

Film or Death

written by

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Lights up. Music playing loudly.

A partially furnished basement room. Used furniture, a couch and credenza along the walls; a table and two chairs in the center. Cluttered with cardboard boxes and plastic containers stacked precariously. Papers, newspapers, and magazines are piled everywhere. A large framed movie poster from Woody Allen's "Manhattan". An old electric typewriter. A turntable, amp, and speakers.

K. is seated at the table, writing furiously on a legal pad, his eyes inches from the page. Wearing 1990's over-the-ear headphones connected to the amp behind him. As he writes he consults some of the papers from the open container at his feet that are strewn across the tabletop.

B. enters, two mugs in hand; waits for K. to notice him. K. doesn't.

B. crosses behind K. to the amp and unplugs the headphones. The music stops.

K. jerks upright. Takes off the headphones.

K
What the fuck!

B
You're up early for a change.

K
Couldn't sleep.

B. sits at the table and sips from his mug. Takes K's pad and flips through it.

B
"The Imaginary Western."
(looking at the papers on
the table)
I remember this. Deadwood meets Dracula?
(MORE)

B (CONT'D)

Ingmar Bergman's Seventh Seal set in the
Dakota Territory. Wild Bill Hickok. Calamity
Jane.

(returns the pad)

This is old. Did you ever write a first draft
of this?

K. indicates the papers on
the table.

K

Still in the conceptual stage.

B

Twenty years later.

(pause)

There's your tea.

K. sips from his mug. Makes a face.

K

Liptons?

B

She took all the Lemon Zinger and Bengal Spice
with her when she left. You always said you
didn't drink coffee.

K

Didn't even leave you a single fucking bag of
Chamomile. Harsh.

(sips, another face)

It's missing something.

B

I can guess.

K. gets up, rummages around in his
bag, and returns with a pint bottle
of vodka. Unscrewing the cap, he
adds a not-so-small portion to his
mug before sipping again.

K

Better.

He motions with the pint towards B,
who shakes his head.

K

No?

B

No. Remember, I don't drink anymore.

K

One drink. C'mon. Just one for old times sake.
I hate drinking alone.

B

No. Not today. Not yesterday. Not the day
before that or the day before that.

K

What a waste of potential. Must suck to be a
grateful recovering alcoholic.

K. pours the rest of the pint into
his mug.

K

(drinks)

How long has it been again?

B

Like I said, two years, five months, two
weeks, six days.

K

Impressive. Especially to someone whose last
drink was (drinks) Ahhh...just now.

B

One day at a time. Yada yada yada. Works if
you work it.

K. pour the rest of the pint into
his mug and drinks. (Note: While K.
drinks throughout the scene he
never gets sloppy or stupid.)

B

Nice to see all that SSI and food stamp money
is being well spent.

K

What's your...what do they call it...sponsor
say about all this. Inviting your old writing
buddy from college up for a lost weekend of
drinking...sorry...reminiscing while the wife
is away?

B

Don't have one.

Meetings? K

Don't go. B

No sponsor. No meetings. John Wayne would be proud. K

(drinks)
"Shine on you crazy diamond..."

Listen, are you ready to start... B

I always thought the other person left the alcoholic because they drank, not because they stopped drinking. K

K. drains his mug. Gets up.

Her leaving you... K

K. rummages through his bag. Returns with another pint.

That's fucked up. K

She'll be back in a week. Maybe two. It's a vacation. B

Vacation. Right. K

B. gets up and grabs the unopened pint from K.

You're going to want to pace yourself. B

B. slams the pint down onto the table.

You ready to start? B

What? Not drinking? K

B. searches for and opens a specific box. Digging inside he comes out with a script. Tosses it to K.

B
Writing a second draft. Of DP.
(pause)
Displaced Persons.

K
I know what DP stands for.

K. starts paging through the script.

K
The first and only script we wrote together. Troglodytes appear in the Mexican...

B
Arizona.

K
...Arizona desert. Millions of them. Fleeing some subterranean catastrophe.
(continues paging)
They end up being exterminated by the military-industrial complex.
(paging)
Except for a few who escape, saved by the protagonist, Harlan something or other.

B
Temple. Harlan Temple.

K. tosses the script on the table.

K
1950's sci-fi B movie. Why?
(pause)
Why go back and write a second draft of the only script we wrote together? It's not even particularly good.
(pause)
Why not write something new?

B
It's...it's complicated...I...

K
Have a drink.

