearing slacks and dark turtleneck under her white smock, comes toward him.

For a moment, she looks cross, then studying Tom's expression, her expression softens.

DR. DARWAZA
(imitating Billie Holiday)
What a difference a day makes....24
little hours.

Unable to control himself, Tom starts weeping, letting tears fall unashamedly down his cheeks.

Embarrassed that she has hurt him, the psychiatrist puts her arm around Tom.

DR. DARWAZA (CONT'D)
I'm sorry, Tom. I just didn't want
to make it heavy.

He pulls away a little, giving her an unbroken stare.

TOM
It is heavy, believe me, it is
heavy.

Nodding, she takes his arm.

DR. DARWAZA
I know. Come on. We can go talk in
my office.

EXT. VA CORRIDOR - MINUTES LATER

Walking to the doctor's office, Tom and the psychiatrist pass a darkened in-patients' lounge

Inside, clad in blue bathrobes, half a dozen patients are sprawled on sofas, watching a large television screen in which

VENTRY ALNOCH is shown coming down a Beverly Hills sidewalk, being blocked by a phalanx of photographers and journalists, thrusting out microphones, all clamoring for a response to their din of questions.

Ventry rudely pushes through the bodies.

TOM stops to stare at the screen.

TOM
Don't they have anything else to
talk about but him?

Glancing over, Dr. Darwaza stares at Alnoch's face.

DR. DARWAZA
What do you expect? He's destroyed
millions of lives. He's like the
Hitler of the finance world. And
he's not even sorry.

Her face tightens.

DR. DARWAZA (CONT'D)
 Too bad he's not in China. They'd
 shoot him.

Tom appears startled.

DR. DARWAZA (CONT'D)
 I know, I know, a doctor calling
 for capital punishment, but my aunt
 lost her retirement savings because
 of that SOB. Don't get me started
 on him. Come on, Tom.

They continue on, with Tom glancing back at Ventry Alcoch
 disappearing into a lobby where security guards wait to block
 the press from following him.

INT. DOCTOR'S PRIVATE OFFICE - MINUTES LATER

A mess of papers across the desk. Sagging books on shelves.
 Open medical magazines stacked on the floor.

On the wall hangs the COLOR PHOTOGRAPH OF THE PIETA-LIKE
 ALGERIAN MOTHER SLUMPED AGAINST A WALL, HAVING JUST LEARNED
 HER CHILDREN WERE MASSACRED.

Beside it hangs the FAMOUS BLACK & WHITE PHOTOGRAPH OF THE
 COMBAT-EXHAUSTED STARING AMERICAN SOLDIER IN THE KOREAN WAR.

Sitting behind her desk, Dr. Darwaza waits for Tom to answer.
 Leaning over, she picks up a Styrofoam cup and takes a sip of
 cold coffee. With a yuck-expression, she puts it down.

DR. DARWAZA
 Come on, Tom. Why'd you wander off?
 You were making such progress. All
 ready to go to a shelter AND get
 back on your feet.

Leaning forward, Tom strains to speak.

TOM
 Look, I don't know what happened,
 but I gotta.....

He falls silent.

DR. DARWAZA
gotta what?

TOM
 Gotta get someone to say, 'I love
 you by tomorrow morning.'"

Tilting her head, the psychiatrist studies Tom. Abruptly, she grins.

DR. DARWAZA

Okay. I love you. Feel better?

As though waiting for something to happen, Tom stares down at his dirty fingernails and ragged clothes. After a moment, he looks up at the doctor.

TOM

You gotta mean it. I guess I can't ask.

DR. DARWAZA

What's wrong, Tom? What happened to you? You seem so different.

Tom throws his head back, staring up at the ceiling. With a jolt, he gets up.

TOM

I'm not me.

She takes the remark matter-of-factly.

DR. DARWAZA

Then who are you?

He comes forward to her desk, staring down at her with an unbroken-gaze.

TOM

Don't think I'm crazy....but that guy we just saw.

Her eyebrows furrow.

TOM (CONT'D)

On television, Ventry Alnoch, that's me.

She does her best to suppress a smile, but can't keep it from breaking out.

TOM (CONT'D)

What's so funny about that?

DR. DARWAZA

Why of all people to be, are you him? Why not Brad Pitt, even Napoleon, why a world-class swindler?

With a look of defeat, Tom sits back down.

TOM
Because he's me. I mean, I'm him.

Growing serious, the psychiatrist leans back in her chair, not taking her eyes off Tom.

DR. DARWAZA
So to punish yourself for what happened, you have taken on the guilt of a monster without remorse.

Struck by what she said, Tom strains forward.

TOM
What happened?

The doctor nods impatiently.

DR. DARWAZA
Come on, Tom, not back to square-one.

TOM
I mean it. What happened? I forgot.

DR. DARWAZA
You mean you chose to forget. Selective-forgetting we call it, tucking away what we don't want to deal with -- in your case, everything.

Leaning over, she opens a side drawer and takes out a thick folder.

DR. DARWAZA (CONT'D)
Memory time. Come on over.

Warily, Tom gets up and walks around the desk as the doctor is sorting through a thick stack of government documents.

She holds up a photograph.

Tom stares at the PICTURE OF A YOUNG MARINE CAPTAIN BEING DECORATED BY A MAN IN A SUIT. STANDING PROUDLY BESIDE THE CAPTAIN IS AN ATTRACTIVE BLONDE-HAIRED WOMAN, HOLDING THE HAND OF A LITTLE BOY.

TOM
Who's that?

Alarmed by the flat intonation of his question, the psychiatrist looks up.

DR. DARWAZA
That is Captain Tom Arden,
receiving the Navy Cross from the
Secretary of the Navy at Twenty-
Nine Palms; and that is his wife
and son.

Tom stares at her, not seeing the link to his question.

DR. DARWAZA (CONT'D)
That is YOU when you came back from
your third-tour in Iraq.

He shakes his head.

TOM
I've never been to Iraq.

She nods.

DR. DARWAZA
I don't blame you.

He stares at the stack of documents under the photograph.

TOM
What's that?

DR. DARWAZA
More you. Your Annapolis grades.
Evaluations of your first command.
Combat citations. You were up for
major. Then the balloon popped. You
stared drinking, was insubordinate
to a major. Dried out. Then went
off the wagon. Forced to resign
your commission.

Tom stares uncomprehendingly as the doctor lifts up sheaf
after sheaf of papers.

DR. DARWAZA (CONT'D)
It's all here, like watching a free-
fall down a well. The car accident
was the last straw for you . Your
life She took your son and left to
drive to her mother's house until
you got help.

She pauses, staring at the next document. Sadly, she closes
the dossier.

TOM
Go on, what happened?

DR. SHARON-LEELAND
Twenty miles outside of Laramie
they were hit dead on by a drunk
driver.

Tom looks shaken.

TOM
Dead on.

The psychiatrist gets up, coming around to stand beside Tom.

TOM (CONT'D)
Then what happened to him?

The word shudders through her.

DR. SHARON-LEELAND
Him? Well, he got into his own
private elevator and hit bottom. He
lost his house, car, couldn't even
hold on to a job as a security
guard. So he ended up on the
streets until the night he broken
up a liquor store and the police
brought him here.

TOM
The Luna Liquor in Santa Monica?

Startled, the doctor nods.

DR. SHARON-LEELAND
So, see you do remember.

TOM
That's all I remember.

DR. SHARON LEELAND
It's a start. You were well on your
way back, Tom. The group really
helped, and you really helped them.
That's why they were so hurt?

TOM
Hurt?

DR. SHARON-LEELAND
Betrayed, let down, abandoned, when
you disappeared and didn't show up
for group therapy.

Tom looks confused.

TOM

But when I got here, you said, what a differenced a day makes.

She nods, then glances at her watch.

DR. SHARON-LEELAND

I only meant it to say how much we can change in a short time. You left here clean-shaven and in a sports coat and slacks.

TOM

How long have I been gone?

Closing her eyes, the doctor does some mental calculations, then looks at Tom.

DR. DARWAZA

How's eight weeks sound?

Tom staggers back, bumping into the wall.

TOM

No, it can't be.

The psychiatrist smiles softly.

DR. DARWAZA

I know, I know. Where does it go so fast? Come on, they're waiting.

Tom glances at her.

TOM

Who?

DR. DARWAZA

It's Thursday night, almost seven, Tom. The group's waiting. They'll be really happy to see you....all except Lee, who bet with Doc you'd never be back.

Tom looks frightened.

TOM

You don't understand. I only have until tomorrow morning. I have to find someone to....

The doctor pats his arm.

DR. SHARON-LEELAND
I know, what we're all trying to find: someone to say, "I love you," and mean it. Come on, Tom. I've watched you interact for six months. They may not ever tell you, but they love you, too.

He looks anxiously at her.

She reads his emotion as a question.

DR. SHARON-LELAND
Come on, it's only an hour with a bunch of vets sitting around talking about stuff.

The doctor opens the door and waits for Tom. Stepping up beside her, Tom looks to the right, toward the exit.

She locks the door, then seeing him deliberating, starts down the corridor to the left -- not looking back.

With a sigh of exasperation, Tom follows.

Stopping at a door, she opens it and waits for Tom to enter.

Pausing, he pulls himself together and walks through the doorway.

INT. GROUP THERAPY ROOM - SAME TIME

Sitting in a circle are five men and a woman, plus one CONSPICUOUSLY EMPTY CHAIR.

Closest to the door sits DOC, A 55-YEAR-OLD BLACK, FORMER NAVY CORPSMAN IN A WHEEL CHAIR DECORATED WITH AN AMERICAN FLAG AND VIETNAM VET STICKER

To his left is the empty chair.

Next is ROSALES, A SCRAWNY 20-YEAR-OLD HISPANIC, WEARING EARPHONES TO DROWN OUT CONSTANT TINNITUS RINGING.

Beside him is BUD, 84, crusty, chewing tobacco, wearing a faded MARINE RAIDERS sweatshirt, and occasionally squeezing an atomiser for his asthma.

Sprawled back in his chair, cracking his knuckles is LEE, 34, A LEAN, FORMER ARMY RANGER FROM TUSCALOOSA.

Last in the circle is BEVERLY, 38, PUFFY-FACED, OVERWEIGHT BLONDE-HAIRED, IN A PURPLE JOGGING SUIT. HER RIGHT SLEEVE IS PINNED BACK FROM WHERE AN IRAQI IED HIT HER ARMY SUPPLY TRUCK AND TOOK HER ARM.

