

The Copywriter

A screenplay by
Bruce Whitehead

FADE IN:

INT. OFFICE - NIGHT

TOM BORLAND, VP of business development, and AVERY HESSLICH, owner of an advertising firm, are seated at one side of a boardroom table.

A group of several EMPLOYEES sits at the opposite side.

White-boards line the walls, while papers, water bottles, laptop computers and coffee cups populate the table surface.

TOM

(exhausted)

We're going in circles again. We're spinning our wheels, chasing our tails, flailing at windmills...

He stands up, yawns, stretches.

TOM (cont'd)

The audience has to feel involved, connected, compassionate, if they stand any chance of believing the bull we're feeding them.

(beat)

I personally don't know any rock climbers, do you? What's the point we're trying to make here?

Looks at a clock on the wall.

TOM (cont'd)

Guys, I'm calling it a night. I've said my piece ... let my piece be with you.

AVERY

Come on, Tommy. We're not done yet. Sit down. Have some more pizza.

TOM

Hear that, people? More pizza! The fuel of ingenuity and the driver of mass consumption is pizza. Translatable, transportable and trans-fatty, it's the almighty pizza that has infiltrated our veins, mutated our minds and altered our dreams.

(MORE)

TOM(cont'd)

What reason for the relentless pace of utopian striving, if we're going to dash our hopes with mushrooms, and witness the green peppers dancing in delight at our majestic folly? We risk so much, perhaps civilization itself, for the sake of a flour-dough pie, tomato sauce, toppings and cheese. It's no wonder the Chinese are laughing at us. Cheese, for Christ's sake, Avery! Cheese!

AVERY

Tom, maybe you should get on home after all. The rest of us can wrap things up here tonight, it's all right.

(beat)

Really, it's okay. Say hi to Charlotte for me, all right?

Tom looks at the silent faces around him.

Avery stands up, puts his arm around Tom's shoulder, walks him out of the boardroom.

Into main office, a large area of cubicles, potted palms and filing cabinets.

AVERY (cont'd)

Tommy, I don't mean to make a big deal out of it, but you were acting kind of weird in there just now, you know?

TOM

Weird? You mean the stuff about the pizza? You're the one who started it, Ave. Don't mess with me. I'm tired, a little frustrated, a little horny and coming down off a cheese buzz, but I'm certainly not *weird*.

AVERY

Okay, okay. Take it easy, man. I understand. Get home then, get some rest. You know we've got Abelman at 10 sharp uptown. Don't disappoint yourself.

TOM

You mean, don't disappoint you.

AVERY

It sounded better my way, more profound.

TOM

Sure, whatever you say, Avery. Anyway, you sure the Abelman file is solid? Have you talked to Marianne about the typos? And did Greg fix that bug on the demo website?

AVERY

It's 100% solid. See you at 10. Bring your game face. Good night, Tom.

Avery returns to the boardroom, closing the door behind him.

Tom looks about the office, his head cocked as if seeing something there for the first time.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Tom drives home through dark slippery streets, still muttering his cheese thesis.

Ahead, a crow appears on the road. It does not fly away and Tom has to slide to a stop.

TOM

Fucking bird! I could have crashed!
What's the matter with you?
(thought replacing shock)
Jesus...

The crow jumps on the hood of the car, screeches, then flies away.

TOM

What the hell?

CUT TO:

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Tom pulls the car into his driveway, in front of a tidy city house with a small yard rimmed by ornamental trees.

Gets out of the car, walks up to the door and enters.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

He takes his coat and shoes off, heads upstairs.

Upstairs hallway, he's looking in on his two DAUGHTERS, each asleep in their rooms.

He enters the bedroom, where his wife, CHARLOTTE, is watching television in bed.

TOM

Hey, honey.

CHARLOTTE

You're home late. Is everything okay at work?

TOM

I guess so. I nearly killed a crow.

CHARLOTTE

(smiling)

What's that, some new kind of advertising lingo?

TOM

No, I mean I almost ran over a crow. It was the strangest thing. He just sat there. I nearly hit him. Then he jumps up on the car and screeches at me.

CHARLOTTE

Did you say a crow? That's odd.

TOM

I know. It scared the heck out of me.

CHARLOTTE

No, I mean, that's odd, because there was a crow outside the bedroom window a little while ago, squawking from the maple tree out front.

TOM

I bet that's him! Maybe he's injured or gone crazy or something. I wish I had run him over.

CHARLOTTE

That's kind of dark, isn't it? Are you sure everything's okay at work?

TOM

Yeah, I guess so. Didn't you just ask me that?

(beat)

How was your day? How are the kids?

CHARLOTTE

The kids are fine. Linda bumped her knee on the driveway, but she's okay. Charlie helped her with the Band-Aid. How was my day? Well, you know, seen one hairy back you've seen them all. I swear sometimes I should charge extra for the trauma I suffer working those bald guys with the hairy backs. It's always the bald guys, you know, that have the hairy backs.

Tom eyes the crow outside the window. It's staring at him.

CHARLOTTE (cont'd)

Why is that, you figure? You think maybe testosterone doesn't like altitude? Or maybe it's got to do with direct sunlight...

(pause)

Hello, Earth to Tom. Come in, Tom. Your wife is feeling neglected, here.

He moves to the window and closes the drapes.

TOM

(turning)

In some cultures, baldness is construed as a sign of virility. Bald men, in particular those with hairy backs and beards, command great respect in these societies, and many become their rulers or political leaders.

(MORE)

TOM(cont'd)

Indeed, note that numerous artworks celebrating the ancient Greek senate chambers, as well as the saunas, depict senior balding men in great abundance.

CHARLOTTE

Thanks for that somewhat dubious anthropology lesson, professor. Anyway, I had lunch with a podiatrist today. As a chiropractor, I draw the line at hairy toes.

TOM

(looking in a wall mirror)
Do you think I'm old-looking? You know, older than I am?

CHARLOTTE

Yikes, here we go again. Now what's on your mind?

TOM

You know I always wanted to be a writer.

CHARLOTTE

You are a writer. You write brilliant ad copy. You're the best out there. And you make a lot of money at it. And what's that got to do with being old?

TOM

Thanks for the support, Charlotte, but it's deeper than that, you know?

CHARLOTTE

(defensive but drowsy)
What's stopping you, then? Why don't you write that novel you keep trying to explain to me? What exactly is holding you back?

TOM

I just don't know if I can get off the treadmill long enough to actually create something original. I mean, sure, I like what I do, in a way, but somehow I have to realize the consequences as well.

(MORE)

TOM(cont'd)

I help to push a load of crap, when you get down to it. Weight loss drugs, debt consolidation scams, insurance people don't need or can't afford.

Tom opens the curtains quickly, but the bird is gone. He draws the curtains close again, gazing blankly at the swaying fabric.

TOM (cont'd)

Maybe if I had some sort of writing retreat, you know, a place where I could really let go of everything external, somewhere dedicated to writing only, no television, no newspapers or neighbors or pets or kids or jobs or wives.

Whoops, shouldn't have let that slip. Tom turns to face his wife's disdain ... but she's fallen asleep.

CUT TO:

EXT. HILLSIDE - DAY

Tom on a hillside overlooking the ocean. A strong wind plays with the tall grass and Tom's hair.

He's facing us, his back to the bluff and the ocean below, smiling, one arm extended. A large crow is perched on his outstretched hand. The crow leaps into the air, and as if by opposite force, Tom stumbles back toward the cliff...

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Tom wakes, his eyes open wide, unblinking. Charlotte turns away and moans. Tom sits up in bed and begins to laugh.

CHARLOTTE

(groggy, turning back)

Tom? Is that you? What's so funny?

TOM

Oh, nothing. I may be losing my mind, that's all.

CHARLOTTE

Did you have a bad dream, honey?

TOM

I think it was a dream. Seemed more like a, sort of hallucination, you know?

CHARLOTTE

What, are we back in college? I bet you ate pizza at the office again last night, didn't you? You know I warned you.

(pause)

And I'll bet it was stacked with mushrooms. And all that cheese late at night, Tom. You need to take better care of yourself. Men in their 40s can have heart attacks, too, you know. It's not all that uncommon.

TOM

(dazed, sleepy)

Cheese?

(pause)

Crows. Cheese. Crows and cheese?

CHARLOTTE

Okay, now you're scaring me.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Tom enters the kitchen, dressed for work. Charlotte is busy feeding their two daughters, CHARLIE, 7 and LINDA, 5.

CHARLOTTE

Linda, Charlie, both of you get your shoes on, it's time to go. Make sure you've packed your homework and your lunches. And Charlie, remember to give Mrs. Sanchez that form for the skating tournament, okay?

(beat)

Tom, Charlie didn't eat her eggs, do you want them?

TOM

Delighted. Thank you.

Tom sits at Charlie's place at the table. He eats the leftover eggs in one slurp and gulp. Charlie and Linda are getting their shoes and coats on. Charlotte is tidying up.

TOM

Maybe I'm hallucinating again, but I don't see any eggs here.

CHARLOTTE

What? Aw, very funny. You're a real riot, Tom. Coffee?

LINDA

(giggling)

I saw Daddy eat those eggs.

(beat)

What a riot.

CHARLIE

C'mon, Linda, get your shoes on.

CHARLOTTE

You're going to have a great meeting today, honey. I hope Avery behaves himself. Is he still seeing that dancer, or whatever she is?

TOM

She's an acrobat, with the *Cirque de Soleil*. And it's not him I'm worried about.

LINDA

What's the Serfda Solay?

CHARLOTTE

That's *Cirque de Soleil*, sweetie. It's French, it means circus of the sun.

LINDA

What's French?

CHARLIE

French is where mustard comes from, dumb-dumb. C'mon, Linda, you still don't have your shoes on.

CHARLOTTE

Tom, I was listening to you last night, you know. I understand that you want to try something different, and I respect that. But let's not make any huge decisions today, all right? Believe me, some days what I do doesn't seem all that thrilling, either.

(MORE)

CHARLOTTE(cont'd)

Tell me you're just thinking about this fiction writing stuff. That's all, right?

(getting no response)

Is it something to do with that crow?

LINDA

Did Daddy eat a crow?

CHARLIE

Lindie - your shoes! Jeez!

LINDA

Forty-Twenty blackbirds, baked in a pie!

CHARLOTTE

All right, girls, that's enough. Let's go, chop-chop. We're getting late now.

LINDA

Chop, chop. Thirty black-birdies with mustard pie, hah, hah, hah.

CHARLIE

Linda! Those are MY shoes! Mom!

CHARLOTTE

That's enough. Linda, put your shoes on this instant. Charlie! Out the door! Let's go. Have a good day, Tom. I'm making chicken lasagna for dinner tonight. Can you make it back for six?

TOM

That sounds great, bird pie.

CHARLOTTE

That's very funny, dear. Now chin up. I love you. Bye.

Charlotte and the girls scramble out the door. Tom sits at the table, doodling with a red crayon on a napkin. He outlines the form of a bird.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

Tom and Avery stand in an elevator moving up to the downtown offices of the Abelman and Pride accounting firm.

Avery holds an oversized leather folder and a pair of cardboard tubes. Tom holds a laptop case and a folded metal easel.

TOM

I'm just saying we could have a contingency concept, that's all.

AVERY

What contingency concept? When did we start with contingency concepts at presentation meetings?

TOM

How about today?

AVERY

Look, Tom. We finished the direction you started. You wanted to make accounting sexy. We did that.

TOM

What's sexy about rock climbing? And what's rock climbing got to do with accounting?

Tom and Avery exit the elevator and cross a landing area to the glass doors of the office.

AVERY

Tom, if you're playing some sort of game with me, can we do it after the meeting? You're making me nervous. Please, stay with me on this. You can take a break after, whatever you want, lead the next big project from start to finish, whatever turns your crank. But right now, there is no contingency, and there will be no talk of birds as symbolizing the talents of accountancy. It won't fly, get it?