K. tosses the pint to B, who catches it like it's a hot potato.

B

All those other scripts you've written since DP, you've written. Just you.

B. puts the pint back on the table.

B

This one. It was the first. Together.

(pause)

It was going to be the start of something?

K. doesn't say anything. Mulls it over. Takes the pint.

K

And you, what, want to retype your way down memory lane.

(drinks)

What, dissatisfied with all...this.

B. looks anywhere but at K.

K

You definitely could use a drink.

(drinks)

When you invited me up, paid for the train ticket, picked me up at the station, I thought we were gonna hang out for a couple of days, have a few laughs, then drive my stuff back to the island.

(drinks)

Not write a second draft.

B

We talked about this before you came up.

K

Vaguely. We talked about a lot of things. The group home. The roommate who shits in the tub because he can't afford toilet paper. The crack addict downstairs with PTSD. A lot of things.

(drinks)

I'm not writing screenplays anymore.

B

What?! That's all you've done since I've known you.

K

Film is dead. It's all sequels and superhero movies. Citizen Kane Part Three. Marvel Bullshit Part Ninety-Nine.

(MORE)

K (CONT'D)

(drinks)

The invisible hand of capitalism guiding the world towards profitable mediocrity...

B

Please, not that proletariat Karl Marx opiate of the masses manifesto bullshit again.

K

Theatre. Plays. That's where the it's at. Oedipus. Tennessee Williams. Streetcar Named Desire. Glass Menagerie. Our Town.

(drinks)

The classics.

B

Cats. Phantom of the Opera. Guys and Dolls. The crap. I guess "Imaginary Western" is going to be a play now?

(pause)

Fine. We'll write Displaced Persons: The Play. Maybe make it a musical. Open on Broadway in six months. T-Shirts. Souvenir programs. Cast album. The whole works.

K

Un-fucking-believable.

(pause)

It's hard to imagine we ever were able to write anything together. Any compromise you won't make?

B

Depends on the rules. And he who has the gold makes the rules.

K

It isn't always about money!

(drinks)

I remember some of those changes you wanted to make to DP. They're probably still around here somewhere.

B

They're in that box.

K

You said to make them from another planet. Spacemen or something like that. Refugees fleeing some Star Wars apocalypse. "It'll sell," you said. "It's commercial."

(pause)

It's fucking wrong! It's popcorn movies.

(MORE)

K (CONT'D)

Lowest common denominator shit.
Spielberg. Lucas.

(drinks)

That's why we never wrote another script together. Because of you. Because of your obsession about...about stuff.

B

You fucking hypocrite. Look around this room. All this stuff. Your stuff.

K

I didn't stop writing. I didn't sell out.

B

Not if selling out means getting a job and paying your bills. You couldn't sell out if they put a gun to your head, a pen in your hand, and told you to sign on the dotted line. You're as much about stuff as I am. Except someone else always has to be around to take care of you and your stuff. Your parents. Me.

(pause)

You're forgetting the trips I made down and back to cart all your stuff back here. Because I had the car and the house and the money. Because I was the only friend you had left. That's the only reason you're able to rummage through any of this.

(pause)

I think I've made my amends for last time.

K

I've got limited experience with AA but I don't think it's up to you to say when an amend has been made. (drinks) I think I read that somewhere in Step Nine.

B

Fuck you mister "searching and fearless moral inventory." If it wasn't for me and all of my "selling out" all of this would have gone into the dumpster.

(pause)

When your sister threw you out of your parent's apartment after your Mom died. When Mike's girlfriend had you arrested after you crashed on their couch for a year and a half and then got into a drunken fistfight with him. Gone forever.

(pause)

Who bailed you out?

(MORE)

B (CONT'D)

Who answered all those "Man, I hate to ask but I could really use \$100. I'll pay you back." phone calls.

(pause)

If it wasn't for me you'd still be living in the shelter. Hanging out with junkie whores panhandling a few bucks for some fix instead of scribbling in drunken leisure through your past...failures.

K

Failures?!

B

No, fuckups. Because that's who you are, you're Captain Fuckup.

K

It's not my fault!

B

It never is! You're free to be the struggling, misunderstood, starving artist because someone, somewhere is playing by the rules, ready to compromise, so they can bail your ass out when you screw up.

(pause)

You know what, you're right. I am too attached to stuff. I'm going to turn over a new leaf right now and start getting rid of some of this crap.

B. grabs the nearest box and turns towards the door, papers spilling onto the floor.

K

Hey! You can't do that. That's my stuff!