AS TOM STEPS INTO THE DOORWAY, EVERYONE SEEMS JOLTED BY ELECTRICITY.

DOC
Hey, the ghost came back.

DOC holds out his hand toward Lee.

DOC (CONT'D)
Told you, man. You owe me twenty.

Lee clutches his crotch.

LEE
I owe you this.

The psychiatrist motions for Tom to take the empty chair...while she goes to sit down at a chair behind the circle.

As Tom goes to sit down, she removes a pad of paper and pen.

Every in the circle studies Tom as he takes HIS seat.

A palpable silence fills the room.

BUD
Never figured you were going to bug out. Officers are supposed to set an example.

Not knowing what to say, Tom looks at the doctor. She shrugs: you're in the group, not me.

TOM
I'm sorry.

Beverly puts her finger down her throat to mimic gagging.

BEVERLY
That's what the medic said when I came to and asked him where my arm was. 'I'm sorry, the little faggot said.' Sorry, shit.

Across the circle, Rosales snaps his fingers to music no one else can hear, but holding his eyes on Tom with a lot of pure contempt.

LEE

Fuck, man, why'd you come back. I'd
a kept on going.

TOM

I had to. I had nowhere else to go.

Seeing Tom's discomfort, Doc looks over at him.

DOC

Cap, you left a big hole when you
left. Group almost broke up cause
of you. We felt ripped off.
Everyone told their story. Even
Rosales over there, taking off
those earphones and going through
hell to tell us what happened in
that Hummer. And you listened to
all of us, never saying what you
had to share. Then when it was your
turn....

Lee smirks, sitting up and looking as though he is going to
spit on the ground.

LEE

You turned yellow. Fuckin'
jarheads.

Bud bolts out of his chair.

BUD

Shut up, you little punk. I can
still kick your ass at my age.

Lee laughs.

Realizing she has to intercede, the doctor stands.

DR. DARWAZA

Look, he came back on his own.

Tom glances at her. She doesn't look at him.

DR. DARWAZA (CONT'D)

Tom said he wasn't ready to tell
what had happened.

Beverly shakes her head, reaching down seemingly to stroke
the air below her pinned up sleeve.

BEVERLY

Who is? Every night I feel my arm hurting where there isn't any arm, but I gotta deal with it.

Bud scratches his belly then looks at Tom.

BUD

There's no shame, Captain. Hey, I still see the first Jap I killed at Tarawa. I can ever hear him farting when that slug hit his gut.

Beverly makes a face.

BEVERLY

That's gross.

BUD

It ain't no video game, honey.

BEVERLY

No shit, pops.

Rosales slides off one ear-phone, grimacing as he does.

ROSALES

I seen you, man. We was driving around Venice on Sunday and saw you passed out on the beach. The cops roused you and took your bottle. You were wasted, man.

Tom holds up his hands: what can I say.

BUD

Shit, you don't know how many times I've fallen off the wagon. Trick is just to get back on it.

Tom nods, staring down at the floor.

TOM

Look, I gotta tell you something.

From his tone and stance, the group tightens. Even Lee sits up.

LEE

I've been waiting for this, man. I told you about the shit I did in Desert Storm. Fuck, I would have killed more of those hajis if they hadn't stopped the war. Pussies.

Beverly looks at the doctor, who nods.

DR. DARWAZA

Lee, I don't like playing cop. You know the rules. No sexist talk.

Lee scowls and leans back.

Doc has been studying Tom.

DOC

Hell, captain, we're all here trying to bury something before being buried ourselves. You can't be no worse than us.

Tom scans the watching faces.

TOM

Listen, I got to tell you something. I'm not the person you think I am.

Lee laughs.

LEE

You don't know what I think...

DOC

Shut up, Lee. Let the man speak. What are you staying, Captain?

Tom puts his hands over his face.

TOM

I don't know what happened to me, but somehow I was in a car wreck...and...

He falters, trying to find the words to speak.

BEVERLY

Were you driving, Captain?

He shakes his head.

TOM

Yeah, but it's not like that. I wasn't me anymore. I died. And all of a sudden, I was standing there like this.

Breaking down, he covers his face -- trying to conceal his tears.

Everyone is stunned, even the doctor, seeing Tom weeping.
Doc rolls toward him in his wheel chair.

TOM (CONT'D)
I hurt a lot of people. Some are
even dead because of me.

Everyone mutters something.

BEVERLY
I never killed anybody. I just
drove a truck.

ROSALES
Yeah, filled with ammo that killed
people. You're just as much as
murderer as the rest of us.

BUD
It's war, captain, Them or us.

Tom looks up at Bud.

TOM
But it wasn't war....it was....

Again, he breaks down just as Doc rolls over next to him,
draping a pipe-thick arm on Tom's shoulder.

DOC
I know, Tom. I saw them burn
hootches. Just a bunch of farmers,
they wasted them all.

Tom throws his head back.

TOM
That's what I did, wasted them all,
and that's why I'm going down there
tomorrow.

Doc studies Tom.

DOC
Down where?

TOM
Nothing.

Thinking that Tom means to change the subject, Doc nods,
rolling his wheelchair back.

DOC
 Listen, Captain, we're all here
 because we need help, because we
 need someone to listen, someone to
 help us forgive ourselves for all
 the shit we've been through and
 done. You know what I mean,
 Captain?

Tom looks straight at Doc, then nods.

TOM
 Yeah, I know. I know it's too late
 for me to be forgiven for what I've
 done.

Yanking off his other earphone. Rosales walks over to Tom,
 stopping right in front of him.

ROSALES
 I don't know what kind of shit you
 did over there, but it'll never be
 as bad as what we did to the
 prisoners we took. If there's a
 hell, I'm heading there after I
 die.

TOM
 I'm already there.

Abruptly, Doc grabs Tom's head and pulls it next to his
 massive chest.

DOC
 Bullshit, you're here with us, got
 me, Captain?

When Tom doesn't respond, Doc squeezes him harder.

DOC (CONT'D)
 You hear me?

TOM
 I'm not....

DOC
 Yes, you are, Captain.

Releasing Tom, Doc looks around the group.

DOC (CONT'D)
 Tell him, he's here with us. Tell
 him he is.

All of the group begin muttering, speaking, nodding affirmation.

Even Lee, after scowling at the display of emotions, reluctantly nods.

LEE

Yea, man, you gotta be here....after putting up with all my shit, I owe you one, to listen. Just don't go running off no more, okay, Captain?

Doc points his finger at Tom.

DOC

He's right, sir. Your point man. You took all those fancy courses on leadership at Annapolis. Well, put it to use, Captain. Lead us out of here. Will you? Promise?

Wiping his eyes, Tom drops his head then looks up at Doc.

TOM

Yes, I promise, but if something happens to me and I don't make it back, it wasn't because I didn't want to come back.

Beverly starts crying.

BEVERLY

Don't start talking like that. I can't stand when people talking about not making it back. My driver said the same thing the morning we got hit. He jinxed us.

Tom looks gently at her.

TOM

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you. Of course, I'll be back.

He glances over at the doctor, who has turned away to dab her eyes.

Doc rolls forward, motioning for everyone to come into the middle of the circle.

BUD

Oh, I hate this part.

LEE

I know. If they could see me back home, they'd think I went fag.

Smiling, Rosales pulls his earphones on and walks up beside Doc.

Then Beverly gets up and walks into the circle. Lee slowly follows.

Finally, Tom gets up and walks into the circle. All the group members join arms at the shoulder, with Doc in the wheelchair, draping his arms around Beverly's waist, just below her pinned up sleeve. With his other arm, Doc grips Tom's waist.

Doc drops his head forward.

TOM

Thank you, God, for bringing Tom back. The circle is whole again.

Seeing the group members close their eyes, Tom does too.

EXT. OBLIVION - TIMELESSNESS

Tom's procession of light dangles at the very edge of the rim. Its panels of light seemingly suspended in the vast darkness.

INT. GROUP THERAPY ROOM - SAME TIME

Eyes opening, Tom snaps up in the circle.

TOM

I love you, she said.

Doc smiles.

DOC

We feel the same way, Captain.
Welcome back.

In an instant, the group separates, leaving Tom stunned, standing in the middle of the room.

Looking around as though lost, Tom sees the members moving away, then the doctor coming forward toward him.

DR. DARWAZA

You sure save the best for last.

Struck by the remark, Tom looks up at he wall clock: 9:00.

TOM
I guess so, Doctor. The best for
last.

She motions for him to follow her.

DR. DARWAZA
I'll call the shelter. They were
holding a bed for you. I knew you
would come back.

Tom stares at the doctor.

TOM
How'd you know?

She smiles.

DR. DARWAZA
I'm a good judge of character.
Besides, I was always taught Marine
officers were men of their word.

Tom smiles grimly.

TOM
Yep, no matter who they are.

They start out of the room.

Remembering something, the psychiatrist glances at Tom.

DR. DARWAZA
Still need to find someone to say,
'I love you?'

He stops abruptly, then recovers.

TOM
More than ever, doctor, more than
ever.

INT. HOSPITAL BASEMENT - MINUTES LATER

Tom follows A HUSKY BLACK DRIVER to the shuttle to the
shelter.

As they come around the corner, a set of double doors opens,
and a stretcher with a cadaver covered by a sheet rolls out,
seemingly under its own power.

Tom stops dead, watching the gurney come farther and farther out until at the end, A WIRY ASIAN ATTENDANT appears pushing from behind.

He sees the driver and Tom.

ASIAN ATTENDANT
Hey, Roscoe, working late, huh?

The black driver nods toward Tom.

HUSKY DRIVER
Last one tonight. What'd you got there?

ASIAN ATTENDANT
Navy chief. Pancreatic cancer. From what I heard, somebody snuck him in a bottle of bourbon. He locked himself in a toilet then put a plastic bag over his head. Found him an hour later. Hell of a way to go, sitting on a shitter.

HUSKY DRIVER
Yeah, but no more suffering, huh?

Tom and the driver stop to let the attendant roll the gurney down the hallway. They follow a few paces back.

Tom looks ashen.

INT. SHUTTLE VAN - LATER NIGHT

Alone, Tom sits in the back row, as the driver heads down crowded Wilshire Boulevard.