They enter the office and stand before a large, raised reception desk. Chrome and glass assail the eye. A female RECEPTIONIST greets Tom and Avery.

RECEPTIONIST

Good morning, gentlemen. Mr. Ableman will be right out. He's very excited to see what you've come up with this time.

EVERY

Thank you. I think he's going to fall in love with the TV spot. And the print ads incorporate some new elements of design we developed to better complement the convergence with our interactive media...

LARRY ABELMAN, a partner in the firm, emerges from a hallway.

ABELMAN

You'd better save your wind for the sale, son.

(slaps Avery on the back)

Tom, how are you? How are Charlotte and the girls?

TOM

Everyone's doing great, Larry, thank you. Linda's been talking in rhymes and riddles lately. Maybe she'll be a copywriter one day.

ABELMAN

Hah, hah. That's terrific. Riddles and rhymes. C'mon in gentlemen.

Tom, Avery and Abelman enter a large office overlooking the downtown core. Rain trickles down the huge windows that form one wall.

Abelman sits at his desk, his back to the windows.

Tom and Avery set up their presentation materials.

ABELMAN

C'mon boys, let's get down to it. What's the basic idea here?

EVERY

Well, Mr. Abelman, it occurred to us that the art, science and ethics of accounting is all about passion, passion for accuracy, passion for truth, passion for precision and passion for people.

ABELMAN

(nodding)

Go on.

AVERY

Tom, can you please show us the first sequences?

Tom opens a tube and slides a storyboard poster out, placing it with clips on the easel.

AVERY (cont'd)

Thank you. Now, here's an athletic man climbing a rock face. His line breaks loose and falls into the abyss. Clinging for life by a single limb, he pulls out his cell phone and speed-dials a number.

A beat as Avery scans Abelman's reaction.

AVERY (cont'd)

Cut to an office where the man's accountant picks up the phone. He listens, then acts quickly, pulling up numbers and charts on a screen, making calls, crunching figures, thinking and strategizing. He calls the man back, and tells him he's going to be okay. The man looks up as a trooper tosses down a life rope. The kicker - next time you think you're in too deep, just call your accountant.

ABELMAN

(after a lengthy pause)

I don't get it ... I mean, how did he know the trooper would be there? And why did he call an accountant and not 911?

(beat)

And what's accounting got to do with mountain climbing?

TOM

(eyes rolling)

Mr. Abelman, you've just proven our point. You see, your keen sense for detail has blinded you to the bigger picture. That's what this is about, how accountants think so deeply, know so much and help such a great deal. Accountants have tremendous value and can save our lives.

ABELMAN

Ah, okay, yeah ... I could see that.

AVERY

Exactly, you guys are life-savers.

TOM

Yeah, right. Butterscotch.

ABELMAN

Eh?

TOM

Ah, I mean, you better scootch over a bit, Mr. Abelman. It helps to see the presentation head on.

ABELMAN

Scotch?

AVERY

Tom, let's see sequence number two. Here we have a woman climbing a rock wall.

ABELMAN

Here he goes with the rock climbing again.

AVERY

That's right, sir. We feel strongly about the symbolism of the activity of rock climbing. On some level, we can all relate to it. Anyone can understand it's about challenge and achievement, personal sacrifice and satisfaction, adventure and social responsibility, bringing all human character traits to an apex of triumphant balance between the material and spiritual planes.

ABELMAN

Oh, brother. Tom ... you have to help me here.

TOM

What he means, sir is that accounting isn't boring at all.

ABELMAN

Okay ... that's not bad.

AVERY

Give me lion taming or give me accounting? Am I right?

ABELMAN

I never liked the circus, personally.

(head shaking now)

I don't know, guys, it seems we're going all or nothing here. What about the online material, you can't have mountain climbers on our website, for crying out loud. Anyway, I'll have to talk to Ben about it, but I'm not convinced this is the message we want to broadcast. Have you got any sort of contingencies, other concepts in your bag of tricks?

AVERY

(glances at Tom)

Mr. Abelman, we understand this is a little out of the ordinary for you. We realized you would expect something different. But think about it. Accounting - it's more than just dull number crunching, it's about passion, passion for truth, passion for...

ABELMAN

(interrupting)

Yeah, yeah, passion. Know what? I'm pashin' on this one, Avery.

(turning to Tom)

So, how about it, Tom? Have you got anything else up your sleeve? You'd better spill it.

TOM

Well, there is one thing we came up with early on, but it's not very well developed yet.

ABELMAN

Let's hear it, man.

AVERY

Mr. Abelman, I really don't think there's any need for this.

(MORE)

EVERY(cont'd)

Please, let me show you the layouts for the print ads. I'm sure you'll get a better feel as we continue.

ABELMAN

Let me guess, pictures of people climbing rocks?

EVERY

Well, sort of, but it's metaphoric, symbolic.

ABELMAN

Rocks don't symbolize anything but hard time to me. Tom, rescue yourself now before I cut your both your ropes.

Tom looks at Avery, who nods despondently.

TOM

What do birds symbolize, Mr. Abelman?

ABELMAN

Birds? Well, freedom I suppose.

TOM

Freedom.

(to himself)

Yes ... of course ... freedom.

(to Abelman)

And what about a particular bird, say a crow?

ABELMAN

What is this, verbal Rorschach drawings? Crows? I guess crows represent mystery, the supernatural, fate perhaps.

TOM

Fate, destiny. The freedom to pursue my destiny. Yes, that's got to be it.

(smiles)

Thank you, Mr. Abelman. You nailed it. It's about freedom and courage to pursue one's own destiny. It's clear to me now.

ABELMAN

What sort of a side show is this? I don't think you've got any idea what you're talking about. Tom, I've known you a long time, longer than Avery, and if it weren't for that I'd have lost my patience ten minutes ago. Now, for the last time, do you have any ideas or not?

TOM

Yes, I do have an idea, sir. Accounting is for the birds ... how does that grab you?

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Tom and Charlotte are sitting at the table. Charlotte adds numbers on a calculator, a stack of bills before her.

CHARLOTTE

Charlie's skating lessons could be cut back. And we don't really have to replace the fence this year.

TOM

It's going to be okay. You really don't have to do this. It's just a leave. I can go back any time.

CHARLOTTE

We've got bills to pay. How are we going to survive? If we lose this house, I don't know what will happen. The kids need stability and security. I need security, Tom. Why did you have to do this?

TOM

You're over-reacting a little here, don't you think? We've got our savings, and I've still got a job. It's just an unpaid leave. I think this is a great opportunity for us.

CHARLOTTE

For you, you mean.

TOM

Sure, why not for me? This is my life we're talking about here, too, isn't it?

CHARLOTTE

Tom, you know I'm going to support you, whatever you do. I just want to be sure you're making the right decisions. That you're doing this for the right reasons. I'm your gut check.

TOM

It feels more like a gut ache sometimes ... I mean, what are the right reasons to follow your heart? What sort of values do we want to have in our family? Do we teach the girls that you have to do whatever it takes to make money, or do we teach them that they should follow their dreams?

CHARLOTTE

Hopefully they can do both.

TOM

Exactly, but how will they know that if we don't set an example?

CHARLOTTE

I guess I didn't realize how unhappy you are. I was really hoping this was just a mid-life crisis, and that you'd get over it.

TOM

I don't know exactly how it happened, but it dawned on me that advertising is really just about pushing people to buy things they don't really want.

CHARLOTTE

I could have told you that.

TOM

I know, it's infantile, isn't it? You spend years at university studying art and literature and you find the only practical application for your knowledge and skill is to sell time-shares or hawk discount appliances.

CHARLOTTE

I still don't see what's so terribly wrong about that.

TOM

Char, listen. You have your work, and you're helping people. It's fulfilling. You offer hope and the prospect of a healthier life. Your job makes sense.

CHARLOTTE

It's not that fulfilling, believe me. Anyway, look, you say you've worked it out with Avery, and that you're on a leave of absence? Is that right? And that you can go back any time you like? If that's all true, then can we put a deadline on this, maybe? How about a month?

TOM

A month? How am I going to write a best-seller in a month? Charlotte, come on, cut me some slack here. I'm serious about this.

(pause)

I could probably get something done in two months. That takes us to the fall. If I turn out to be a total hack I can ease myself back into things when it's slow at the office. What do you say?

CHARLOTTE

I don't know. Are you sure you can go back if you have to? I mean, if you want to?

TOM
 Yes, I'm sure. Everything is going
 to be just fine. Trust me.

CUT TO:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

Tom drives along a forested country road, a piece of paper in his mouth, a cell phone in one hand. The phone rings. He answers, dropping the paper, which sails out the half-opened window.

TOM
 Hey Jim, yeah, I'm on the road now.
 I haven't found the place yet.
 (pause)
 Um, let's see, well, I passed a
 little white church maybe a mile
 back.
 (pause)
 What? Oh, okay then I've gone too
 far. Yes, I had the map and the
 keys but I've just lost the map.
 (pause)
 No, just the map. I've got the
 keys. So it's 100 yards south of
 the church? Okay, I've got it.
 Thanks, Jim, I'll let you know.
 Bye.

Tom pulls the car over and then begins steering forward and back to make a turn on the narrow gravel road. During a gear-shift, Tom spots a crow outside on the road to his left.

TOM
 Shit.
 (beat)
 What do you want?

An ancient dilapidated pickup pulls up. There's a honk. The crow flies away.

The truck's door opens and ERNIE BOB, a large middle-aged native Indian man, emerges and approaches Tom's car.

As Tom rolls the window down, the crow passes over the treetops.

TOM
 Hello there ... sorry, I was just
 turning around.

ERNIE

Why did you stop?

TOM

Eh? No, I didn't stop, I was just turning around.

ERNIE

Oh. Okay, I thought you were stuck maybe, because you've been sitting there since I came over the hill.

TOM

(dazed)

Oh.

(beat)

I was looking for my map. Sorry.

ERNIE

If I was drunk I might have smashed your car to bits.

(laughing)

And even if I was drunk, I wouldn't need no map to tell me I was facing sideways, man.

TOM

Sorry. I was, I mean, there was this. The map fell, and then...

ERNIE

What?

TOM

It was a crow, that's all. It was standing on the road right there. I guess I was looking at him for a minute. I don't know, I'm not from around here, I got lost, then I lost my map, and well here I am. Anyway, let me get out of your way.

ERNIE

Where are you from?

TOM

Seattle. I'm looking for a place to rent for a couple of months. I'm going to check out a cottage by the church back there a ways. I must have missed it driving by, so was just going to turn around and go back.

ERNIE

If you don't mind me asking, what are you planning to do out here?

TOM

Do? Oh. I'm writing a book, actually.

ERNIE

Is that so? A book you say? You must be a modern-day Thoreau, then, huh? I think that's terrific. Just wonderful. Good for you, uh...

TOM

Tom, Tom Borland. It's nice to meet you.

Tom extends his hand. Ernie shakes it, grasping hard.

Tom eyes an outlined tattoo of a bird on Ernie's thumb.

ERNIE

(with a wink)

Maybe you'll be writing about me, some day, Tom.

(beat)

Look, I know where the entrance to that cottage is. It's sort of hidden. Follow me back and I'll point it out to you.

CUT TO:

INT. COTTAGE - DAY

A wood-stove, bed, desk and chairs furnish one room, while a kitchen and bathroom round out the floor plan.

Out the window we see an unkempt yard, a hammock bobbing in the wind.

Tom dials his cell phone.

TOM

Hey Jim, it's Tom again. I'm at the cottage now.

(pause)

Yes, it's cozy, all right. It's tiny, actually.

(pause)

Why would he want to do that?

(pause)

(MORE)

TOM(cont'd)

Sure, I could fix the place up a bit.