B

It's still your stuff. I'm just getting it out of my basement like I should have done years ago.

K

You do that and I'm out of here.

B. stops for a second.

K

I'm serious. Do this and we're through. Remember last time?

B. puts the box on the table.

B
Will you write the second draft with me?

K. drinks.

K
No.

B. picks up the box and continues towards the door. K jumps up and grabs at the box. They both wrestle silently until the box violently escapes their grip and falls to the floor, spilling its contents.

The two stare at one another for a few seconds. At the box and papers on the floor.

K. gets on his knees and starts gathering the papers, organizing as he collects. B. slumps back to the couch.

B
Just once I'd like to have a conversation with you that doesn't end with someone taking a resentment or a regret.

K
Where'd you pick that up. One of those AA meetings you never went to?

B. watches K. collect and organize the papers on the floor.

B
I didn't think you could do it.

K
Do what? Walk out? Stop talking to you?

B
Write a second draft.
(pause)
I don't think you've ever written a second draft of anything since I've known you.

K
Get the fuck outta here. I wrote a second draft of "Kentucky Avenue".

B
No you didn't.
(MORE)

B (CONT'D)

You won't find a second draft of it anywhere in this room. I checked.

(pause)

You sent the first draft to me. I read it. Gave you my comments but you didn't think anything had to be changed. I think "Perfect the way it is" were your exact words.

(pause)

You don't have a second draft of anything in you.

K

Maybe if I got some constructive criticism.

B

Maybe if you ever sent stuff out to anyone else but me to read it.

K

Other people have read my scripts.

B

Right. I think your dentist read "Blood Lessons"? And I remember you had your therapist read "Margo's Building". Which I bet gave her a head start on psychoanalysis. I sent Phil "Werewolf of Christmas".

K

Fucking hack.

B

But you never sent any of your scripts to anyone who could help get them sold. Not one. Here they sit.

K

What do you want me to do? Get an agent? Make twenty copies of a script and send them to that list of agents that's around here somewhere.

B

First, I did make you twenty copies of "Blood Lessons" years ago. Second, that list, which is in that box over there, is so out of date. Today, you make a phone call. You send an email. Third. You never sent out those twenty copies. They're still in that box over there. Case fucking closed.

(pause)

Obviously you remember Phil.

K

Your high school buddy from NYU? Yeah. I think I worked on his junior narrative. Tofu Lizard Something.

B

Mama. Tofu Lizard Mama.

K

That's it.

(pause)

He still in LA? Still writing?

B

Yeah. We talk once in a while.

K

Why don't you write a second draft of DP with him?

B

Distance.

K

I read that screenplay of his that you sent me. The one about the midget detective.

B

The Small McGinty.

K

Yeah. Piece of shit.

(pause)

I bet it got made though.

B

I know he sold it. I think he said they brought in some other writers to polish it up. After that who knows. I never saw it advertised in the movie theater.

K

Figures. An army of writers couldn't have saved that script. It would have been like D-Day, waves of screenwriters lugging their typewriters ashore, hitting the beach, and getting slaughtered.

B

Whether it was good or not is beside the point. The point is he put the time in, sat his ass in the chair, to write as many drafts as necessary to get it sold. He's a professional.

K

I'm a professional.

B

You're an amateur. Someone who types. An amateur typist. A professional retypes.

K

So I'm supposed to prostitute myself like your high school buddy. Get an agent. Rewrite my script until it turns into crap because I took notes from idiots and assholes who think they're the next Marty Scorsese or Ingmar Bergman because they can write a compound sentence. Get the fuck outta here.

(drinks)

I remember what your buddy Phil said about "Werewolf"?

B. moves a couple of boxes and opens one. Takes out some papers.

B

(reading)

"While I think the concept of Santa being turned into a werewolf is very original and amusing, he needs to work on two things. Streamlining his storytelling and writing a good scene."

K

Writing a good scene. Get the fuck outta here.

K. grabs the papers from B. Scans them.

B

The rest is pretty much the same.

K

Did you send him "Margo's Building"? I told you to send that to him. Couple of fucking good scenes in that, I'd say.

B

No. Didn't see the point. I can just imagine what he'd say though.

(pause)

"A Hitchcockian homage in the vein of North by Northwest if Cary Grant were a chronic masturbator and Eve Marie Saint was a transvestite hooker. Bondage and autoerotic asphyxiation are not plot points. Lose the self castration scene at the end."