When the van stops at the traffic light, Tom looks out the back window at A YOUNG COUPLE LAUGHING INSIDE A FADED VW BUG.

With a match-girl-at-the-window hungry stare, Tom watches the man leans over to kiss the woman.

She closes her eyes, leaning into him.

The light changes. The VW pulls away.

TOM leans back, lonelier than he was a moment before.

THE DRIVER LOOKS IN THE REAR-VIEW MIRROR, SEEING THE POORLY DRESSED BEARDED MAN GAPING DOWN AT THE FLOOR AS THOUGH IT WERE AN ABYSS.

DRIVER
Where you from, buddy?

Tom looks up, staring at the driver's eyes in the mirror.

TOM
Uh, nowhere now.

DRIVER
Well, before.

Tom breaks his gaze.

TOM
It doesn't matter. It's all gone,
like a bubble that burst.

The driver chuckles.

DRIVER
Yeah, I hear a lot of people on Fox
News talking about bubbles busting.
That guy sure put a whammy on lots
of people. Sure glad I didn't have
any stock options, or whatever.

The driver slows in the traffic.

DRIVER (CONT'D)
Then look at him, heading down the
highway with all the money in the
world, and bang, next second he's
burning to death. Makes you think,
doesn't it?

Tom nods and says nothing.

The driver glances over his shoulder.

DRIVER (CONT'D)
Mind if I put on the radio?

TOM
Just no news. I've had enough.

The driver fiddles with the station, passing Spanish announcers, classical music, rock, and hearing rap music, he hesitates a moment, then moves on...finding an oldies by goodies station.

He settles back, letting Eartha Kitt's sultry voice fill the van with the haunting lyrics of Stormy Weather.

Almost shuddering, the driver shakes his head then glances at Tom in the mirror.

DRIVER

You can play that till Judgment Day, and I'm still going to get goose bumps. Just a few words and a voice, but man, it goes right into my soul. You know what I mean?

The driver looks up in the rear view mirror.

Tom's face is like a mask in the darkness.

TOM

I know what you mean.

Sensing Tom is dealing with some heavy issues, the driver lowers the volume and picks up speed.

EXT. ST. JUDE'S SHELTER, SANTA MONICA, LATER NIGHT

The driver holds open the side door for Tom to get out.

DRIVER

Here you are, man. You'll like it here.

Tom merely nods.

TOM

Yeah, kinda right back where I started from.

The driver chuckles and closes the door.

DRIVER

Well, then you can't get lost.

Patting Tom on the shoulder, the driver starts away.

DRIVER (CONT'D)

See you.

Tom shakes his head.

TOM

(more to himself)
Sure you will.

Reluctantly, he glances over at the darkened ocean in the distance then starts up the steps.

Pausing, he glances at the faded paint on the entrance then down at an empty box of crackers on the ground.

TOM (CONT'D)
From the Ritz to Ritz Crackers.

With a plodding step, he enters the shelter.

INT. DIRECTOR'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

ROLAND TIPPIT, 52, the strident white-haired director in sports clothes and sandals, finishes his indoctrination to Tom and two Hispanic men in their forties.

TIPPITT
There are no second chances here.
You break one of the rules, you're out. We've got women and children in the other dorm, so I want all of you to watch your language. Got me?

All three men nod.

TIPPITT (CONT'D)
And when that bell sounds at six, everybody up and out. Nobody stays in the shelter past seven. Get to the employment office. Try to find work in the neighborhood. Just don't sit around outside. You can go pick up your linen now.

As the men start to leave, the director motions toward Tom.

TIPPITT (CONT'D)
Look, I got a call from your doctor at the VA. She feels bad they don't have room for you, but I don't want any flashbacks or acting out. I know you were in Iraq, but keep it to yourself here okay, Captain. Everybody else here has been in their own war, and most of them are still frightening in it.

Tom nods.

TOM
I got you. You won't have any trouble from me. I'll be leaving in the morning.

The director looks surprised.

TIPPITT
The doctor didn't say anything
about you leaving.

TOM
Yeah, well, she has enough on her
hands.

The director smiles.

TIPPITT
Family?

Tom doesn't answer.

TIPPITT (CONT'D)
A friend?

Tom is still silent.

TIPPITT (CONT'D)
It's not any of my business anyway.
Well, good luck, wherever you go.

He holds out his hand.

Tom shakes it.

TOM
Thanks.

INT. LINEN LOCKER - MINUTES LATER

After an attendant hands Tom a pillow, sheets and blanket, he starts down the corridor, when the front door opens and SHARON WALLER, 29, a once-attractive blonde-haired woman now haggard with stress, is pulling her crying daughter, KIM, 6.

KIM
I want to go home.

SHARON
Honey, I told you. We don't live
there anymore. We have to stay here
till momma fixes things.

Seeing the bearded Tom, the little girl looks frightened and hides behind her mother.

Sharon looks up at Tom, then shrugs.

SHARON (CONT'D)
Sorry, Mister.

Sharon turns around and gently pulls her daughter around in front of her.

SHARON (CONT'D)

Kimmy, stop that. That's not nice.

Tom nods, squatting down so he is eye-level with the child.

He tries his best to smile and disarm the child.

TOM

Hello, there. What's your name?

The child cries even louder.

Picking up her daughter, Sharon starts past Tom.

SHARON

Sorry, Mister. She's just tired.
It's been a rough day.

Tom nods sympathetically.

TOM

Sorry, I hope it gets better.

She stops, weighing his words.

SHARON

I used work the same shift with a gal from Pittsburg. Worked with her for three years and never heard her once say anything but the orders to the cook and ask the customers what they wanted. One day, a fat guy on her station got a piece of meat stuck in his throat.

Sharon pauses to see if her daughter is listening: she isn't, merely gazing off into space, sucking her thumb.

SHARON (CONT'D)

It was really weird. We're all running around, trying to help the guy, or calling the fire department, but Iola, she just stood watching the guy turn blue on the floor. By the time the rescue squad arrived, he was gone. I'll never forget it. I didn't know the guy, but I was crying, and half a dozen customers were all teared up.

Swallowing, Sharon pauses, staring down the corridor as though back on the road in front of the cafe.

But Iola, all she did was clear his table when they carried him out. When the cafe closed, we went out to catch the same bus. I guess I was still rattled. "That was something today, wasn't it?" Iola stepped out in the road to see if the bus was coming, then she looked back at me. "They save the worse for last." And you know, mister. I now know what she meant.

Without another word, Sharon clutches her daughter tightly and walks down the hall to the door to the women's dormitory, opens it and steps inside.

As though turned to stone, Tom stands motionless, trying to move his lips. Finally, he echoes her words.

TOM
(whispering)
The worst for last.

Gripping the linen and pillow, he wearily walks toward the doorway of the men's dormitory.

INT. MEN'S DORMITORY - LATER NIGHT

Not even bothering to make his bed, Tom sits on the stripped mattress, staring across the dormitory as though seeing none of the other residents spread out across the room: playing cards on lower bunk beds, writing letters or talking in ones and twos.

A MIDDLE-AGED MAN IN A FADED JOGGING SUIT comes over to Tom.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN
Hey, soon as lights out, we're going to get a bottle of Popoff, but we're short a third. You wanna buy in for a buck?

Seeing Tom hesitate, the man steps closer.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN (CONT'D)
Hey, you can drink first, man. We're clean.

Tom starts to explain then makes a feeble gesture of his hand.

TOM
Thanks, but I don't want a drink.

The man wanders off, leaving Tom alone.

ELDERLY MAN (O.S.)
Psst, hey, new guy.

Tom turns, seeing AN ELDERLY MAN IN PAJAMAS sitting on a made bunk across the aisle.

ELDERLY MAN (CONT'D)
Keep anything you wanna have in the morning under your pillow. They'll steal your teeth out of a glass.

He grins, revealing a mouthful of gums.

ELDERLY MAN (CONT'D)
They did mine.

The lights go out.

People stop playing cards and get up to go to their bunks.

Around Tom, voices lower.

He lies back on the bare bunk, staring up at the metal coils of the bed bunk above him.

From the darkness, A HUSKY BLACK MAN in camouflage pants and ragged T-shirt approaches. Seeing Tom, he glances down at him.

HUSKY BLACK MAN
You better not snore like that last fuck.

Tom ignores the remark. You hear me?

TOM
Don't worry. I won't be sleeping much.

HUSKY BLACK MAN
You got any uppers>

Tom sits up, hanging his feet over the bunk.

TOM
No, I don't do drugs.

HUSKY BLACK DRIVER
Well, can you spot me ten? I
promise to pay you back tomorrow,
soon as I get back from the blood
bank.

Tom looks at him.

TOM
You sell your blood?

BLACK MAN
Hell yes, better than selling my
ass, if you know what I mean. What
kind you got?

Tom doesn't understand the question.

BLACK MAN (CONT'D)
Blood, man, what type?

Tom shrugs.

TOM
I was A-positive. I don't know what
I am now.

The man gives Tom a weird look.

BLACK MAN
What are you, some fuckin' vampire,
man? Changing your blood.

Angrily, Tom gets up.

TOM
Shit, I just wanna be alone.

He starts away in the darkened dormitory.

BLACK MAN
Well, fuck you, dude. Go be alone
forever for all I care.

Tom shudders, glancing back.

TOM
Thanks, I wish you the same.

Getting up, the black man takes one step toward Tom.

BLACK MAN

One more wise ass remark from you,
you bearded fuck, and you're gonna
be needing blood, lots of it.

Turning, Tom walks out of the dormitory.

EXT. SANTA MONICA STREET - MINUTES LATER

Tom walks down the sidewalk toward the ocean glittering in
the moonlight.

EXT. SANTA MONICA BEACH - MOMENTS LATER

With the lights from a nearby restaurant throwing a patch on
the darkened sand, Tom walks straight across the sand dunes
and straight surf.

INSIDE THE RESTAURANT,

A BORED LITTLE BOY looking out the window, sees Tom and
motions to his parents.

They look over in surprise, staring past the window

AT TOM, FULLY-DRESSED UP TO HIS CHEST. AS THE SMALL WAVES
BREAKING OVER HIS THROAT, HE HOLDS HIS HANDS UP TO THE SKY.

TOM

(desperate)

I don't want to wait till tomorrow.
Take me now. You know I can't win.
You set me up to fail.

He attempts to walk forward over his head, but the force of
the waves force him back.