(pause)

Sure, Jim, free sounds just fine to me.

(pause)

Okay, you've got a deal. I'll give you a call in a couple of weeks to let you know how things are going.

(pause)

Okay, I will. Thanks. Bye.

Tom's takes in the interior scene, then gazes out the window.

TOM

Well, it ain't exactly Walden Pond.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE - DAY

Tom and Avery are in Avery's office, Avery at his desk and Tom standing in front.

TOM

What the hell do you mean, I'm out?

AVERY

Tom, take the deal. This is the right thing to do. You're going to do very well.

TOM

Fuck your deal.

AVERY

Okay, I didn't want to do this, but I've got a security firm I can call.

TOM

You're going to have me physically removed? Is that it? Jesus, Avery, what the hell is the matter with you?

AVERY

Me? What about you? The Abelman account is toast. That's seven years of work out the window. Who's responsible for that? Add to that all the whacko commentary and flippant criticisms lately, coming in late, knocking off early.

(MORE)

AVERY(cont'd)

For Christ sake's, Tom, it's obvious your heart's not in it any more. Why can't we just do the right thing and move on?

TOM

Maybe that's what I want to do, sure. But I'm damned if I'm going to let you tell me that's what I want.

AVERY

You're not making any sense, Tom. What the hell happened, anyway? What's eating you?

TOM

We create, we dream, we envision a world where polyunsaturated housewives with perfect hair and glistening teeth prepare effortless meals for their adoring families while their triple-blade-shaven husbands invest in lawn care products and plan invasions of Mexican coastal cities created to satisfy their predetermined desires. It's insane.

AVERY

It's a business.

TOM

Business? It's a scam. Remember the Couture Cosmetics campaign a couple of years ago? We targeted older women with that all that crap. Rather than helping them embrace their maturity and wisdom, we convinced them their only value is in their languishing looks. Today I see hideous old ladies caked in powder, with blue eyebrows and those God-awful first-baseman's haircuts. The business we're in is nothing more than deception and fraud.

AVERY

You mean the business I'm in. Look, why don't you write to your congressman, Tom? Maybe the authorities could shut down every stinking ad firm in the state.

(MORE)

AVERY(cont'd)

And ban all that insane political lobbying for good measure. Get real, Tom. Are you smoking pot again or something?

TOM

Yeah, that's it, Avery. If it doesn't fit the mold, it's got to be broken.

AVERY

You've still got a knack for slogans, buddy. I'll hand that to you.

(beat)

I'm going to miss you, Tom.

CUT TO:

INT. COTTAGE - DAY

Tom sits at his laptop computer at the old desk in the cottage. He types slowly, at times gazing away, shaking his head or muttering.

There is a knock at the door. Tom crosses the floor and opens it. Ernie's massive frame fills the doorway.

TOM

Hello there, ah, sorry I didn't catch your name.

ERNIE

My name's Chester Bob, but everyone calls me Ernie, because Chester's my dad's name too.

(beat)

Anyway, I brought you some sweet grass.

TOM

Ah ... thanks, but I'm not quite sure what to do with sweet grass. Should I make tea with it?

ERNIE

Hah, hah, no, I wouldn't recommend that. You burn it.

TOM

Burn it? You mean like in a pipe or something?

ERNIE

Jeez, Tom, you've got a lot to learn about Native culture. Here, let me show you.

Ernie takes the grass and lights the end on fire with a Zippo. He quickly blows out the flame and then walks about the cottage blowing the smoke at the walls, softly chanting a rhythmic song. Tom coughs.

ERNIE

You okay, Tom? I'm done. I thought you might want some good luck for your writing. I have just blessed this home for wisdom and creativity. Now, please let me know if there's anything you need done. I'm a sort of Jack of all trades, you know? Carpentry, small engine repair, hauling, deliveries, yard work, whatever you need, Tommy. And it's all under the table, see, so here's my card, call me if you need anything at all, okay?

TOM

(takes his card)

I appreciate that Ernie. I may in fact have something for you. I'm sort of responsible for tidying the place up over the next couple of months. It's mostly yard work, a coat of paint, fix up that fence and the porch a bit. Are you up for that?

ERNIE

Let me look around and I'll give you an estimate.

TOM

Sounds good, Ernie. I'll be right here, writing my soon-to-be-famous prose.

Ernie exits and Tom returns to his desk with a sigh. He begins typing, but soon stops.

He gets up, crosses to the kitchen to get coffee. Ernie returns.

ERNIE

Well, I think I can get this place looking ship-shape for three hundred. That includes all labor and materials. If you want some references, just stop anybody on the street. And look over there. Do you see the roof on that house there? That's my father's place. I did that roof last summer.

TOM

That's quite all right, Ernie. I can see you know what you're doing. How about half up front?

ERNIE

How about you pay me for the materials first? A hundred will cover it. You can pay me the rest when I'm done.

TOM

Are you sure?

ERNIE

Yeah. I make it a policy so I don't get waylaid down at the Lumberman's Lounge with a pocket full of cash. I'm saving to buy a boat.

TOM

That's very responsible of you Ernie.

ERNIE

Yeah, I know.

Ernie appears lost in thought. An awkward moment passes.

TOM

You mean like a sailboat or something?

ERNIE

What?

TOM

You said you were saving to buy a boat.

ERNIE

Oh yeah, a salmon boat. I'll need like a hundred thousand dollars.

TOM

Oh.

ERNIE

I know. Well, a man's only as rich as his dreams. Am I right?

TOM

Sure, I guess so.

ERNIE

Anyway, I was wondering something. Maybe since I'm giving you such a great deal on the work, that maybe you could look in on my dad while I'm out of town this weekend.

(pauses, points)

He's blind now. He lives alone over there. I check on him every day, but I've got to go down to Portland to pick up some parts and stay overnight with a friend. It would just be the one time, Saturday night, after supper. If that's not a big deal ... oh, crap, I guess you might have plans, eh? Ah, forget it, I can get Art to drive by, or maybe Sonny's out of jail now. It's just you seem like a nice guy, I can't just have anyone going over there, because he's a really proud man and I'm not sure he even knows what year it is any more so if I don't check in on him or send someone I can trust I'm afraid he'll fall over or get moved out of there by the authorities or something. When they do that, the people always die right after. You know? I can't let that happen. My father was an elder, like a shaman, in the Skokomish tribe. He used to be a sort of oracle, or orator, or something, in the old days. Now he just listens to the radio. He won't leave the house because he thinks somebody will pounce on him and cart him off to Lakeview.

TOM

Look, Ernie. Don't worry. I'm here for the whole week. I can help you out. What time should I go over?

ERNIE

Ah, that's great. Tom, you're my friend and my benefactor, a real scholar and a gentleman. What can I say?

Ernie hugs Tom suddenly. Tom gasps.

TOM

That's quite all right, really. You said around supper time to check in on him?

ERNIE

Yeah, that's awesome, just great. Tap on the door and he'll know it's you. I'll let him know before I take off on Friday night. I'll be back on Sunday.

TOM

Not a problem. All right, then. So, when did you want to get started on the job, and how long do you think it will take?

ERNIE

I can pick up the materials next week, and start the week after. Does that work for you? It shouldn't take me more than three or four days. When I'm done, you'll think old Martha Stewart herself must have swept through town.

TOM

That's fine. I've got some business back in Seattle that week. I probably won't be back until the weekend.

ERNIE

If you can spot me that hundred now for the paint and stuff ... that'd be great.

Tom pulls some bills from a wallet in his coat and hands them to Ernie.

TOM

Here you go.

ERNIE

I'm glad you came to Shelton to write your books, Tom. Who knows? Maybe I'll even be in it, eh? Hah, hah.

TOM

Yeah, right. Hey, Ernie, listen. There's something I've been meaning to ask you. It's that tattoo on your hand. Is that some kind of bird?

ERNIE

(regards his hand)

That? Yes, it is. My father did that to me when I was like ten or eleven. He said I should always remember the spirit of Sna'a N'a Nishka, the Greeter.

TOM

The Greeter?

ERNIE

I think so, I forget, you can ask my father if you like.

TOM

What kind of bird is it, anyway?

ERNIE

Sna'a N'a Nishka was a crow or a raven that lived half in this world and half in the mind of man. You find him in shadows, or roadways, or in mirrors, or on ledges, places where the worlds collide, sort of like an earthquake fault.

TOM

Why is he known as the greeter?

ERNIE

He greets people between the worlds of matter and spirit and advises them.

TOM

Advises them about what?

ERNIE

That's all I can remember. My father told me to follow the bird spirit and let it guide me. I tried that for a couple of years, but I ended up down on skid row. I guess I'm not cut out as a spirit follower.

TOM

When he greets people, what happens then? I mean, is that it? Just "Hey, how's it going?" or something?

ERNIE

No, it's a little more complicated. He appears to those whose destinies are changing and helps them figure it out. It's pretty rare. Most of us are predetermined and can never change. But some people's fate changes almost daily. At least, that's the theory.

TOM

What theory?

ERNIE

Well, the legend, actually, of Nishka, the raven. Maybe you should ask my father about it. Heck, if he likes you, I'm sure he'll tell you the whole story. All I know is I got this stupid tattoo and have to explain it to everyone I meet.

TOM

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to pry or bug you about it.

ERNIE

Forget it. I usually tell people it's a bald eagle anyway. But you being a writer and all, I thought you might be interested in the story and everything.

TOM

Yes, well, I appreciate that, Ernie. Well ... I'd better get back to the task at hand.

ERNIE

Yeah, I have to turn over Mrs. Sunderland's tomato beds. She likes to get the compost churned in once a week. She's won the state fair championship three years running, so I guess she knows what she's doing.

TOM

Say, Ernie. If you're not into the spiritual stuff like your father, why did you do that ceremony just now with the sweet grass?

ERNIE

That was sort of corny, huh? It's usually a great ice-breaker with city folks like you, that's all. And it makes a good transition for business purposes, because I can inspect stuff while I fart around with the smoke signals, hah, hah, hah.

FADE OUT.

CUT TO:

INT. RESTAURANT - EVENING

Tom and Avery, along with Charlotte and Avery's wife, JENNA, are seated for lunch at a fashionable downtown Seattle restaurant.

CHARLOTTE

(to Jenna)

Actually, it's really not much different. I mean, Tom was hardly ever home when he was working, either. It's just for a few weeks anyhow, while he finally explores his life-long ambition to become a novelist. I give it two months, max.

JENNA

Really, then what?

CHARLOTTE

Then he goes back to work, that's what. Isn't that right, sweetie?

(MORE)

CHARLOTTE(cont'd)

What did you call it, again, Tom,
an independent leave of creativity?

TOM

Um, yeah, well, that was always a
possibility. But, uh, hey, how am I
going to go back to work if I'm
touring the country promoting my
book, huh?

AVERY

You mean?

JENNA

Oh, boy.

CHARLOTTE

What? What's going on? Why are you
all looking at me?

AVERY

Charlotte, I assumed you and Tom
had discussed this.

CHARLOTTE

Discussed what? Tom?

(pause)

Okay, just go ahead, fill me in,
somebody!

TOM

I'm giving up my position in the
firm, honey. Avery and I have
agreed to terms. I'm not going back
to the ad business.

CHARLOTTE

(terse)

Take me home.

TOM

I'm sorry, what with the traveling
back and forth, the paperwork, the
lawyers, I just never found the
right time to tell you.

CHARLOTTE

Save it for later, Tom. Let's go.
Now!

AVERY

Christ. I'm sorry. Tom, I mean,
what the hell.

(pause)

(MORE)

AVERY(cont'd)

Anyhow, look, I've lost my appetite too, but there are still papers to sign.

Avery pulls a file folder from a briefcase at his feet. He produces two documents and extracts a pen from his shirt pocket.

Charlotte rises and moves to the door glancing, lips pursed at Tom, as she leaves.