They both burst out laughing in spite of themselves.

B

Look, I'm don't want to argue anymore. I'll drive you to the train station later today before we end of up...

K

Killing each other?

B

Not talking again.

K

But what about...

B

Your stuff. I thought I was the one who's obsessed about material things? Sorry. Just kidding.

(pause)

Take a box of it back with you on the train. Take the "Imaginary Western" and work on it some more. The rest of it.

(looks around)

It's not going anywhere.

K

You're sure?

B

I'm sure.

K

Really? You're not going to throw it all in the trash after if I leave?

B

I said I'd get it all back to you someday.

(pause)

I gave you my word.

K

What about the second draft of DP?

B

What about it?

K

I thought that's why you invited me up here?

B

So. What do you care?

(MORE)

B (CONT'D)

You've got plenty of first draft ideas to work on here. Enough to last you a lifetime. When you're finished with one box you send me the script and I'll send you the next box.

(pause)

Maybe I'll end up giving tours of this place. "Over here we find the work from his Blue period where the themes veer into denial and self deception. Watch your step."

K

I can take the train up and give lectures and interviews and readings.

They both laugh.

B

Listen, I'm gonna take a shower. Get dressed. Make us some breakfast. We've got some time before the train so maybe we could watch a movie. For old times sake. Corman's "Attack of the Crab Monsters"?

K

Harvey's "Carnival of Souls"?

B

Your choice.

B. is about to leave.

K

What if we wrote it?

B. stops. A slight smile crosses his face and disappears before he turns back to K.

B

DP?

K

The second draft.

B

It was a dumb idea. We can't write a draft in two weeks.

K

If I remember, we wrote the first draft in nine days. Maybe seven.

B

That was twenty-five years ago. You...well, I was different back then. Thanks though. It might've been fun but I must have been delusional to think we should write a second draft.

(pause)

Maybe you're right, maybe I should start drinking again. Get my fucking head right.

K

That's it!

B

What's it?

K

What did you just say.

B. hesitates. Looks warily at K. before answering.

B

That...I must have been delusional to want to write a second draft with you...

K

And.

B

That...that maybe I should start drinking again.

(pause)

So?

K

You don't see the logic?

B

That to write a second draft I should drink?

(pause)

Get the fuck outta here. What's one got to do with the other?

K

They're fucking intertwined. You want to write a second draft but you can't do it by yourself. I could write it with you but I want to write it with guy I wrote the first draft with.

B

And me drinking is going to magically transform me into that guy?

K

Couldn't hurt. Takes the edge off. Gets rid of some of your more nauseating commercial instincts. Bring out your inner Orson Welles.

(pause)

It's just a couple of drinks. Get you in the right frame of mind. Loosen you up. You're not going to get too fucked up. You're the only one who can touch type.

B

I can write the second draft without drinking.

K

No you can't. What have you written in the past two years? The past twenty?

(pause)

We couldn't even talk for ten minutes, you sober, without getting into an argument. Us writing together, me drinking and you not, is a recipe for disaster.

B

I think you're being overly dramatic. Theatrical even.

K

I've never been more sober.

K. grabs another unopened pint from his bag. Tosses it to B. Sits at the table.

K

Do you want to write another draft of DP or don't you?

(drinks)

Are you serious?

B. looks at the pint in his hands. Walks over and puts it on the table. Starts restocking some boxes.

B

One drink?

K

One drink. I'll know you're serious and we can bang out this draft before she gets back. Five days. Seven max.

B

Then what?

K
(drinks)
Fame and fortune, buddy. What else.

B. sits the table.

B
You know what they say.

K
What do they say.

B
That one drink is one too many and one
thousand is never enough.

K
Who says that? Your imaginary sponsor?
(drinks)
What the fuck does he know. He's an alcoholic.
Not a screenwriter.

B. picks up the pint.

K
You gonna let a bunch of alcoholics tell you
how to live your life? How'd you get all this?

B. twists open the pint.

K
You can stop anytime you want. When we're done
you pick up a new white chip and not drink for
another twenty years. How many of those white
chips you picked up already.

B.
Quite a few.

K
What's one more.

B. sniffs at the contents.

K
The smell of success.

He toasts B's pint and drinks.

K
I got a feeling that this second draft is
gonna rock.

B. looks at K. Drinks. Makes a slightly face at the taste but swallows.

Yes it will. B

He toasts K's pint and they drink again.

Lights down. Music up.