Again and again, he tries to step deeper into the sea, but
the water keeps thrusting him back.

Enraged, he thrusts his fist at the sky.

TOM (CONT'D)

Come on. Get it over with!

With one final lurch, he tries to fall forward, but is caught
by the waves and pushed backward toward the beach.

INSIDE THE POSH RESTAURANT

Have a dozen well-dressed people are jabbering and watching Tom, emerge drenched from the ocean and stride up on the dry sand.

Looking up, Tom sees the diners watching him.

He flips them the finger.

TOM (CONT'D)
(shouting)
Take a picture, you fuckin ghouls.

Calmly, Tom begins stripping down: first his coat, then his shirt, next his trousers.

SEEING WHAT HE IS DOING, the women diners cover their mouths in shock...but still keep watching.

The men are gesticulating at a waiter, who hurries across the restaurant.

Stripping down to his shorts, Tom kicks off his shoes and is about to pull off his shorts, when

A POMPOUS, MOUSTACHED WAITER IN HIS FORTIES comes striding from the restaurant.

WAITER
Don't you dare. We already called the police. You better get your clothes and get out of here right now.

Tom scratches his underarm.

TOM
Hey, the more the merrier.

Nervously, the waiter looks back at the restaurant and the watching patrons. He reaches into his pocket.

WAITER
Look, I'll give you five bucks for a bottle and get lost.

Tom snorts.

TOM
Five fucks? What can I buy that's drinkable with that?

The waiter looks dumbfounded.

WAITER

What are you crazy? You can get a bottle. What do you give a shit what you drink?

Tom pulls himself up, then contemplates the waiter disdainfully.

TOM

You are an ingrate, Charles. I gave you a five hundred tip two weeks ago.

The waiter's jaw drops. He is more than stunned.

WAITER

Huh? You've never seen that much money in your life.

TOM

Right, and what about the bottle of Krug, Clos de Mesnil, 1995, I ordered with the Beluga Royal caviar?

More stunned than ever, the waiter leans forward, peering at Tom as though he were wearing a mask..

WAITER

How do you know about that? It was a private party in Commorant Room.

Tom laughs.

TOM

No kidding. Just her and me. If I remember, you kept staring down her decollete whenever you filled her glass.

Where were watching from?

Now the waiter looks scared.

TOM (CONT'D)

Right beside her.

The waiter steps back.

WAITER

That's impossible. The only person there beside her is, I mean, was that fuckin' crook.

Tom nods.

TOM
 Ventry Alnoch...so don't come out
 here acting like you own the place.
 Remember who made the phone call to
 Guido to get you the job.

Backing up in fear, the waiter trips on the sand, then runs
 back to the restaurant.

Tom starts sloshing up the beach when he hears SOBBING.

Looking over, in the wedge of a street lamp, he sees the
 woman from the shelter cupping a cigarette a 12-ounce beer
 while watching HER DAUGHTER MAKING A SAND CASTLE IN THE
 DARKNESS.

Turning, he walks slowly toward her then stops a few feet
 from where she is crying.

TOM (CONT'D)
 You okay?

Without looking up to see who is talking to her, Sharon waves
 him away.

SHARON
 Get lost.

Tom doesn't move for a moment, then steps closer. Sensing him
 approach, she looks up, not recognizing him in the darkness.

SHARON (CONT'D)
 Leave me alone, I said.

Tom comes right up to her, standing motionless.

TOM
 (voice quavering)
 Look, I gotta talk to someone or
 I'm gonna go crazy. I cant take it
 anymore.

Shifting back, the woman stares up at Tom, recognizing him
 from the shelter.

Drying her eyes, she starts to rub her forehead then drops
 her hand.

SHARON
 Mister, I'm sorry, but my lifeboat
 has no room in it. I got enough
 shit to deal with.

Tom plots down on the sand.

TOM
Sometimes it does some good just to
talk and know somebody is
listening.

She gives him a glinty look.

SHARON
Who are you, Dr. Phil?

Tom looks hurt by the remark.

TOM
No, just some someone who heard you
crying and came over to see if I
could help.

Her expression softens.

SHARON
Sorry, I didn't mean to be rude. I
need more than help now....I need
divine intervention.

Pausing, she gazes out at the sea.

SHARON (CONT'D)
And my ship ain't coming in -- in
time.

Tom studies her.

TOM
What's wrong?

She shrugs, glancing over to make sure her daughter is safe,
still building her sand castle.

SHARON
What isn't....

She glances up at the night sky.

SHARON (CONT'D)
Chicken Little's right. The sky is
falling.

He glances overhead, then looks back at her.

TOM

Well, mine's gonna be crashing down
on me by morning if I don't get...

He falls silent, pushing his hand into the sand.

For the first time, she snaps out of her mood and notices Tom
is soaking wet.

SHARRON

You better go back to the shelter
and change. You're gonna get sick.

He smiles sardonically.

TOM

It takes time to get sick, and I
haven't got any left.

SHARON

You out on bail?

He shakes his head.

TOM

I wish. Then I'd only go to jail.
No, I got someone much bigger
coming to get me.

He rubs the sand off his hand then studies his soaked, ragged
clothes. Slowly he turns to Sharon.

TOM (CONT'D)

You see before you a bum, but only
days ago I was coveted by movie
stars, baseball heroes and even
kings, even if of small countries,
still kings.

Sharon doesn't know what to make of Tom. She swigs back on
her beer.

SHARON

Right, and you probably had a big
boat and a castle in Spain, huh?

TOM

Actually, two boats, the sailboat
at St. Tropez, and the cruiser in
Barbados. But there's no castle in
Spain, only a chateau in the Loire
Valley. But that's...

He takes a handful of sand and tosses it in the air.

TOM (CONT'D)
....all gone now.

She nods knowingly.

SHARON
Up in smoke, huh? Drugs will do it.

TOM
Drugs didn't do it, unless greed's
a drug, and it is probably is if
you keep wanting more and more of
it...until you hit the wall.

Hearing what he said, he grins.

SHARON
What's so funny?

TOM
I just realized I really did hit
the wall.

Curious, she finishes the last of her beer then tosses the
can at a trash container, and misses.

SHARON
What'd you do?

TOM
You don't wanna know.

She starts to get up.

SHARON
I don't care what you did, long as
it doesn't have anything to do with
hurting kids.

Tom falls silent.

SHARON (CONT'D)
You're not some sex offender, are
you? I didn't know the shelter
accepted them.

Shaking his head, Tom gets up.

TOM
No, I never hurt a child, but I
know what I did will hurt a lot of
families.

Sharon walks over to get her daughter. Tom follows, stopping beside the little sand castle.

At that moment, a stronger wave than the rest comes rushing up on the sand. Scooping Kim up, Sharon runs back as the water washes over the sand castle, and Tom's already-wet feet.

He watches the waves erode the walls, flattening the miniature castle.

TOM (CONT'D)
Vanitas vanitatum et omnia.

Sharon looks over.

SHARON
Huh?

Oh nothing.

Kim grips her mother's shoulder.

KIM
(whining))
Mommy, I'm hungry.

SHARON
Honey, it's late. You'll have to wait for breakfast.

Kim pouts.

KIM
I don't wanna eat the food there.
It's all the same.

Tom steps over to Sharon.

TOM
Come on, I've got a charge account at a store near the shelter. We'll get a snack there.

He leans over to smile at Kim.

TOM (CONT'D)
I bet you like cookies.

She beams.

Sharon studies Tom.

SHARON

Mister, from what you said, you need all the help you can get.

He shrugs.

TOM

And like your ship that's not coming in. It ain't enough. Come on, a box of cookies won't make a bit of difference in the scheme of themes.

EXT. STREET UP FROM BEACH - LATER NIGHT

With Kim dozing on her shoulder, Sharon walks beside Tom as they head toward Main and Bay.

He glances over at Sharon.

TOM

Sure you don't want me to carry her?

Sharon shakes her head, glancing over to make sure her daughter is sleeping.

SHARON

This might be the last chance I get for a long time.

Tom shakes his head -- not following her.

RENEE

(lowering her voice)

My old man and I split up six months ago....he met some bimbo at work and moved to Reno with her. I was doing okay as single-mom. Then the investment company went belly-up in the crash, and I was out of a job. I kinda of got bummed out, you know, losing my old man, my job, and having to move into a studio apartment with Kimmy. I kinda slipped backward, if you know what I mean. Not really using a lot of drugs, but getting stoned more than I should.

She falls silent, nodding for her to go on.

SHARON

It's the cracks. They're wider now. When I was younger, I could get by, winging it as a cocktail waitress here and doing direct marketing there, but when I had Kim, it got harder.

She stops to shift her sleeping daughter onto her other shoulder.

SHARON (CONT'D)

I started sleeping late....I got fired, and my unemployment wore out. I sold some of my mom's things but that was enough. We had to move into the shelter. It's clean, you know, and there aren't a lot of little kids for Kimmie, but it's safe. Somehow Ron showed up looking for me and my neighbor told him where I was.

Reaching the corner, Tom points at the Luna Liquor neon sign across the street.

TOM

It's right there. Go on, so what happened?

Sharon bites her lip.

SHARON

I guess his old lady can't have kids, so Tom showed up at the shelter, saying I was an unfit mother. He hired himself a fancy attorney and they been petitioning the court to give Kimmy to him, like I'm a bad influence.

Dropping her head, she begins crying, immediately stifling the sound so her daughter doesn't wake.

But the child stirs.

TOM

Can't you get a public defender?

She shakes her head.

SHARON

No for these kinds of cases. It's not criminal.

(MORE)

SHARON (CONT'D)

At ten tomorrow morning, I have to be in court with proof of a...

She closes her eyes to remember the conditions.

SHARON (CONT'D)

...a domicile and a checking account that isn't overdrawn, which mine is.

They start across the deserted street.

TOM

Or.

SHARON

There isn't any or. I got two postponements while I tried to find work, but Ron keeps pushing the judge to award Kimmie to me, saying a shelter is no place for a child, specially for a girl.

As they reach the sidewalk, she stops, looking spent as though the street they crossed were a wide desert.

SHARON (CONT'D)

If they take her from me, I'm through. There won't be anything to live for. I know Ron and that witch will move away and do all they can to make Kim forget me.

Tom stops, turning to face Sharon who is standing in front of a newspaper rack.