AVERY

These are final drafts, Tom. It covers everything and includes your shareholder equity agreement and severance disposition, along with standard non-disclosures, etc. as well as an assessment of liability. I was actually hoping we could review this together tonight.

TOM

I'll read it over later, if I survive. What liability?

AVERY

Like I said, I thought we could go over it now.

TOM

Did you see the look in her eyes?

AVERY

(handing a copy to Tom)
Okay, call me in the morning to discuss, then. I hope we can finalize this before the end of the week.

TOM

You know I hate surprises, have I got one coming?

AVERY

Call me tomorrow.

JENNA

Say hi to the girls for us, okay, Tom?

TOM

Sure. Okay. I'll call you tomorrow, Avery. Bye, Jen.

Tom strides to the exit.

CUT TO:

EXT. PARKING LOT - EVENING

Tom catches up to Charlotte on her way to the car.

TOM

Honey ... wait. I thought it might be easier for you if Jenna and Avery were there to sort of soften the blow. I'm sorry. I, ah, I wanted to talk to you about it, but I knew how you'd react.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, so since you know me so well, why bother to tell me anything at all? Is there anything else I should know about? Affairs? Second mortgages? Crack cocaine addiction? Anything to report, Tom?

TOM

Easy, now. Okay, I screwed up. I just thought this way would be more understandable.

CHARLOTTE

I understand. Believe me.

TOM

What do you mean?

CHARLOTTE

You don't want to know.

TOM

Oh ... crap.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAR - TWILIGHT

TOM

(singing)

"I'm in the dog house nowww. I'm in the dog house nowwww. Get me some water and toss me a bone - I'm in the dog house now."

CHARLOTTE

Can you please stop that?

TOM

C'mon, honey. I'm really sorry, I've been all messed up about this stuff the past few weeks. It's a big change for me too. I'm writing out in the country and I don't know what the hell happened. A couple of weeks ago I knew who I was. Now it's all changed. I don't even know what to write about.

CHARLOTTE

WHAT? Are you kidding me? What the hell have you been doing up in that damned cottage then?

TOM

No, I mean, I'm writing. But it has no market, you know. I didn't know how hard that would be, to create something without a sales angle. I mean, what the hell do novelists start with?

CHARLOTTE

I wish you would have talked to me. Just what is that contract, anyway?

TOM

It's our separation agreement. It's a lot like a divorce. It basically divides the assets.

CHARLOTTE

So what's your cut?

TOM

Well, after expenses and taxes of course, we should be able to scramble up about one-five.

CHARLOTTE

If that's a dollar-fifty, you're a dead man.

TOM

That's one million, five hundred thousand dollars.

CHARLOTTE

(anger dispersing)

We can pay off the mortgage, and then some. That's not bad. Are you sure?

TOM

Well, there was some shareholder inequity balancing that needed to be worked out. But that was the general direction, 1.5 million.

CHARLOTTE

We're millionaires? Way to go, Tom!

TOM

You're not angry any more?

CHARLOTTE

Oh no, I'm still furious.

(beat)

But being rich helps.

Tom pulls up at a stop sign near their house. As he begins to move forward again, Charlotte throws her left arm over his chest, pointing at the stop sign.

CHARLOTTE

Look! Is that a bird sitting up there?

TOM

Nishka.

CHARLOTTE

What?

TOM

Man, I think that's that same damned crow I saw the other night. I'm sure it is.

CHARLOTTE

Maybe it's a spirit crow looking to do some mischief with you?

TOM

(in disbelief)

What the heck are you talking about?

CHARLOTTE

That's amazing that I could remember that.

TOM

Remember what?

CHARLOTTE

I took a course in coastal Indian folklore in college. It was an elective, something to take my mind off anatomy. Hah, that's funny, take the mind off the body. Anyway, I really enjoyed it. I just remembered about legend of the crow. Or maybe it was a raven.

TOM

(innocently)

Do you remember how the legend actually goes?

CHARLOTTE

Vaguely, it was something about a harbinger, or perhaps an usher, one who foreshadowed change and gave advice. He could take any form and would often play devilish tricks on the people he guided. You know, I'd forgotten all about that stuff. It really is amazing how the brain can store things for so long, isn't it?

(beat)

Say, did you ever hear the legend of the great orca that cruises the oceans pushing schools of salmon to shore as an offering to humans?

TOM

Um, no, I never heard of that one.

Tom parks the car.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Tom is reading in a chair by the window. The girls play at the foot of the couch, wrestling and watching television. Charlotte folds laundry on the couch.

TOM
(under his breath)
Jesus.

CHARLOTTE
Tom? Is everything all right?

TOM
Nothing's all right.

The girls look up momentarily, then begin wrestling again.

CHARLOTTE
C'mon, Tom. Help me tidy up the
kitchen. Girls, not too rough now.

Tom and Charlotte exit to the kitchen.

CHARLIE
This can't be good.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

TOM
It looks like our destiny is
changing again.

CHARLOTTE
Is there something wrong with the
agreement?

TOM
You could say that. Avery is
claiming damages for lost business
and goodwill.

CHARLOTTE
What does that mean?

TOM
It means he's deducting damages
from the 1.5 million we negotiated.
I'll have to get another lawyer to
take a look at this, but Avery's
brother is a lawyer and they don't
fool around. I've seen them in
action.

CHARLOTTE
So how much is he claiming?

TOM

He wants 1.45 million.

CHARLOTTE

So, so that means, we get, what, fifty thousand? We get fifty grand for the whole seven years? That's it?

TOM

That's what it looks like, Char. No wonder he wanted to meet at a restaurant. Christ, this is insane.

CHARLOTTE

I'm not so sure, Tom.

(pause)

I think you really screwed up this time. What are we going to do? Fifty thousand won't even make a dent in the mortgage on this place. You took a forty thousand dollar bonus last year and we spent that in no time. What are we going to do?

TOM

I ought to go over to his house and punch him in the mouth.

CHARLOTTE

There he goes, always planning ahead, thinking of his family. What do you mean, punch him in the mouth?

(beat)

I can't believe this, I married a 10-year-old, and he's not growing up.

TOM

Why do you have to bring the marriage into play every time we have a fight? Do you regret marrying me that much?

CHARLOTTE

Do you have another lawyer?

TOM

I'll find one.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, God. Just be careful. And don't
go punching anyone in the mouth.
I'm going to check on the girls.

Charlotte exits through a swinging door to the living room,
toppling the girls over who have been eavesdropping.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

LINDA

Oww! You fell on my arm, Charlie.
Owweee!

CHARLIE

Do we have to sell the house, Mom?

CHARLOTTE

What? Of course we're not selling
the house! What are you talking
about? Daddy and I were just
talking about his business, there's
nothing to worry about.

CHARLIE

Why does he have to work way out in
the country? Did he do something
wrong?

LINDA

Did he punch someone in the mouth?

CHARLOTTE

All right, girls. First off, it's
not right to listen to other
people's conversations. That's
called an invasion of privacy.
There are even laws about it, so
it's serious stuff. I mean it, no
more eavesdropping, okay?

LINDA

I didn't drop anything. That vase
was already broken.

CHARLOTTE

What? Forget about the vase.

(beat)

Wait ... what vase?

(beat)

No ... forget the vase.

(MORE)

CHARLOTTE(cont'd)

I'm talking about listening to other people's private discussions. Please do not do that any more. Second, Daddy hasn't done anything wrong, he's just doing some new work, and it happens to be in the country. There's nothing wrong with that. Finally, nobody is punching anyone in the mouth, and nobody ever will. Is that clear? Daddy was talking figuratively, I mean, it was a metaphor, I mean, it was just a way of saying he was unhappy with someone. Like an expression, you know, like slang.

CHARLIE

Who was he mad at?

CHARLOTTE

Nobody! And it's none of your business anyhow, and if you two hadn't been spying on us, I wouldn't have to be explaining all this. Phew. Now up you get, it's bath time and then to bed.

(pause)

Okay, Lindie, now ... what vase were you talking about? Did you break a vase, sweetie?

LINDA

(sheepishly)

The one you put grandma in.

CUT TO:

INT. LAWYER'S OFFICE - DAY

Tom sits in the office of STAN CLAYTON, lawyer. The office is small, dark and stuffy, crammed with files, boxes, papers, family photos, a half-eaten sandwich, a banker's lamp, etc.

TOM

So, basically I'm screwed, here. That's what you're saying, isn't it?

STAN

I wouldn't necessarily phrase things quite that way, Mr. Borland, no.

(MORE)

STAN(cont'd)

What I'm saying is we could attempt to fight him, but he's got a lot of resources, both legally and financially, and quite frankly I don't see a lot of upside for you to litigate.

TOM

Is there nothing I can do about this?

STAN

I don't know, Mr. Borland. You could try to reason with him, perhaps. You know, negotiate a more favorable settlement. Do you think that's possible?

TOM

You mean go beg to him?

STAN

Again, not the phraseology I would employ.

TOM

I don't know. Where do these numbers come from, anyhow? I can't believe I put seven years into that business and one screw-up means I walk away with only fifty grand.

STAN

The supporting brief to the action claims one million dollars in direct future revenue losses, as well as four hundred and fifty thousand for lost reputation. These are, of course, arbitrary numbers. I would be happy to issue a letter through Mr. Hesslich's attorney if you wish, Mr. Borland. However, if you remain on amicable terms you may wish to undertake the matter yourself. I leave it to you.

TOM

But I want to sue his ass.

STAN

I understand your motivation to assert such a fiduciary desire, Mr. Borland;

(MORE)

STAN(cont'd)

however, for the reasons previously discussed may I reiterate a strong suggestion that you personally enter into a negotiation with your former employer to determine if a more favorable financial outcome is feasible. Unfortunately, I have no other professional advice I can offer.

(beat)

Personally, I'd probably punch the guy in the mouth.

CUT TO:

INT. COTTAGE - DAY

Tom is writing on a laptop computer placed on a makeshift desk in the cottage. The phone rings.

TOM

Hello? (pause) Hi, baby. Yeah, it's going pretty well. I'm starting to get into the groove again. Out of the rut and into the groove, you know?

CHARLOTTE (O.S.)

It's funny, not having you here, Tom.

TOM

Did you say that it's fun not having me there?

CHARLOTTE (O.S.)

No, funny ... I said it's funny - strange - you know, strange not having you around.

TOM

Oh, I thought you said fun.

CHARLOTTE (O.S.)

No.

TOM

How are the girls?

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

CHARLOTTE

They're doing great. They miss their daddy. Want to say hi?

TOM (O.S.)

I'm sort of in the middle of something.

CHARLOTTE

Oh?

TOM (O.S.)

You know ... the story ... the writing.

CHARLOTTE

Ah. I thought you'd be fishing or golfing or something. Well, I'm impressed. All right, I just wanted to let you know that the girls and I are going up to stay at Laura's overnight. She actually pitched a tent in the living room for them, isn't that hilarious?

TOM (O.S.)

Laura's got a lot of imagination.

CHARLOTTE

So ... how many pages are you up to?

TOM (O.S.)

Ah, about forty.

CHARLOTTE

Heck, you'll be finished in no time.

CUT TO:

INT. COTTAGE - DAY

Tom is now sitting on the floor amidst a giant pile of crumpled paper.

TOM

(picks up a crumple)
Yeah ... no time.

CHARLOTTE (O.S.)

All right, sweetie. You just keep on typing. You're going do a great job.

TOM

Thanks.

(beat)

Thanks for your support, Charlotte. And I know you're not my mother.

CHARLOTTE (O.S.)

You're damn right. By the way, you've got some fathering to catch up on, Bucko. Now back to work, I'll call you when we get back tomorrow night. Love you.

TOM

Love you too. Bye.

Tom puts the phone down and sighs. He looks out the window and sees a cabin across the way. He looks at his watch then moves to get his coat and exits.

CUT TO:

EXT. YARD - EVENING

Tom crosses the yard and walks down a wooded path to CHESTER BOB's cabin, a structure much like Tom's, but smaller.

He reaches the front door and pauses, taking in the scene on the small porch. Rough, half-finished carvings, animal skins, drums and small tools litter the area. On the door hangs a carved sign that reads "Trespassers Welcome."

Tom knocks gently and the door falls open. He peers inside. A chaotic scene of cups and plates, clothing, firewood and food busts through the gloom.

Chester sits in a gigantic overstuffed chair by the fire, a bottle of wine in one hand, a shaggy gray cat in the other.

CHESTER

Hark, I hear steps. Is it the soon-to-be famous novelist my foolish son has invited to sit with me?

TOM

I don't know about the famous part.

CHESTER

You'll have to trust me on that, my boy. Please, come in.

TOM

Thank you. My name is Tom Borland. I, uh, Ernie didn't really mention, so I'm not sure, was there something in particular I was to do for you?

CHESTER

Why, yes, absolutely, but all in good time. Now, have a seat here, Tom. How does the fire look?

TOM

Um, it's, well, you know ... a fire.

CHESTER

Remember, I'm blind, my boy. Look around. Is everything safe, no blankets next to a burning log or anything like that?

TOM

No, you seem to be under control, sir.

CHESTER

Sir. Yes ... sir. Now there's a word you don't hear much any more. Sir. I never heard it much at all in my life, to be honest. And frankly I never called anyone sir, either, that I can remember. It's a white man's word, I guess. Tell me about your book.

TOM

It's a screenplay, actually, although it could be a book.

CHESTER

That's interesting. So, what's it all about?

TOM

Well, it's, I mean, I started it about a year ago and just moved out here to get it going again.

(MORE)

TOM(cont'd)

I guess you could say there's a basic concept, but I really just sort of have the first couple of chapters. Anyway, so, yeah, it's about this guy.

CHESTER

What guy?

TOM

Well, he's a politician, the mayor of a small town in California. It's sort of Steinbeck-like, you know. He's got crazy councilors and a bunch of madcap friends that drink beer milkshakes and find ways to waste tax dollars.

CHESTER

I don't like it.

TOM

How's that?

CHESTER

It sounds boring. No drama. No conflict, nothing to hang your hat on there, my boy. Why did you really come out here, if it wasn't to write books?

TOM

I'm not following. You're implying that I'm here under false pretenses?

CHESTER

Never mind pretenses. Would you mind splitting some firewood for me?

TOM

I ... well, yes, I could do that.

CHESTER

Fine, let's go out back. Follow me.

Chester puts the cat down, gets up and feels his way to the back door.

Tom looks about, and notices a stuffed crow on the window sill.

TOM

Is that a stuffed crow?

CHESTER

Sure, if you say so. Now there's an axe and you'll find some rounds of fir out in the yard. Just do as much as you like. If I can get a little cut every day, I'll have enough for the winter.

Tom exits and the sounds of chopping are heard.

Ernie returns to his chair and begins to chant, a monotonous and repetitious bass guttural noise, almost a moaning.

Tom returns, holding a piece of firewood. He beholds Ernie, who suddenly halts the chant and turns his blind gaze up into Tom's eyes.

TOM

I just wanted to make sure this was going to be the right size.

Tom extends the piece of wood toward Chester who grasps it.

CHESTER

That's perfect. Don't worry about cutting any more. Please, you can put that piece in the bin right there, thank you.

(pause)

Now, you've told me about your story. How about I tell you about one? What do you say?

TOM

Sure, I'd be honored.

CHESTER

Good. So now, have a seat, my boy. Let's see ... what was that again? All right, I'll make sure it ends like that.

TOM

Are you speaking to someone?

CHESTER

How's that?

(beat)

(MORE)

CHESTER(cont'd)

Yes, let's get to it, a story for you. It's a story about a guy, a guy very much like you.

CUT TO:

EXT. YARD - NIGHT

Tom is walking back along the wooded path to his cottage. He hears twigs snap behind him. He starts and then runs.

CUT TO:

INT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

Inside, he throws off his coat and strides to the computer, banging out copy.

CUT TO:

INT. COTTAGE - DAY

Tom awakes from sleep, throws off the covers and returns to the desk to read what he wrote the night before. A broad smile crosses his face.

CUT TO:

INT. STORE - DAY

Tom is buying supplies at a hardware store in the nearby town of Shelton. He carries a tape recorder, batteries and microphone and some blank cassettes.

He runs into Ernie, who is eyeing up axes along a wall display.

TOM

Hello, there, Ernie. Already back from Portland?

ERNIE

Well, say, Tom Borland. How's it going? How did you like my father?

TOM

I liked him a lot.

ERNIE

That's interesting.

TOM
You're looking for a new axe, huh?
Is it for your dad?

ERNIE
How did you know?

TOM
(displays his palms)
These are city folk hands. Check
out the blisters.

ERNIE
Hah, hah. I'm sorry, that's one
dull old axe he's got. Say, would
you mind dropping this off? I'm
actually heading south. There's
steelhead running down the Little
Skookum Inlet and me and some guys
are going to toss out some illegal
nets.

TOM
Illegal?

ERNIE
Yeah, it's illegal to use nets to
catch steelhead, but our ancestors
used to do it that way, so we still
do, too.

TOM
What happens if you get caught?

ERNIE
They only bust the white guys who
use nets to protest us using nets.
We never get busted, just Whitie.

TOM
Are there always white guys that
protest with nets?

ERNIE
Yeah. Gets them on the TV news, you
know?

TOM
I see. Well, I'd better get back. I
can deliver that axe for you.

ERNIE

Aw, thanks, Tom. Hey, you mind tabbing me on this? I'll pay you back. The fancy restaurants in Seattle pay top dollar for fresh steelhead salmon, especially native-caught.

(beat)

Adds some cultural flavor, I guess.

TOM

I guess. Okay, here, give me that. When did you say you were coming back again?

ERNIE

Well, probably late tomorrow. But don't worry. I looked in on him this morning. He seemed to like you, I think.

TOM

All right, see you later, Ernie.

ERNIE

(smiling)

May the mountain spirits ground you and the ocean spirits inspire you. Namaste.

CUT TO:

INT. CHESTER'S CABIN - NIGHT

Chester sits in his throne by the fire. Tom sprawls on the floor, tending the fire and occasionally writing in a notebook. The tape recorder runs.

CHESTER

And so God imbued the homeless, the vagrants, the hobos and bums, the rooming house riffraff and the Salvation Army hangers on and He let His spirit dance through their souls, and He blessed them. He blessed them with kindness and love and empathy for one another.

(MORE)

CHESTER(cont'd)

He quenched their hunger and fired heat through the limbs of their shivering bodies as they huddled in painful awareness within the acrid zone, the place where cracks meet edges, blood stains rock, and the massive walls of prosperity slam into the cruel firmament. And so, upon receiving His blessing, these urban streets, once so mean and dark and dangerous, were transformed. Where there was fear and violence, there was now love and tolerance. It was as if St. Francis stood on every corner, from Pioneer Square straight on up to Broad Street and right out onto the I-5.

Chester falls silent. Tom pokes the fire and clears his throat.

CHESTER

You're still here, Tom? What time is it? I must have dozed off there for a bit.

TOM

No, you've been story telling non-stop for over an hour.

CHESTER

Really? I tell you, son, the muse can take advantage of you, just to be heard, if she knows there's an audience. And if you let her in often enough, she'll steal in for a look around when you're not home. I would have sworn I was asleep. Wait, I remember a dream. Something about, what, street people, is that possible?

TOM

Not just possible. That's in the story.

(pause)

Chester, I have to ask you a question.

CHESTER

Please, go ahead.

TOM

Do you want me to write your stories?

(beat)

That's the whole point here, isn't it?

CHESTER

How do you mean?

TOM

I mean you're feeding me ideas, characters, themes, and all of it exceptional and relevant and alive. You want me to put this stuff in my book, don't you? Isn't that why I'm here?

CHESTER

I really don't know what you're talking about. I realize that I may be channeling for you, and you can certainly use the ideas for your writing. But that's not why you're here, I'm quite sure of that.

TOM

So what am I then, just some hasty holz-hacker for you, merely a laughable woodchopper for a narcoleptic narrator?

CHESTER

Now you've lost me. You think I'm from Belgium or something?

(pause)

Tom, let me tell you another story. It's a short one. It may help explain what your purpose is.

TOM

All right.

CHESTER

But let me ask you a question first. Do you believe in anything?

TOM

You mean, like in God?

CHESTER

If that's what you like to call it, yes.

TOM

Well, not exactly. I don't know.

CHESTER

What about fate?

TOM

Fate, yes, I guess I believe in fate. I think things happen for a reason, even if sometimes they can't be understood by people. And that what goes around comes around.

CHESTER

Good. That's very good. All right, so things happen for a reason, and what goes around comes around. Now, how do you suppose all of this is arranged?

TOM

Arranged?

CHESTER

Yes, you know. Is it God? Is He directing the action like a puppeteer?

TOM

Well, I'm not sure, but no, I don't think that's quite how it works. It's more about spirit. And how spirit is manifest in the material world.

CHESTER

Fair enough. So you're here in my house, is that not right? Did anyone put a gun to your head? Do you think there's a reason for this? Of course you do, and you think the reason is to take the stories that flow through me and write them for a commercial audience and feed your family. That does seem nice and tidy, doesn't it? Sort of like a puppet show, eh? But, you and I, we think there may be something deeper than that, a more subtle objective perhaps.

(pause)

I'm getting a little tired, Tom. Can we talk again tomorrow?

TOM

Of course, is there anything I can get you?

CHESTER

No, thank you. You know, Tom, my son Ernie has got a big heart; he'd never hesitate to help a stranded driver or deal with an injured animal. When a bird flies into a building, it's always Ernie that gets it out again. He's sort of blessed for the here and now, you see. Not a great man, but a good man.

(pause)

Sometimes I wish I was able to have had a son more like you, Tom. You have a thirst to understand and to fulfill your destiny. That's admirable.

TOM

(unconvinced)

That's very nice of you...

Tom has gathered up his notebook and tape recorder and jacket and looks back towards Chester, who has fallen asleep again and snores quietly.

As Tom closes the front door behind him, he hears Chester speak, in a strange new voice, his eyes still shut.

CHESTER

The road to inspiration requires you to activate all your senses. If a decrepit old blind man can absorb revelation, then think of what you could achieve. You must hone your senses in order to forget everything. This is important. It is the only way.

CUT TO:

INT. COTTAGE - MORNING

Tom is tidying up the cottage when the phone rings.

TOM

Hello?

(beat)

Hey, Charlie, how's my girl?

CHARLIE (O.S.)
We're coming up for a visit today,
Daddy.

TOM
You are? Well, that's just swell,
pumpkin. When will you be here?

CHARLIE (O.S.)
I don't know. You can talk to
Mommy. Are there any bears up
there?

TOM
I'm afraid I haven't seen any,
pumpkin.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Charlie on the phone, Emily's wiping the counter.

CHARLIE
I told Linda bears are striped like
Zebras.
(beat)
So she's not allowed to see any
real ones or she'll figure it out.

TOM (O.S.)
Why do you want to fool your
sister, sweetheart?

CHARLIE
I don't know. Because it's fun, I
guess. Do you think it's wrong?

TOM (O.S.)
It might be. I'm not sure. But I
know it hurts when people make fun
of me.

CHARLIE
Who is making fun of you daddy?

Charlotte tosses the dishcloth into the sink and takes the
phone from Charlie.

CHARLOTTE
Somebody's making fun of you,
darling?

TOM (O.S.)

Char, hey, I hear you're planning a country drive?