ON THE FRONT PAGE OF THE LOS ANGELES TIMES IS A PHOTOGRAPH OF THE BURNED PORSCHE ABOVE THE BANNER:

WHERE IS THE \$?

Seeing Tom glancing over her shoulder, she winces then starts away.

SHARON

Didn't mean to bore you with my shit when you got your own to deal with. Thanks for the company on the beach.

TOM

Wait. I'll be right back.

She glances up at the liquor store.

SHARON

You don't have to buy her anything.

TOM

I said I would. I'll be right back.

INT. LUNA LIQUOR - MOMENTS LATER

Darla, a squat, hard-faced woman in her late-50's, wearing too much eye-liner possessing the permanently surprised expression of someone who with a face-lift, sees Tom come in the door, and rings a BELL under the counter.

Immediately, WAYNE, HER HULKING HUSBAND, comes out of the freezer, glaring at Tom.

DARLA

Julio warned me you were back.

TOM

Look, I don't know what he did in here, but I don't want any trouble.

Thinking Tom is putting blame on her husband, she looks at Wayne.

DARLA

He? Y What are you talking about? He stopped you from breaking up the display. Now get out. You want anything, you get your hommies to come in and ask. You are permanently 86'ed.

WAYNE

Yeah, person non granted, got me? Now move.

Seeing Wayne approaching, holding his hand behind his back, Tom starts moving back toward the door.

TOM

Okay, I lost it. But it'll won't happen again. Just give me a box of cookies...

Darla gapes.

DARLA

Since when did you start eating cooking?

TOM
I didn't, but there's a little girl
at the shelter.

Darla puts her hands in the air.

DARLA
Oh, Jesus, they let you in there.

Imploringly, Tom holds his hands out to Darla.

TOM
Look, she and her mom haven't
eaten. Just give me a box of
cookies, a quart of milk, a quart
of orange juice..and some rolls and
cheese.

Darla puts her hands on her hips.

DARLA
Hey, we're running a deli here.

Instantly, Tom goes livid, jerking his finger at her.

TOM
No, but you've got half a dozen
homeless people hooked up here,
having their checks come here.

She glares at him.

DARLA
So what's wrong with that? They're
homeless...where else can they get
their disability checks?

TOM
Nice try, no cigar. These guys
don't eat. They use up all their
money on booze and cigarettes, and
you know it. And how about Jorge
dying in back with a quart of
Popoff form here under his arm, and
you guys grabbed the bottle and
carried him over to the parking lot
across the street to make it look
like he died there.

Darla looks stunned.

DARLA
That's bullshit. Who told you that?

TOM

Rush Limbaugh. Now give me those groceries now, and I'm calling the Veteran's Administration tomorrow and let them know just what kind of shit you're up to.

Her husband comes up to Tom, holding up a cosh.

WAYNE

You do, and I'll break you fuckin' skull.

Tom smiles.

TOM

Go ahead, Sasquach, put me out of my misery now.

Wayne raises the cosh.

DARLA (O.S.)

Don't, hon, he's nuts. Give him what he wants to get out of our hair.

Reaching under the counter, she lifts a shoe box and starts looking through it for Tom's account.

TOM

I'm right up in front there. I think I still got a hundred left.

Turning, he goes to take a box of cookies off the shelf.

EXT. STORE - MINUTES LATER

Coming out with a bag full of groceries, Tom looks around. Sharon and her daughter are gone.

Dejected, he looks down at the bag then starts to go back into the store and return the foot, then realizes he can't do that.

Clutching the groceries, he starts up the sidewalk.

As he passes the parking lot behind the liquor store, he glances over and sees Sharon sitting on the ground, leaning against a wall, eyes closed, holding her sleeping daughter.

Tom starts over to her. Hearing his footsteps in the gravel, she opens her eyes.

SHARON

Just needed to sit down and take a break.

She notices the bag.

SHARON (CONT'D)

How many boxes of cookies did you get her?

TOM

Just one, but I got you some milk and stuff for the morning.

Gently lifting her daughter, she gets up and walks over.

SHARON

Condemned man ate a hearty supper, isn't that how it goes?

He nods.

TOM

Something like that. Come on, let me carry her. You hold on to the groceries.

Tom takes the sleeping child his arms as Sharon takes the bag of food. Glancing inside, she looks up at Tom.

SHARON

Thanks, man, I owe you.

TOM

It's Tom and you don't owe me a thing. I owe you a lot.

She looks quizzically at him.

TOM (CONT'D)

Without you and your daughter, I'd be lying face down on my bunk, waiting for morning. You helped me get through the night.

She smiles.

SHARON

Me, too, I would be climbing the walls, worrying. I'm still worrying, but, well, anyway it's easier waiting when you're not alone.

EXT. ENTRANCE OF SHELTER - MINUTES LATER

As Tom rings the night buzzer, the door opens. AN OVERWEIGHT SECURITY GUARD looks up from his small television in the lobby and comes over to open the door.

He nods to Sharon then turns to Tom.

SECURITY GUARD
I know her, but I don't know you.

TOM
Tom Arden.

The guard holds the door open for them to enter. Walking back, he picks up a roster and scans the name.

SECURITY GUARD
You're here.

Tom smiles softly.

TOM
I figured that.

He walks a few steps in the corridor then stops just before the doorway to the women's dormitory.

TOM (CONT'D)
No man's land. This is about as far
as it goes.

Sharon reaches over to take her daughter. Tom pauses, prolonging holding Kimmie in his arms.

TOM (CONT'D)
Weird, it's like I can't ever
remembering holding a child before,
but then I keep seeing myself
holding one.

She takes her daughter.

SHARON
You married?

TOM
I know this sounds crazy,
but...right, I was.

SHARON
Children?

Tom looks down the darkened corridor.

TOM

A son, from what the doctor said.

SHARON

You don't remember?

TOM

Selective forgetting she said,
something about what happened after
Iraq, when I got back, then my wife
took my son, the doctor said, and
went away....but were killed in a
car wreck.

Sharon looks genuinely pained.

SHARON

I'm so sorry, Mister. I mean, Tom.
Thank you for the food and coming
over on the beach.

He smiles.

TOM

It's pretty hard ignoring someone
who's crying.

Hearing himself, he shakes his head.

TOM (CONT'D)

I wonder where that came from?

She stares at him.

SHARON

From you.

Smiling awkwardly, he leans over the child then looks up at Sharon.

TOM

May I kiss her goodbye? I won't
wake her.

Sharon starts to nod, then stops.

SHARON

Goodbye? But you'll see her in the
morning.

TOM

Just in case, I don't.

Slowly, he leans over and ever so softly kisses the little girl on the cheek.

His eyes close and he pauses, savoring the moment.

He opens his eyes then stares at Sharon.

TOM (CONT'D)

Thank you. Of all the nights of my life this was the one when I didn't want to be alone.

Turning, he starts down the hall and opens the door to the men's dormitory, stepping inside.

Recovering, Sharon manages to grip the groceries in one hand and her daughter in the other.

As she reaches the door to the women's dormitory, she has to fumble to grasp the handle.

Momentarily, Kimmie stirs and starts to wake.

SHARON

Shhhhh....go To sleep, honey. Go to sleep.

The child settles back in her mother's arms as Sharon opens the door and steps into the darkened dormitory.

INT. DARKENED MEN'S DORMITORY - LATER NIGHT

Unable to sleep, Tom rolls on his side, listening to the night sounds of coughing, snoring, farting. A hideous warehouse of weary bodies.

Looking across the aisle, he sees the toothless old man lying on his back, mouth open, resembling a corpse.

For a second, the man doesn't seem to be breathing. Tom strains forward, staring....waiting.

With a snort, the man gasps and begins breathing again.

Turning away, Tom's face seems to give way to sadness. HIS EYES probe through the darkness.

His shoulders shake and he covers his mouth, mouthing his sobs.

Dropping his hand, he drops his head on the bed.

TOM
I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

Lifting his head, he stares past the row of double-bunks and motionless silhouettes on the bed.

TOM (CONT'D)
(voice breaking)
Forgive me...forgive.

ALL IS STILL, SILENT.

MAN (O.S.)
You're forgiven.

Tom bolts up, turning to see who spoke. But no one moves in the darkened dorm. Getting up, Tom walks quietly down the aisle, staring from bunk to bed, trying to find someone looking up at him.

But everyone appears to be sleeping. Reaching the end of the dorm, he turns, staring back down the row of bunks.

TOM
(whispering)
Who are you?

Silence.

TOM (CONT'D)
Where are you?

Silence.

Walking back to his bunk, Tom sits down momentarily. Then abruptly, he jumps up and hurries out of the dorm.

INT. SHELTER - SAME TIME

Tom hurries toward the exit, where A SHORT BUT FIT FILIPINO-AMERICAN SECURITY GUARD is sitting by the door. Seeing Tom coming, he stands.

SECURITY GUARD
Where you going?

TOM
I gotta go somewhere. It's important.

The guard shakes his head.

SECURITY GUARD

Rules are, you go out after twelve,
you can't come in before wake-up at
six.

Tom nods quickly.

TOM

Okay, just let me out. It's
important.

The security guard unlocks the door and opens it for Tom, who hurries outside and runs into the night.

EXT. BEHIND DARKENED LIQUOR STORE - MINUTES LATER

Out of breath, Tom comes loping down the street. Crossing into the arc of a street light in the alley behind the liquor store, he stops.

WAYNE is stomping down a cardboard box, which he throws into a Dipsy Dumpster.

Inside an idling sedan, Darla is using the vanity mirror on the passenger seat to freshen her makeup.

Seeing Darla in the car, Tom starts toward it.

Sensing someone coming, she turns, screaming at the sight of the bearded man coming out of the darkness.

Whirling around, Wayne spots Tom moving toward the sedan.

WAYNE

You crazy fuck. I'm gonna kill you.

Yanking a chunk of wooden from the trash, Wayne runs at Tom, who makes no attempt to defend himself.

Without stopping, Wayne hits Tom on the side of the head, knocking him to the ground.

Tom lies motionless....with Wayne waiting for him to get up.

The car door opens and Darla leans out.

DARLA

You killed him.

Seeing that Tom is coming to, Wayne throws the piece of wood down the alley.

WAYNE
Self-defense.

With blood seeping down his temple, Tom gets up, woozy. Losing his balance, he falls forward, gripping the sedan for support.

WAYNE (CONT'D)
You get any blood on that car.

Tom turns, staring at Wayne.