CHARLOTTE

That's all right, isn't it? The girls want to see you and it's such a nice day. We can only stay for a couple of hours. Is there anything at all to do up there?

TOM (O.S.)

Sure, you can watch the bears.

CHARLOTTE

Bears? Are you serious?

TOM

No, I'm just fooling.

CHARLOTTE

You're an idiot ... So, how's it going?

TOM (O.S.)

I don't know, a little strange, I guess. Sort of like when Lennon got shot.

CHARLOTTE

Why?

CUT TO:

INT. COTTAGE - MORNING

TOM

(grinning)

You didn't hear the news? The Rolling Stones were killed in a plane crash, their jet went down in the Atlantic. Turn on the TV.

CHARLOTTE (O.S.)

Oh, no. Oh. That's awful.

TOM (O.S.)

Bah, I'm just kidding.

CHARLOTTE (O.S.)
You're completely impossible, did
you know that? Why do you want to
make fun of me?

TOM
So when are you coming?

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

CHARLOTTE
We should be there a little after
noon. Linda has to get back for
skating and Charlie's getting
together with some friends tonight.

TOM (O.S.)
Should I make lunch?

CHARLOTTE
That would be wonderful. Do you
need anything?

CUT TO:

INT. COTTAGE - MORNING

TOM
Nope, I've got caviar and
champagne, no wait, I've got peanut
butter and bananas. The girls like
that better than fish eggs anyhow.

CHARLOTTE
Dare I ask?

TOM
You mean the writing? It's running
on all cylinders. I should have my
first draft finished soon.

CHARLOTTE
You're not kidding?

TOM
No, really.

CHARLOTTE

Wow, that's great, honey. Then what happens?

TOM

What do you mean?

CHARLOTTE

I mean when you're finished writing...

TOM

Oh, yeah, the pimpistry of commerce. I found a literary agent in Los Angeles. Ernie recommended him.

CHARLOTTE

Ernie?

TOM

He's a friend I met here, sort of a jack of all trades kind of guy. I've been helping out with his dad, he's blind.

CHARLOTTE

Sounds like you're really settling in there, Tom. Don't get too attached. Anyway, look, I'll see you in a couple of hours. See if you can find something to occupy the girls - maybe we can find some time to take a little walk out into the woods, just the two of us.

TOM

Oh - okay. I'll see what I can dig up. I think I saw a couple of kites over at Chester's place.

CHARLOTTE

It already sounds like you know more people there than in our own neighborhood.

TOM

That's interesting. Well, okay, see you in a while.

CHARLOTTE

Bye.

CUT TO:

EXT. YARD - DAY

A minivan arrives and Charlotte, Charlie and Linda spill out, along with their golden Labrador retriever.

Tom makes his way around from the back of the cottage, a rake in hand.

TOM

Hey, there. Look who's here!

CHARLOTTE

Hi, baby.

Tom and Charlotte embrace hesitantly. Charlie and Linda run forward. Hugs and exclamations ensue.

CHARLIE

Daddy! Is this your house?

TOM

Just for a little while longer, Charlie.

CHARLOTTE

Oh? So, you're making progress, huh? That's great. Well now, this is the writer's retreat. Jesus, it's not much, is it?

TOM

Dostoyevsky toiled in a far more tawdry setting. I rather like it.

CHARLOTTE

Oh my God. It talks like a writer too.

TOM

One must make certain acclimations, it's true.

LINDA

Look, a tree house! Wee!

CHARLIE

Last one there's a rotten egg.

Charlie darts across the yard towards an ancient chestnut tree in which sprawls and awkward tree house.

LINDA
(defeated)
Charlie's always making me a rotten egg.

CHARLOTTE
My mother said the last one there is the wisest of the bunch.

LINDA
You mean like an owl?

CHARLOTTE
Yes, like an owl. Wise means smart, sweetheart.

LINDA
So I'm not made of stinky old eggs?

CHARLOTTE
No.

TOM
I was told little girls are made of sugar and spice, and...

LINDA
(interrupting)
Aw, that's just silly, Daddy.

Linda laughs and skips away to join her sister.

CHARLOTTE
So how's the big novel?

TOM
It's a screenplay.

CHARLOTTE
I'm sorry, darling.

TOM
It's all right. I'm not quite certain on that point myself, yet, to be honest.

CHARLOTTE
(frowns)
Aren't you going to carry me over the threshold?

TOM
You want to go inside?

CHARLOTTE
No, I came to see the tree house...

TOM
(a little confused)
I'm not sure it would support your
weight, it's...

CHARLOTTE
Was that meant as an insult or
something? Jesus, Tom, you're
losing brownie points by the second
here.

TOM
I'm sorry ... come in.

CUT TO:

INT. COTTAGE - DAY

Charlotte looks around, arms folded. Charlie and Linda can be heard singing outside.

CHARLOTTE
I hate to say this, but it looks
better from the outside.

TOM
It's not much, I know. How are the
girls?

CHARLOTTE
They miss you. I think Charlie
blames herself somehow, like she
drove you away. Sometimes she takes
it out on Linda.

TOM
Oh, no.

CHARLOTTE
Yeah, but you say it won't be much
longer, huh? How far along are you?

TOM
Well, it's hard to say.

CHARLOTTE
Brownie points, Tom.

TOM

Okay, maybe another few weeks.

CHARLOTTE

You mean another month?

TOM

Well, yeah. That ought to do it.

CHARLOTTE

So you're half way done? Is that right? It sounds a bit like you're stalling, Tom.

TOM

Well, I was stalled for a while, but it's finally come together. All this time, it's sort of like opening a jar, you know, you twist and twist and then suddenly the lid turns. I've got it all in my head and it's really gushing out now.

CHARLOTTE

So you've been twisting on your jar all this time?

TOM

What?

CHARLOTTE

Show me the screenplay.

TOM

It's in a novel format right now.

CHARLOTTE

Jeez, okay, show me the novel, then.

TOM

It's more or less an outline, really.

CHARLOTTE

Where?

TOM

(points to the laptop)
It's in there.

CHARLOTTE

May I see?

TOM

Ah, one sec.

Tom moves the mouse and a text document appears on screen. Charlotte sits down at the desk.

CHARLOTTE

There's only one page, here.

TOM

Like I said, it's more or less the outline.

CHARLOTTE

You're kidding, right? Like the Rolling Stones bit, right? Where's the rest?

TOM

A lot of it's on tape.

CHARLOTTE

What do you mean on tape?

TOM

You know, tape recordings, talking.

CHARLOTTE

You're not making a lot of sense right now.

TOM

I'm not kidding.

CHARLOTTE

(angering)

I don't believe this.

TOM

(with anxious enthusiasm)

I've got the outline, Charlotte. See? It'll be smooth sailing from here. I just need a few more weeks, honestly. It's been really tough.

CHARLOTTE

You have no idea what tough is.

TOM

Can I get you some coffee or a Coke or something?

CHARLOTTE

(her tone rising)

I just don't believe it. My husband gets fired and moves out to the country to start a new career. Meanwhile, our savings are shrinking. Soon we'll have no money, no prospects and no future. And you're standing there grinning like it's Christmas Eve. This is insane.

(beat)

Screw your coffee.

TOM

C'mon, Charlotte, the kids will hear you.

CHARLOTTE

Maybe they *should* hear me. Maybe they can knock some sense into you when they find out they won't get new shoes any more.

TOM

Please, Charlotte. I know what it must seem like, baby.

CHARLOTTE

You've been out here for almost a month and you've got nothing to show for yourself but a pile of crumpled paper. And now you're telling me that just last night the "Big Picture" comes to you out of the blue and you're rearing to go. Is that it? Well, I'm not buying it. What's going on here, Tom?

TOM

What do you mean, what's going on?

CHARLOTTE

I mean ... what have you been doing up here all this time? It's been a month, Tom. Do you know what it's been like for me?

TOM

I know it's hard, honey. Look, it's been hard on me to. I've been writing, but it just hadn't really gelled until now.

(MORE)

TOM(cont'd)

It's like a fire that you blow on and blow on and then it suddenly catches.

CHARLOTTE

You've got some pretty lame analogies, you know that? Maybe you can't write at all. Maybe you need to twist your jar or blow on your fire for a while.

TOM

Huh?

CHARLOTTE

Forget it. I'm mad at you. That's all you need to know. I'm taking the girls down to Olympia to buy clothes for school. You're not invited. Good-bye.

Charlotte gets up and exits.

CUT TO:

EXT. YARD - DAY

CHARLOTTE

(loudly)

Girls, let's go. We're leaving. Shakespeare needs another month to finish A Midsummer Night's Dream.

Tom appears at the doorway.

TOM

C'mon, honey. Don't go. Let me show you around a bit. There's a waterfall just around the corner, and that church over there is really quite beautiful.

CHARLOTTE

GIRLS! Right this instant!

TOM

Please don't go like this.

Charlie and Linda approach.

LINDA

Who is Shakes Pears?

CHARLOTTE
 (pointing to Tom)
 He is.

LINDA
 Like a juggler? Go on, Daddy. Shake
 some pears. Shakie-shake, shake
 some ripey pears. Put on your
 skates and chase the stripey bears!

CHARLOTTE
 Maybe you'd better write this stuff
 down, Tom. You could have two pages
 done by this time next month. Get
 in the car, girls!

CHARLIE
 Where are we going?

CHARLOTTE
 To buy clothes. We're going to
 spend a lot of money.

CHARLIE
 Can I get a new knapsack for
 school?

CHARLOTTE
 Sure, we'll get you the best
 knapsack and lots of stuff to put
 in it.

TOM
 Please don't involve them. It's not
 their fault.

Charlotte and the girls clamber into the car and pull away,
 spitting up dust. Linda is singing as they go.

LINDA
 Knapsack, knapsack, Daddy's never
 coming back...

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

Tom at the desk, typing. There's a knock at the door.

TOM
 (continues to type)
 Come in.

The door opens and Ernie leans in.

ERNIE
 Tom, can you come? Something's
 happened to my father.

Tom leaps up and rushes out the door with Ernie.

CUT TO:

INT CHESTER'S CABIN - NIGHT

Chester sits slumped in the chair. The cat is rubbing up against him. Tom and Ernie enter and rush towards him. Tom notices the stuffed crow is not on its perch.

CHESTER
 I came in to check on him and found
 him like this.

TOM
 How long ago was that?

CHESTER
 Just now. I tried to talk to him
 but he just sort of mumbles. I
 don't think he's drunk.

TOM
 (eying liquor bottles
 everywhere)
 How can you be sure?

CHESTER
 I can always wake him up. Watch.
 (leans in)
 Hey, Dad. I've got a case of light
 beer here. I can't stand the stuff.
 I could go sell it down at the
 marina, or if you want it I can
 leave it here for you.
 (pause)
 You see? Nothing.

TOM
 I'm not sure that's a valid test,
 Ernie. Let me try.

Tom does a quick look-over, smelling breath, checking heartbeat and breathing.

TOM

His heart and breathing are steady.
He doesn't really reek of booze,
either. Yeah, I don't think he's
drunk.

ERNIE

I just told you that.

TOM

(strokes Chester's cheek
lightly)
Chester! It's Tom. Ernie's here
with me. Are you all right?

Chester does not respond. Tom looks about the room.

TOM

Ernie, do you know where that
stuffed crow is?

ERNIE

Eh?

TOM

Where's the crow that was on that
window ledge over there?

ERNIE

Sorry, Tom. I don't remember that
at all. Are you sure?

TOM

Never mind.
(beat)
Maybe we should take him to the
hospital.

CHESTER

Is that you, Tom?

TOM

Chester! Thank goodness, are you
all right?

CHESTER

(in the strange voice)
You have to help them, Tom.

ERNIE

Dad?

CHESTER

Ernie, my boy, I must have dozed off a bit. Did you say something about a case of beer?