WAYNE (CONT'D)
You know, I always wanted to ask you something?

Wayne juts his chin out.

WAYNE (CONT'D)
Yeah, what?

TOM
Where'd you learn your people skills, San Quentin?

Enraged, Wayne runs at Tom. Throwing herself forward, Darla steps between Tom and her boyfriend.

DARLA
No, honey. Stop! Don't you see. He wants to die. Don't do it for him.

Wayne stops, holding off a few feet away from Tom.

Feeling blood coming down the side of his cheek, Tom wipes it off and looks at it in the darkness. He turns to the owner of the store.

TOM
You're wrong there. I want to live. That's why I had to come here before it's too late.

DARLA
It is too late. We're closed.

TOM
I don't mean the store. I mean helping me get to Malibu.

Darla and Wayne look at each other.

DARLA
Malibu? At midnight. All you're
gonna do is get arrested.

Tom shrugs off the statement.

TOM
Can you give me a ride?

Sensing Tom's desperation, Darla turns to Wayne. He sees the question in her look.

TOM (CONT'D)
No way. I don't want his blood all
over my car.

DARLA
But you heard what Peetie and Jorge
said he did over there.

Wayne shakes his head.

TOM
Hey, then let them take him up
there.

Tom starts walking in a circle, looking over at Darla and Wayne, then glancing out at the street.

Abruptly, he walks straight over to Darla. Wayne runs forward to head him off.

Tom holds his hands up in the air.

TOM (CONT'D)
I'm not going to do anything. The
only reason I got in that fight was
that fucker hit me with the wine
bottle.

Darla's crusty mask of a face softens. She reaches into the car and takes a handkerchief from her purse.

DARLA
Here, wipe the blood off. And you
can keep the handkerchief.

Wayne motions to Darla for them to go. Nodding, she starts to get into the car.

TOM
You leave me here like this, and
I'm doomed.

Wayne laughs.

WAYNE

Doomed. Get that, hon, he's gonna be doomed. Well, let's get going then.

He starts to get into the driver's side. Darla pauses, half-in, half-out of the car.

DARLA

What the hell's wrong with you? You used to be just a harmless bum. Now look at you, racing around like a madman.

TOM

I only got till tomorrow morning.

DARLA

For what.

TOM

To help some or she's gonna lose her kid.

Darla softens.

DARLA

The kid you bought the cookies for?

He nods.

DARLA (CONT'D)

So you want me to open the store back up for you to get something else to eat?

Holding the handkerchief to his temple, Tom walks right up to Darla.

TOM

No, but I need enough money to get a cab to Malibu and back.

Her jaw drops.

DARLA

You got some nerve.

TOM

Swear to god, whatever's left on my check this month, you take it. And I promise I'll never be back.

(MORE)

TOM (CONT'D)

You can take every check from now on and keep it all for yourself. I swear I won't be back. Just help me get to Malibu and back.

Wayne rises from the other side of the car.

WAYNE

What's he doing, telling you how he won the battle of Baghdad?

Tom turns slowly to face Wayne.

TOM

We didn't make it that far. We did all our fighting on the way.

Darla motions below the door of the sedan. Tom looks down, seeing her taking several twenty dollar bills and dropping them to the ground.

DARLA

Let's go, hon. I don't care how bad he needs a drink. We're closed.

Nodding his approval, Wayne gets in the car. Darla opens the door then winks.

DARLA (CONT'D)

I'm not as bad as you think, Tom. And keep your check. Good luck whatever you up to.

SHE GETS IN THE CAR AND CLOSES THE DOOR. AS LARRY STARTS THE ENGINE, TOM KNEELS DOWN SCOOPS UP THE MONEY BEFORE LARRY CAN BACK UP AND HAVE THE HEADLIGHTS REVEAL THE MONEY.

As the car backs up, Tom looks down at Darla, who smiles and points at his temple, still bleeding.

Nodding, he puts the handkerchief to his forehead.

EXT. SANTA MONICA TAXI STATION - LATER NIGHT

A LONE TAXI IS PARKED ALONG THE DOWNTOWN SIDEWALK AS TOM COMES UP AND OPENS THE BACK DOOR. IT IS LOCKED.

He bends down, finding the CHUBBY WHITE DRIVER staring at him. The window clicks open.

Opening the door, Tom leans in.

CHUBBY DRIVER
Where you wanna go?

TOM
Highland Drive, in Malibu.

The driver gives Tom the once-over.

CHUBBY DRIVER
I want a hundred buck deposit if
you want me to wait.

Don slides into the car.

TOM
It's one-way, and I'll give you a
good tip.

Turning on the engine, the driver pulls away from the curb.

INT. TAXI CAB - MINUTES LATER

Tom gazes out the back window at Pacific Coast Highway, with
only a few cars spread out in the night.

TOM
By any chance, have you been down
PCH today, you know, heading in the
other direction, into Santa Monica.

The driver looks up at Tom in the rear view mirror.

CHUBBY DRIVER
Nope, just the West Side and two
runs to the airport. Why you ask?

Tom leans back in his seat.

TOM
Oh, I heard on the news that they
had a bad accident down here today.
Some guy in a sports car.

The driver chuckles.

CHUBBY DRIVER
Some guy? That was Ventry Alnoch,
the Ponzi crook. They had to scrape
him off the dash with a shovel from
what I heard. Serves him right,
right?

Tom looks at the driver's gaze in the rear-view mirror.

TOM

I'm not businessman, but I heard some guy on the radio talking about this guy. He said the people making money from him, year after year, they weren't complaining at the time.

The driver weighs the remark.

CHUBBY DRIVER

But it was all a con game.

TOM

Not as long as there were making money.

The driver is silent then leans forward, gripping the steering wheel.

CHUBBY DRIVER

Easy to say if you didn't lose any money.

TOM

And you did?

The driver sits up in his seat.

CHUBBY DRIVER

Doesn't matter. That guy fucked everybody who believed in him. He deserved to burn.

Tom shudders then gazes out at the ocean in the moonlight.

TOM

I guess so.

EXT. MALIBU - LATER NIGHT

With the cab stopped at the side of Pacific Coast Highway, Tom pays the driver and gets out of the cab. Waiting for it to drive away, Tom hurries across the highway toward the beach.

EXT. GARAGE BEHIND WHITE BEACH HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Coming alongside the garage, Tom stops beside the entrance and feels the ledge above the double doors.

Taking down a key, he inserts it into the lock, opens the door, then steps inside, pausing to make sure one is around.

He steps away from the door. Momentarily, a flashlight beam comes on and sweeps deeper into the garage.

INT. DARKENED BASEMENT - MINUTES LATER

The cabinet of instruments shifts open. Holding the flashlight, Tom emerges and leaving the passageway open, starts for the stairway.

As he starts up the steps, he stops to listen.

A massive silence.

EXT. MANSION LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The room is now empty of furniture.

A lone shaft of light cuts along under a door at the end of the corridor.

The basement door swings open, and Tom emerges cupping his hand over the lamp to hide the beam of light.

He holds up the lamp, seeing the log rack still arranged in front of the fireplace.

Just as he is about to cross the floor, A MOANING COMES FROM DOWN THE HALLWAY.

Ducking down, Tom turns off the flashlight, listening as the moaning grows louder.

Tom moves forward, peering around the corner.

A door is ajar above a wedge of light coming from along the floor and the side of the door.

MAN (O.S.)
Oh, yeah, baby, yeah.

Torn behind running over and opening the top of the log rack or going to see who is making the moaning, Tom hesitates, listening to the sound.

MAN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Oh, there, there.

A FOOT STRIKES THE DOOR, knocking it open, and spilling light across the empty dining room and illuminating the fireplace.

Tom sees the log rack only a few feet away.

Hearing the moaning stop, Tom peaks out around corner.

SITTING ON A TOILET SEAT WITH HIS PANTS DOWN AROUND HIS ANKLES IN A SMALL UTILITY BATHROOM, IS AN OBESE SECURITY GUARD IN HIS 30'S.

IN HIS RIGHT HAND, IS A PLAYBOY MAGAZINE WITH THE CENTERFOLD HANGING DOWN. WITH HIS LEFT HAND THE MAN IS WIPING HIMSELF WITH TOILET PAPER.

HIS RADIO SQUAWKS.

Cursing, the security guard drops the phone and pulls out the phone to answer it.

SECURITY GUARD

Can't a guy relieve himself without being bothered? Yeah, yeah, all secure. Five-by-five.

Hanging up, he leans over to pick up his magazine.

SEEING HIS MOMENT,

Tom darts into the light, running toward the log rack.

BEHIND HIM,

THE SECURITY GUARD sees Tom. Hurried, he tries to pull up his pants while turning on the phone.

SECURITY GUARD (CONT'D)

We got an intruder. Get Daisy and get over here.

REACHING THE LOG RACK, Tom fumbles with the top. It won't open as before.

Behind him, the guard is buckling his pants. Desperately, Tom tries one last time to open the lid. Pausing, he glances as the other....then reaches over and tugs at the lid.

It opens. The iron log racks had bad switched.

Turning it upside down, Tom catches the tag and chain as they slide into his hand.

He snaps down the lid and sets the rack down on the floor just as the security guard starts hurrying out of the bathroom.

Seeing that he can't make it to the basement door in time, Tom races into the dining room facing the back of the house.

Reaching the window, he tugs at the lock. It won't open.

Turning, he sees the guard coming.

Pulling his coat up over his head, Tom lunges through the window in a smashing of glass.

EXT. LAWN - SAME TIME

Landing hard on the grass, Tom gets up and starts running for the wall at the far end of the guard.

FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE HOUSE

Races a barking German Shepherd.

Glancing back, Tom sees the guard dog gaining on him.

Hitting the wall, Tom claws at the top, yelling in pain as his palms come down on spikes embedded at the top of the brick.

With all his might, he pulls himself up -- as the dog leaps up and begins tearing at Tom's trousers.

Trying to kick the dog loose, Tom pulls himself higher as A HUSKY SECURITY GUARD comes running around the house, aiming a flashlight at Tom while calling the Sheriff on his cellphone.

Reaching the top of the wall, Tom looks down at HIS BLEEDING HANDS. Taking the chain and tag from his right hand, he slides it over his neck. Squatting down, he readies to drop to the ground several feet below.

With a here-goes-nothing expression, he jumps and hits the ground making a paratrooper's PLF landing: not trying to land on his feet but rolling forward.

With the dog barking down the wall toward a closed gate, Tom gets up and starts running down the hill toward the beach.

EXT. BEACH - MINUTES LATER

Running as fast as he can, Tom comes racing down a trail between a row of houses.

FROM DOWN THE BEACH, appear a pair of bouncing lights.

Staring in their direction. Tom sees a SHERIFF'S DUNE BUGGY HEADING TOWARD HIM.

He turns in the other direction:

TWO MORE LIGHTS are coming from the other direction.

He turns to head back up to the road, when he sees the red glow of a police car's light pulling up.

Whirling around, he takes one hard look at the ocean then starts running toward the waves breaking ashore.

SHERIFF (O.S.)
Stop right now! Stop, or I'll
shoot!

Not heeding the warning, Tom strips off his coat and kicks off his shoes, then dives into the water and begins stroking away from the beach.

FROM THE CLIFF, A STRONG BEAM OF LIGHT picks him up. Trapped and followed by the arc of light, Tom takes a deep breath then dives below the surface.

INT. OCEAN - SAME TIME

Tom swims through the murky water, with the tag dangling on the chain around his neck.

EXT. OCEAN SURFACE - MOMENTS LATER

Needing air, Tom comes up with his head tilted sideways not to break the surface, only a few feet from where the spotlight beam is searching the water.

Catching his breath, he sinks below again.

EXT. OCEAN - MINUTES LATER

With the searchlight now a hundred yards up the beach, Tom begins swimming along the surface, careful not to splash with his feet.

EXT. SANTA MONICA BEACH - LATER NIGHT

Holding hands, a young couple walk along the tide line, laughing and exchanging kisses.

Suddenly, a figure lurches from the water.

The woman screams as Tom staggers from the surf, drenched in his shirt and trousers.

Scared but wanting to protect her, the boyfriend holds his hands up around his girl, warning Tom off.

Ignoring the couple, Tom strides up on the beach, then blows the mucus from both his nostrils and begins jogging up the hill toward Main Street.

EXT. MAIN STREET - MINUTES LATER

Standing beside their shopping cart wired together, a HOMELESS MAN is rooting through a trash can as Tom comes up the hill, drenched and in his bare feet.

The homeless man looks over.

HOMELESS MAN
Got any change, mister?

Tom shakes his head at the idiocy of the question.

TOM
Do I look like I have change?

Still rooting around the trash, the man shrugs.

HOMELESS MAN
Don't know till you ask. Hey
what's this?

Grabbing something, the man pulls out a pair of sun glasses with one lens missing.

As Tom hurries on, the homeless man puts them on, giving him a strange appearance of one black lens, one blank one. He continues inspecting the trash as Tom goes up the street.

EXT. SHELTER - MINUTES LATER

Shivering from being wet, Tom mounts the steps and knocks on the door.

From the darkness emerges the Filipino Security Guard. Seeing Tom, the man shakes his head and points at his watch.

TOM
Let me in. I'm freezing.

Shrugging, the man comes right up to the glass and holds up his two hands....making the number six.

Turning, he walks back into the shadows.

Clutching his arms under his sleeves for what little warmth he can get, Tom stands shivering on the steps.

EXT. SANTA MONICA SKYLINE - DAYBREAK

A perfect day. Not a cloud in the sky. The air clear all the way to the horizon.

The sea flat, with a few joggers loping along the shoreline.

UP A STREET

Appears the squat structure of the shelter.

Pacing back and forth in front of the entrance is Tom.

Running back up the steps, he peers into the lobby.

ON THE WALL IS A CLOCK SHOWING 5:58.

Seeing the security guard coming with a cup of coffee in his hand, Tom motions for him to open the door.

The guard glances at the clock then back at Tom. He shakes his head, stopping on the other side of the glass, to sip the coffee.

Shaking his head at the man's stubbornness, Tom starts muttering to himself.

TOM

Right, just two minutes, you jerk.

The rising sunlight hits the rooftop and begins to shine in Tom's face.

SUDDENLY, he hears a ROARING NOISE. Looking around, Tom tries to feel where it is coming from.

The street is deserted. Not a car or person in sight.

The roaring grows louder.

An look of fear surfaces and spreads across Tom's face.

Throwing his head back, he stares up at the sky.

TOM (CONT'D)
Come on, not yet. I know I'm
screwed, but give me a chance to
help her. Please. What's a few
minutes to eternity?

Behind him, the guard opens the door. As Tom steps in, the
guard looks down and sees he is barefoot.

SECURITY GUARD
Hey, what happened to your shes?

TOM
Long story. When are they waking
everyone up?

The guard puts one index finger up in the air.

SECURITY GUARD
Right about....

A bell rings.

SECURITY GUARD (CONT'D)
Now.

Tom starts toward the door to the women's dormitory.

SECURITY GUARD (CONT'D)
Hey, where do you think you're
going?

SECURITY GUARD (CONT'D)
I gotta see someone.

SECURITY GUARD (CONT'D)
Not in there you're not. You can
wait till she comes out.

With the roar still audible, Tom whirls around.

TOM
Have a heart, man. This is really
important.

The guard shakes his head.

SECURITY GUARD
Rules are rules. I'm not losing my
job for you.

Tom glances outside -- seeing the sunlight spreading over the
buildings across the street.

TOM
 (under his breath)
 Not yet. Please not yet.

The door to the women's dormitory opens and A CORPULENT BLACK WOMAN in A pink leisure suit and white tennis shoes comes out, emerging while attaching an iPod to her head.

CORPULENT BLACK WOMAN
 Mornin', Rudy.

He makes a mock salute.

SECURITY GUARD
 How long you gonna go this morning?

The woman grins.

CORPULENT BLACK WOMAN
 Two Aretha Franklin's and one
 Johnny Mathis.

Tom approaches her.

TOM
 Lady, it's really, really important
 I see the woman in their with the
 little girl.

The woman pauses, adjusting her earphones.

CORPULENT BLACK WOMAN
 Which one? More than a few kids in
 there with their moms.

TOM
 She's got blonde hair, the mother.
 The little girl's about five or so.

Thinking for a moment, the woman nods.

CORPULENT BLACK WOMAN
 Yeah, yeah, I know them. They in
 the next row.

She continues on toward the exit.

Tom steps in front of the woman, staring in her eyes.

TOM
 Please, don't go yet. I gotta talk
 to her. Please go in and tell her
 Tom's got some important news.

Annoyed, the woman looks back at the doorway of the woman's dormitory.

CORPULENT BLACK WOMAN
What's in it for me?

Tom holds out his cut but empty palms.

TOM
I'd give you whatever I had, but I don't have anything left. You can have my thanks. I haven't told many people. I've been saving it up. Please....

She stares at his vulnerable, tired face. Shaking her head, she removes the earphones.

CORPULENT BLACK WOMAN
(shaking her head)
My granny told me, girl, you wear your heart on your sleeve, you just gonna get your blouse torn all the time.

She takes one last look at Tom and starts back to the women's dormitory.

CORPULENT BLACK WOMAN (CONT'D)
Nobody be messing with my morning con...sti...tut...ion...al.

Yanking the door open, she steps inside.

The security guard looks over.

SECURITY GUARD
I don't believe that. Sally don't do anything for anybody. Must be your lucky day.

Not replying, Tom walks up to the glass entrance and stares outside at the spreading sunlight.

The roar is louder than before. Tom turns.

TOM
Hear that?

The security guard cocks his head.

SECURITY GUARD
Hear what?

Pausing, the security guard listens.

SECURITY GUARD
I don't hear nothing. You're
hearing things.

Tom looks back outside.

TOM
Seeing 'em too.

EXT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Nervously pacing, Tom sees the door swing open and Sharon emerge in a bathrobe.

Seeing Tom, she looks confused.

SHARON
Thought you were leaving.

TOM
Not yet. I don't have much time
though. Come on. Get your little
girl.

Sharon looks quizzically at him.

SHARON
Why, where we going?

TOM
I think I can help you save
yourself. What time do you have to
be in court?

She steps closer to Tom, not sure what is going on.

SHARON
Eleven, why?

TOM
I may not have time, but you do.
Hurry up and dress.

SHARON
What are you gonna do?

Tom glances at the wall clock.

TOM
Come on. I'll tell you on the way.

She glances down, noticing he is bare-footed and his feet are cut.

SHARON

What happened to you?

TOM

Doesn't matter. Hurry if you want to keep your daughter.

SHARON

You're not drunk, are you?

TOM

I've never been more sober in my life. But hurry. I haven't got long.

Realizing Tom is serious, Sharon backs up then runs back to the woman's dormitory.

The guard walks over to Tom.

SECURITY GUARD

What are you up to, with that poor woman?

TOM

Trying to keep her from being poorer.

EXT. MAIN STREET, SANTA MONICA - LATER MORNING

With Kimmie chewing a cookie and walking between her mother and Tom, the trio walk toward the downtown area.

Tom stops, pointing at a telephone booth.

TOM

There's one.

He hurries head then stops flat, staring at the empty booth.

TOM (CONT'D)

What have they done with all the pay phones?

Sharon shrugs.

TOM (CONT'D)

They figure everyone has a cellphone now.

Tom motions ahead.

TOM (CONT'D)
We'll find one. Come on.

SHARON
But what are you gonna do?

TOM
You'll hear.

Kimmie looks up at her mother.

KIMMIE
Mommy, I'm tired of walking.

She picks up her daughter.

SHARON
I know, honey.

She looks at Tom.

TOM
Just give me a few minutes more.

Suddenly, he twists his head, holding his hands over his ears.

SHARON
What's wrong?

TOM
The roar is getting louder.

Sharon looks quizzically at him.

SHARON
I don't hear any roar. Do you,
honey.

Kimmie tilts her head, listening.

KIMMIE
Yes, mommy, I hear the ocean.

Lowering his hands, Tom continues on. Clutching her daughter, Sharon stays with him.

EXT. WILSHIRE AND 2ND STREET - LATER MORNING

Standing at the intersection beside Sharon and Kimmie, Tom looks around. No sign of a phone.

Seeing his look of disappointment, Sharon makes her own.

SHARON

I gotta go back and...pack Kimmie's clothes.

Kimmie looks up.

KIMMIE

Where are we going, mommy?

Sharon can't answer and starts tearing up.

SHARON

It's a surprise, darling.