ERNIE

Dad, what was that you were saying to Tom? Help who?

CHESTER

Is Tom here? Well, we're having a party are we? Where's that beer?

ERNIE

Dad, do you feel all right? You had us pretty scared. We couldn't wake you and just now you were talking in a strange voice.

CHESTER

Don't worry about that, son. Everything's all right. I was meditating, that's all.

ERNIE

You sure do it well.

CHESTER

You just have to follow the right spirits, son. Not the ones in the liquor stores.

ERNIE

(insulted)

All right, well, I've got some business to take care of. You sure you're all right?

TOM

I can stay for a while.

ERNIE

You're a true friend, Tom, honestly. Here, let me hug you.

TOM

(wincing)

That's all right.

ERNIE

(still offended)

Okay, then, I've got some crab traps to check. Better get down there before the park rangers show up.

TOM

You're crabbing in the park?

ERNIE

Just a little, yeah.

CHESTER

That's my boy, challenging authority at every step. Good for you, son.

TOM

I see you come by it naturally.

CHESTER

Bring back a crab for your pa, eh? I'll cook it right here.

ERNIE

(softens)

All right, all right. See you later.

Ernie departs.

TOM

Meditating, you say?

CHESTER

I'm afraid I won't be able to help you with the rest of the story, Tom.

TOM

What do you mean? Why not?

CHESTER

You need to communicate directly now.

TOM

What are you talking about? I haven't the foggiest idea how to do something like that.

CHESTER

Don't shoot the messenger, boy.
(beat)
You might just shoot yourself.

TOM

What's going on? Don't you want the story to be published? We've got the theme, plot, characters and even half the dialogue on tape now. All I need is the ending.

CHESTER

I can't help you any more, Tom. You need to understand that.

TOM

I remember you talking about the ending. Don't you remember? You spoke about it. Try to remember.

CHESTER

I'm afraid you're carving from a rotten tree, Tom. I can never remember what happens when I'm with the spirits. If there are witnesses, they hear a different version of things, sort of, and they must take away their own interpretations. It's always been that way. I've tried to write things down when I'm in trance, but it always ends up being something totally different.

TOM

I'm lost.

CHESTER

You need to find yourself, then, don't you? I can't say why the spirits are interested in you. To be blunt, I think you've got a lot of work to do. You seem to be rather self-centered and aloof at times. If you want the ending to your story, you must want something else, for at the subconscious level, which is a concept you may understand, what I call the dream worlds, you will see that the story can only come when you are ready to receive it.

TOM
I'm ready now!

CHESTER
That's great. So what are you
waiting for?

TOM
I don't understand.

CHESTER
Where do you think stories come
from? Where do you think
imagination gets its spark?

TOM
Well, from the brain.

CHESTER
If you persist in such thinking,
you'll never break through.

TOM
Break through into what?

CHESTER
I have no idea. It's your destiny,
not mine. Crow brought you to me.
He may be playing a trick on you
for all I know. Anyway, there's a
much larger issue at stake here,
and until you realize that, I don't
believe much is going to happen.

TOM
I'll make up my own ending, then.

CHESTER
Exactly, of course you will. That's
the whole point, do you see now?

TOM
(fearful)
What the hell happened to that
stuffed crow anyhow?

These words spoken, Chester's head sinks into his chest.

TOM
(shivers)
Chester?

CHESTER

(in the other voice)

Never mind names. You can either accept what is in front of you, or reject it. That's your reality.

TOM

Who are you?

CHESTER

The real question here is who are you?

TOM

I don't understand.

CHESTER

That's not important.

TOM

I'm scared.

CHESTER

That's good. You should be. There is always a danger within the realm of the spirits. A danger only to your mortal self, mind you, but still you should be aware.

TOM

Aware of what?

CHESTER

Enough! Look around you, sniff at everything and say nothing. You must find a way to see through the mirage your senses have built around you. You have to slither your way out of thought by silencing your mind and letting your senses guide you. Do not think, just feel. When you do this you will arrive in a place quite unfamiliar, a place of the spirit, of energy, of balance and transition. Once there your goal is to allow your predestined energy to join the flow around you and to influence causes and effects here on earth. It is that simple.

(pause)

It seems the cosmic ball is in your court.

TOM
Why me?

CHESTER
Why not you? You started all this.

TOM
Oh.

CHESTER
You're wasting time.

TOM
You spoke of dangers just now. What did you mean?

CHESTER
It depends on how well you can free your mind from the psychic traps you have set throughout your lifetime. You may reach a point where you get caught between realities, unable to go forward and unable to return.

(beat)
Your physicians call it "madness" or "insanity." It's just another ephemeral state of mind, really. Perhaps you're already mad. Who knows?

TOM
(pause)
You just said "our" physicians
(beat)
As if you were something else.

Chester rolls over in the chair and begins to snore.

CUT TO:

INT. COTTAGE - DAY

Tom is writing again, muttering, sweating, shaking.

TOM
The homeless form a political organization and take over the government.
(pause)
The homeless steal all the food.
(pause)
They practice civil disobedience.
(MORE)

TOM(cont'd)

(pause)

They rise up for the second American Revolution. They kill everyone. They recycle all the trash and junk. They work for free. They hold hands and sing. They fire guns, rockets, missiles. They destroy nations and blame Gods they don't understand. They blast everything to shit, to shit!

Tom stands up abruptly and falls back over his chair. He lays twisted and motionless. He begins to mutter in a strange voice.

TOM

Knock, knock.

(beat)

Who's there?

(pause)

I am?

(pause)

All right ... so who's minding the store?

CUT TO:

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Tom sits at a table, books open and askew all around.

From a distance behind a counter, the librarian, AMY CHARLES, an attractive girl of 22, looks up at him occasionally. Amy is non-native but wears native jewelry and hippie-like clothing.

Tom is taking notes in a tab-book. Amy rises and flicks the lights on and off.

Tom gathers up the books and approaches the counter.

TOM

I'd like to borrow these books, please.

AMY

Some of those are reference books, sir. They can't leave the library.

TOM

Oh.

AMY
(smiling)
But I can make an exception this
time.

TOM
You can?

AMY
Well, I've sort of been expecting
you, I guess.

TOM
What are you talking about?

AMY
(smiles again)
You know.

TOM
(more to himself)
I think I'm losing my mind.

AMY
Maybe you're finding it.

TOM
Have we met before or something?

AMY
No. But there's been talk of a
white crow. I pretty much guessed
it was you. Did you find what you
were looking for?

TOM
A white crow, is that what you just
said?

AMY
(opening a book)
Look.

CUT TO:

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Charlotte is in the living room of a neighbor, LAURA and JIM
DUNCAN.

CHARLOTTE
I don't know what's happened to
Tom, really.
(MORE)

CHARLOTTE(cont'd)

It's more than a mid-life crisis,
it's like he doesn't care about us
any more. He so obsessed with
writing his novel.

JIM

(interjecting)

I thought you said it was a
screenplay?

CHARLOTTE

I forget. Anyway, he's not even
writing anything as far as I can
tell.

LAURA

Oh sweetie, I'm so sorry.

(beat)

Jim went through something similar
a while back, but he realized he
was too old to be a rock guitarist.
It only lasted a few days.

JIM

Not too old physically, just
artistically. I can't stand hip
hop.

LAURA

Why don't you make some iced tea,
or something.

Jim wanders towards the kitchen.

CHARLOTTE

I'm going up there to tell him
tonight.

LAURA

Do you want me to watch the girls
for you?

CHARLOTTE

Would you? Thanks, Laura. I don't
know how I'm going to explain this
to them.

LAURA

Everything will be all right,
honey. We can take the kids any
time. You've got to do what's right
for them, and for you.

CHARLOTTE

Sometimes I just don't know what that is any more. Maybe I'm the one having the mid-life crisis.

LAURA

You're too young for that.

CHARLOTTE

Maybe it's menopause, you know, the timing is different for different women.

LAURA

I doubt it, honey.

CHARLOTTE

I try to steer him back to reality, to the consequences of his actions, but he's blind, he's blindly trying to fulfill his destiny or something. Maybe he's gone off his rocker.

(beat)

I don't know any more.

LAURA

Are you going to be okay?

CHARLOTTE

Yeah, thanks. We're all right for now. I should get going, it's a couple of hours from here. I'll drop the girls off around 5 o'clock, is that all right?

LAURA

Sure, Jim can make hamburgers.

CHARLOTTE

How is Jim?

Jim arrives with a tray of ice-tea. He is wearing a Mexican sombrero and has put a celery stick in each glass, which he has rimmed with salt. He grins somewhat stupidly.

CUT TO:

INT. PUB - NIGHT

Tom and Amy sit at a window booth at the Lumberman's Lounge, a large dim room with wood paneled walls, rough-hewn tables, a long burl-topped bar and a dance floor. Saws, axes and other logging paraphernalia adorn the walls.

Amy is reading aloud from one of the books.

AMY

And so it was that White Crow warned the buffalo that men were coming to kill them. This made the men of the tribe very angry and they blamed the coyote.

(pause)

Seems you may have some enemies, Tom.

TOM

(sweating)

I'm supposed to believe all this? Is this some kind of practical joke? Did the rental agent set this up? Who's behind this, the CIA?

AMY

It doesn't matter what you believe, Tom. It's already happening, even if you choose to close your eyes to it.

TOM

What are you talking about? How did you know? What's going on?

AMY

Only you can find that out, Tom. There are many who can help you along the way, and it seems clear to me that you have already embarked on the journey. Why did you quit your job? Why did you move out here? How did you find Chester? How do I fit in? The answers are already there. All you need to do is continue on the right path.

TOM

What path? I just wanted to write a book.

(pause)

I don't want anything more.

Amy grabs Tom and pulls him close to her, clutching hard, their faces almost touching.

AMY

You have to keep following your heart, Tom. You've come this far. You can't look back any more. You've been chosen to fulfill a higher calling. You don't want to fool around with this.

(beat)

Spirits have limits too, you know.

Meanwhile, Charlotte has entered the bar and stands now a few paces away.

CHARLOTTE

Well, isn't this something? Not even published yet and he's already he's got a fan club. Or wait a second, maybe he's just having a plain old affair

(pause)

Good-bye, Tom. Don't get up.

Charlotte begins to retreat slowly, unsteadily, crying.

TOM

Honey, you've got the wrong idea completely. Wait, let me explain.

CHARLOTTE

I feel like I've done this scene before, Tom. I've been trying to reach you for two days. Who is this girl?

AMY

My name is Amy Charles. I've been helping Tom with some research for his book.

CHARLOTTE

I bet you have.

TOM

Uh, it's a screenplay, actually.

AMY

Oh, sorry.

CHARLOTTE

Jesus.

TOM

Honey, really, sit down. You look tired. Have some coffee. Is everything all right? Where are the girls?

CHARLOTTE

They're with Laura and Jim. I needed a break.

(beat)

I need a break, Tom.

TOM

They're with Jim? But that guy's always stoned. Couldn't they have gone somewhere else?

(off her expression)

All right, all right. Why don't you sit down?

CHARLOTTE

Tom, I'm leaving you. My parents said we can stay with them until I get settled. I could use the help anyway. I've been trying to call you. Anyway, I can see you've been pretty busy here.

(looking around the place)

You know what's sort of weird about this right now? I'm not really upset. I'm just sort of tired. That's all.

TOM

(still dumbfounded)

Leaving? Are you taking the girls?

CHARLOTTE

No, I thought I'd just drive them out into the woods and leave them there. Of course I'm taking the girls! Or would you like to have them move into your writer's retreat? You could all eat and sleep in one room.

TOM

Charlotte, don't do this. Forget the novel. I'll pack it in, get another job.

CHARLOTTE

For Christ's sake, is it a fucking
novel or a god-damned screenplay?
Make up your mind.