Looking down the sidewalk, Tom sees a well-dressed middle-aged man in a conservative suit at an outdoor cafe table, flicking through the Wall Street Journal. Beside him is A CELL PHONE.

Tom waves for Sharon to stay put.

TOM

I'll be right back.

Tom approaches the man.

TOM (CONT'D)

Sir, sir, excuse me. I have to make an emergency call and I can't find a pay phone? May I use yours just for a moment? It's an 800 number call.

Trying to ignore him, the man continues to read The Wall Street Journal.

TOM (CONT'D)

Please, mister, it's for that woman and little girl over there. It's really important I call the SEC.

Hearing SEC, the man looks over, then scrutinizes Tom's bedraggled appearance.

BUSINESS MAN
SEC? What the hell are you talking
about?

Seeing Tom staring at the front page of the Wall Street
Journal, the man looks at the headline:

SEC UNDER ATTACK FOR NOT CATCHING ALNOCH

The man snaps back at Tom.

BUSINESS MAN (CONT'D)
Sly. Nice trick to get my
cellphone. Get out of here, you
bum.

Backing up, Tom starts back up the sidewalk, where Sharon has
been watching. She shakes her head.

Passing a parked city bus, Tom glances over and sees the
HISPANIC DRIVER standing outside the door, eating a take-out
burrito on his break.

ON HIS HIP is cellphone in a holster.

Slowly, Tom walks over to the driver, now warily watching the
bearded man approach.

TOM
Sir, I swear this is the truth. I
gotta use a phone to call a bank to
get help for that woman and her
child. I don't have a cellphone and
I can't fine a phone. All I have is
this.

He holds out seventy-five cents in change.

TOM (CONT'D)
Here, take this. It's an 800
number. I'll just be a second.

The driver looks down at the change, then over at the
obviously tense Sharon and her little girl, then back at Tom.
Wiping salsa off his hand, the man slides out the phone and
hands it to Tom.

DRIVER
Here, man. Make your call and keep
your money.

Turning to Sharon, Tom motions for her to come.

Holding her daughter's hand, she comes down the sidewalk.

DRIVER (CONT'D)
You know the number, man?

Tom nods.

TOM
By heart. You want to dial it to
see its an 800 number?

The driver shakes his head.

DRIVER
Call, man. I gotta start my run in
three minutes.

Taking the phone, Tom punches in an 800-number. He waits, turning to study Sharron and Kimmie. Then he hears someone answer.

TOM
I'm calling about Ventry Alnoch. I
want to know if there is a reward
for information on where he has
stashed his money.

Listening, Tom shakes his head.

TOM (CONT'D)
This is no joke. Course I know he
was dead. I was there when he died.
That's why I got something to
share...if there's a reward.

He puts his hand over the phone, turning to the now surprised Sharon. The driver hasn't yet figured out what's going down.

TOM (CONT'D)
She's transferring me to a
supervisor.

Momentarily, he hears someone come on the line.

TOM (CONT'D)
Yes, ma'am, that's right. I was
there. He told me where he
had....hold on, hold on. What's the
reward? Well, I'm not giving you
anything until I see.

Listening, Tom's expression tightens.

TOM (CONT'D)
 Come on, I didn't fall off the
 cabbage truck. Yeah, yeah, I can
 prove it.

Reaching inside his shirt, he takes out the tag and studies
 the numbers on the side.

TOM (CONT'D)
 Tell you what, I'll give you a
 small off-shore account. You check
 it and if I'm telling the truth,
 you call me back and I'll tell you
 where to pay enough reward to get
 started.

He glances up the street -- seeing A BANK OF SOUTHERN
 CALIFORNIA branch in the middle of the next block.

TOM (CONT'D)
 Yep, I'm in Santa Monica. You call
 the Bank of Southern California at
 Third and Wilshire and tell the
 manager I'm coming in....me? No, I
 want it to go to my next of kin.

He push is hand over the phone.

TOM (CONT'D)
 Sharon, what's your last name?

She can't believe the conversation she has been hearing.

SHARON
 Leeds.

Tom drops his hand.

TOM
 (over the phone)
 Sharon Leeds....yeah, yeah, okay.
 He said it was in the Bank of
 Antigua under the following account
 number: 0344591. And the password
 was "priapism." Yes,
 p....r...i...a...p...i....m. He
 didn't say how much, just that
 there was a lot, but a lot less
 than the other two he told me
 about. Okay, she'll be waiting.
 I'll give her then numbers to turn
 over to you after each step.

He hangs up and hands the phone back to the astonished driver.

TOM (CONT'D)
Thank you, sir.

Taking the phone, the driver looks at it.

DRIVER
Man, was that for real?

Tom shrugs.

TOM
If it isn't, I don't know what is.

With a nod goodbye, the driver gets on the bus and starts the engine.

Tom motions for Sharon to follow him. Suddenly, he grabs his ears, staggering. She grabs him.

SHARON
What's wrong?

TOM
This is it. Look, take this.

He removes the chain and tag, then hands it to her.

TOM (CONT'D)
Look, there's no time. Believe me. Just go up to the bank and ask for the manger. He'll know what to do. You just make sure he deposits the reward in a new account, then gives you a letter of credit to show to the court. You'll be okay.

Sharon strains, wanting to believe Tom but afraid to.

In pain from the roaring noise, he grips her arm.

TOM (CONT'D)
Go, it's true.

Bending over, he drops to his knees. Sharon leans over.

SHARON
I'll get the restaurant to call an ambulance.

Tom shakes his head.

TOM

It's too late for an ambulance. But not too late for you. Get up to the bank.

SHARON

But what if they don't know me.

The driver comes back down the steps, holding the telephone in his hand.

DRIVER

(scared)

Hey, man, it's the FBI. They want to talk with you.

Tom takes the phone.

TOM

Yeah, that's right. He told me where five are. Not so fast. You tell that bank to set things up with Ms. Leeds....she'll give the information, but she wants the same reward for each account.

Handing the phone to the driver, Tom slumps back on the sidewalk.

TOM (CONT'D)

You're okay now. You're getting two percent of five million dollars now. The other accounts in the Bahamas are bigger. They're all here. Just hold the tag up to the light and you'll see the accounts magnified. Now get to the bank.

Leaning down, Sharon squeezes Tom's hand.

SHARON

I don't even know you and you've helped us. I'll never forget you.

She starts crying. He brushes off her tears.

TOM

Please, nobody's smile around me for a long time.

Sharon forces herself to smile.

Kimmie stares at her mother then at him.

She comes right up next to him.

KIMMIE
You made my mommy happy.

Leaning over, she kisses him on the cheek.

KIMMIE (CONT'D)
I love you.

EVERYTHING STOPS MOVING EXCEPT FOR TOM. Sitting up, he tilts his head then looks around.

THE ROARING HAS STOPPED.

HE LOOKS OUT AT THE STREET. ALL THE CARS HAVE STOPPED. HE TURNS. PEDESTRIANS ARE MOTIONLESS DOWN THE SIDEWALK.

HE LOOKS OVER AT THE DRIVER, STARING DOWN AT TOM.

TOM LOOKS UP AT REBECCA AND KIM.

AS HE GETS TO HIS FEET, EVERYTHING COMES BACK TO LIFE AS THOUGH NOTHING HAD CHANGED.

SHARON STEPS BACK IN AMAZEMENT.

SHARON
Yeah, I guess I am.

He looks down at his cut hands and frayed clothes, as though waiting for something to happen.

Then, with a smile breaking across his face, he leans back and gazes up at the cloudless blue sky.

TOM
So, this is the way it's gonna be.
Fine with me. Fine with me.

Taking Sharon by one hand and Kimmie by another, they start up the sidewalk.

EXT. LUNA LIQUOR STORE - NEXT DAY

ON A NEWSPAPER RACK IN FRONT OF THE STORE IS A HEADLINE:

HOMELESS MAN FINDS ALCOCH'S BILLIONS.

Below the headline

IS A PHOTOGRAPH OF TOM, ALL SPIFFY IN A NEW SUIT, STANDING A FEW FEET AWAY FROM A SMILING IN A NEW DRESS, AND KIMMY IN NEW CLOTHES AND CLUTCHING A TEDDY BEAR.

A FLASH OF LIGHT

INT. LOS ANGELES SEC OFFICE - DAY

Averting their eyes from flashbulbs, Tom stands awkwardly in front of a group of jostling reporters and television station cameramen. To one side stand Sharon and Kim, on the other, the smiling SEC regional director.

A MALE REPORTER steps forward.

REPORTER

Mr. Arden, why would such a heartless, greedy person tell you where he hid the money?

Tom holds up his hands, unable to give an answer.

A FEMALE REPORTER MOVES FORWARD.

FEMALE REPORTER

What do you think, Mr. Arden?

Tom looks down at the carpet then lifts his head, staring at the TV cameras.

TOM

I don't know. Maybe he wanted to try and undo some of the evil he had done. And he did, I think. People will now get back some of their money.

Satisfied with the answer, television cameramen press forward.

CAMERAMAN (O.S.)

Mr. Arden, could you stand next to your wife and daughter?

Tom looks over, seeing Sharon and Kimmie staring at him.

TOM

But they're...

Suddenly breaking into a grin, he steps over toward them.

TOM (CONT'D)
...right there.

Picking up Kimmie, he puts his arm around Sharon.

EXT. PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY - LATER AFTERNOON

Traffic races past the spot at the tunnel entrance where the Porsche crashed. No sign of the accident remains.

Coming from the boardwalk are Tom, Sharon and Kimmie. He holds a bouquet of flowers, with Kimmie licking a ball of candy as large as her head.

Reaching the highway, Tom crosses the barrier and stops at the spot where he found himself after the accident.

Waiting for a patch of traffic to roar past, he sets the flowers down on the spot where the Porsche burned down.

SHARON
He was lucky you were there when it happened.

Tom nods.

TOM
So was I.

Hearing himself, he smiles softly then turns back to Sharon.

SHARON
What did you say?

He steps over the barrier and walks back to her.

TOM
Just three words.

Putting his arm around Sharon and Kimmie, Tom walks off in the afternoon light,

AS TRAFFIC SPEEDS DOWN PACIFIC COAST HIGHWAY AND SLOWS TO ENTER THE TUNNEL.

A RED PORSCHE TEARS OVER THE WILD FLOWERS AND RACES INTO THE DARKENED TUNNEL.

THE END