Amy holds up the book and begins to read aloud again.

AMY

There were those who tried to stop
White Crow from his sacred duty.
They tried to trick him by pulling
at his heart and mind.

CHARLOTTE

You little whore.

Charlotte snatches the book from Amy and throws it across the
room.

FADE OUT.

CUT TO:

INT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

Tom is prone on the floor. Papers, books, bottles, pens, food
waste, all a clutter.

TOM

The homeless and poor, the
destitute and drug-addicted
(beat)
live in fear and without peace
until one day
(beat)
a chance occurrence empowers them
and guides them out of their
misery.
(pause)
What the hell? What story is this
anyway?

Tom rises and stumbles forward over the clutter towards the
door, his clothes soaked, his face streaming with
perspiration.

TOM

(as if replying)
What about the legend?
(pause)
What do you mean?

He heads into the darkness, into the bush, mumbling, asking questions, crashing into the trees and brush.

Visions come and go. Meanings and reality shift: a homeless man wanders downtown streets carrying a dead crow; a wolf stands over a prone coyote on the beach, howling.

Tom stumbles out of the forest at cliff, the same one from his former dream.

TOM

I can see you now.
 (pause, ambling forward)
 I want to dance with you.

Tom dashes ahead, then spinning around falls backwards over the edge, eyes shut tight.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

Tom is in bed. Linda and Charlie watch over him.

CHARLOTTE

Oh, Tom. What are we going to do with you?

LINDA

Charlie said you did an Akapooka dive.

TOM

(eyeing Charlotte)
 Is that so? Well, I don't know about that. I must have slipped over the edge of a cliff in the darkness, sweetie. It was foolish of me to be wandering around at night alone anyway.

CHARLIE

Daddy, you didn't mean to jump over, did you?

TOM

Charlie, sweetie, of course not, whatever would give you that idea?

CHARLIE

Because Mommy said we had to move
to Minnesota.

TOM

(to Charlotte)

Tell me you're staying.

CHARLOTTE

We're staying, Tom.

(pause)

Charlie, can you do me a favor.
Linda's got ballet in the morning
and she wants her hair French
braided. Can you give it a try?
Just sit her over there on that
chair by the window.

Charlie leads Linda across the room.

CHARLOTTE

Tom, I'm really worried about you.

TOM

I know. I'm so sorry, honey. I
honestly don't remember what
happened. But somebody helped me
out of the water. There were two of
them, two men, I think...

CHARLOTTE

Darling, you've got to calm down.
You put yourself under a lot of
stress. And then all that Indian
folklore stuff and, well, I can
understand how things could sort of
get of control.

TOM

I lost my watch, the one you gave
me on our tenth anniversary. It
must have fallen off. I'm sorry.

(pause)

You think I jumped off that cliff,
don't you.

CHARLOTTE

What do you think?

TOM

I don't know. I don't remember.

CHARLOTTE

You say somebody helped you out of the water?

TOM

I don't know. I'm not sure any more.

(pause)

I lost my watch.

CHARLOTTE

It's okay, Tom, it doesn't matter. Just forget about everything now. What matters is that you get well.

TOM

I'm not really hurt, it's just my shoulder.

CHARLOTTE

Well, you need to rest then. You need to rest your mind. You've been through a lot.

(pause)

I think you should give up writing the novel for now.

(beat)

I mean the screenplay.

TOM

You don't think I should finish it, Charlotte?

CHARLOTTE

(defeated)

I'm afraid it might finish you first.

CUT TO:

INT. COTTAGE - DAY

Tom is gathering up his things, one arm in a sling, taking them to his car. As he comes out of the house, he meets Ernie in the driveway.

ERNIE

So you're leaving, too?

TOM

Yep, back to the city to find a nine-to-fiver. Are you going somewhere?

ERNIE

Both of us are leaving, me and my father. After that last episode I couldn't let him go on living there on his own. I've got him a room in a really nice place.

TOM

Oh.

ERNIE

He's changed since he met you, Tom. I don't know how to describe it, but I think he'll be okay in a home now. He's sort of mellowed out a bit, you know, as if something has happened, something has been done that he wanted done for a long time.

(beat)

I guess I'm probably not making much sense. I'm sorry. I'm going to miss you, Tom.

(pause)

You have been a good friend.

TOM

I'm glad to hear he's okay.

(pause)

So what about you, Ernie?

ERNIE

After I finish up your fix-up job, I'm heading out on my cousin's gill-netter. She's a real nice boat. I should be able to rake in some good dough on her. And we get a lot of shore leave, if you know what I mean.

(pause)

How's the arm?

TOM

It's my shoulder. It's going to be fine. They said I should try to immobilize it for a couple of days.

(pause)

Thanks for everything, Ernie. Here's the key. The rest of your payment is on the desk.

ERNIE

Well, cheers, Tom. I'm really sorry you got hurt and everything. I guess my sweet grass ceremony must have backfired.

(pause)

Do you think you'll keep writing?

TOM

How should I know?

CUT TO:

EXT. LIBRARY - DAY

Tom drops some books through the return slot on the outside of the library building. As Tom retreats to the parking lot, Amy bolts out of the building, carrying a sheet of paper.

AMY

Tom! Tom, I just heard what happened. Are you all right?

TOM

I'm fine, Amy.

(pause)

I'm moving back to Seattle. I was just dropping off the books I borrowed.

AMY

(handing a paper to Tom)

I found something for you. Here, have a look.

TOM

What is this?

AMY

It's from a book on Coast Salish legends. It's like a poem.

(pause)

I couldn't believe it when I heard you'd fallen off the bluff. That's got to be 50 feet high. They say the tide was higher than usual. It might have saved your life.

TOM

(reading)

Yeah.

AMY
It's incredible, isn't it? You see,
we were wrong all along. You're not
the White Crow after all, you're...

TOM
(interrupting)
May I keep this?

AMY
Yes, of course ... Aren't excited,
Tom? I mean, isn't it unbelievable?
It's all here. And then, when I
heard about what happened to you
the other night, well, I mean, that
can't be a coincidence, can it?
(pause)
Are you scared?

TOM
(folding the paper)
Yeah.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY

Tom is dressed in a tan colored suit, standing at a newspaper
box in downtown Seattle, circling want ads with one of
Linda's red crayons.

He dials a number on his cell phone.

TOM
Good morning, I'm calling about the
job listed in today's Post
Intelligencer.
(pause)
Okay, sure ... I could drop by now,
I'm just around the corner.
(pause)
It's suite 333? Okay, I'll see you
in a few minutes. Thank you.

Tom walks around the corner and down a somewhat decrepit
street.

A homeless man, DANIEL CROWE, is propped on the sidewalk, a
sign in front of him reading "Will Work for Food".

Tom pauses for a moment, then pulls his wallet from his
pocket, retrieves a bill and tosses it into Daniel's hat.

DANIEL
 (looking up in disbelief)
 God bless you.

Tom pauses, nods, then drops the newspaper want ads into the hat as well, then continues walking.

CUT TO:

INT. SDIS OFFICE - DAY

Tom enters the Pike Street office of the Seattle Downtown Improvement Society. He approaches a RECEPTIONIST.

TOM
 Hi, my name is Tom Borland. I called just a minute ago. I'm here about the marketing position.

RECEPTIONIST
 Hi ... please have a seat.

The receptionist picks up a phone and dials an extension.

RECEPTIONIST
 (into phone)
 Mr. Borland is here to see you now.
 (pause)
 Okay.
 (hangs up)
 Mr. Wolfe will be out in just a minute.

TOM
 I'm sorry, what did you say?

RECEPTIONIST
 I said Mr. Wolfe will be with you shortly. Please have a seat. Can I get you some coffee or a glass of water?

Tom does not respond.

RECEPTIONIST (cont'd)
 Mr. Borland?

TOM
 Oh, yes, thank you.
 (beat)
 I mean, no thank you, I'm fine.

Tom sits. A door opens and ELDWIN WOLFE enters the foyer. Tom rises and they shake hands.

ELDWIN

Eldwin Wolfe, I'm the marketing director for the Society. Thanks for coming in.

TOM

Tom Borland. Pleased to meet you. I'm sorry, your first name?

ELDWIN

Eldwin. E-L-D-W-I-N. And Wolf with an "e".

TOM

I've never heard that name before.

ELDWIN

It's Germanic. It, means "Old Friend." Anyhow, please come into my office, Tom.

(beat)

I've heard your name before, actually.

TOM

Oh?

They enter Eldwin's office, a bright but small area of tables and files. Abstract prints and maps blot the walls.

ELDWIN

Please sit down, Tom. I understand you were over at Hesslich & Associates.

TOM

Yes, I left there a couple of months ago. How did you know?

ELDWIN

(beat)

May I ask why you left?

TOM

Well, it's sort of complicated.

ELDWIN

I like things simple. Try me on.

TOM

It was more or less a difference of opinion, of values.

ELDWIN

I see. Well, never mind, I'm a big fan of your work, Tom. I've been in the non-profit industry for a long time and we don't normally pander to people's emotions, if you know what I mean. That's why I was excited when I heard you were coming. I want to change our image.

TOM

How do you mean?

ELDWIN

The Society is stalled, Tom. We're losing members. We need to do something different, something out of the box.

(pause, oddly emphatic)

Sometimes an intervention from the outside is required, Tom. Do you understand?

TOM

Uh, sure, I guess.

ELDWIN

I've got a budget but that's about all I've got. I'm looking for something sensational for television and print. Do you think you can help us?

TOM

I don't know much about the Society, to be honest with you.

ELDWIN

Just say the name, Tom. We are the Seattle Downtown Improvement Society. Our members are business owners and downtown residents who pay their dues and expect some sort of comparative empirical analysis that shows we're making progress in our objectives, which of course is to "improve" the downtown core.

TOM

I see.

ELDWIN

Like I said, it's not that sexy. What do you think? I'm offering you a contract to design a campaign for the Society. Your cut will be 25 percent of the gross budget. We've got a hundred thousand to spend.

TOM

Do you have a deadline?

ELDWIN

I want something on air and in the papers for October, right before our annual general meeting. Interested?

Tom gazes out the window. A crow lands on the window ledge outside, ruffles its wings and flies off.

TOM

I can start right away.

ELDWIN

Tremendous, now, I don't care much for email or phone calls. Face to face is the way I prefer things. Can you handle that, Tom?

TOM

(puzzled)
Okay.

ELDWIN

Good, so drop by and give me a progress report every Friday at 9 a.m. until you're done.

(handing Tom an envelope)
Here's a 10 percent cash retainer for you, the rest of the money will come from the association on completion. How's that, is everything in order?

TOM

Yes, sir. Thank you.

(pause)
Say, do you actually speak any German?

ELDWIN

A little, yes. I spent some time near Frankfurt as a child.

TOM

The name Hesslich, that's German, isn't it? Does that name anything?

ELDWIN

(laughing)

Hah, it might seem appropriate to you now, perhaps. Yes, it means "ugly."

CUT TO:

EXT. PARK - DAY

Tom sits on a park bench, legs crossed, a notebook in his lap, writing. A wind blows. He is smiling.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tom sits at the computer. Charlotte is in bed, reading. Tom pulls out the paper Amy gave him. He reads, then types at the computer.

CHARLOTTE

(looks up, smiles)

Tom, I'm really proud of you, honey. It only took you one morning to find a new job.

TOM

It's a contract, not a job.

CHARLOTTE

It's a job.

(beat)

Are you doing research?

TOM

Uh ... Yeah.

Charlotte gets up, pads across the room to Tom.

CHARLOTTE

What is that? I thought you were researching for the job.

TOM

I am.

CHARLOTTE

This is a site about Indian legends.

TOM

I have an idea.

CHARLOTTE

Give me a break. Jesus, Tom, when are you going to let go of this crazy shit?

TOM

I'm not crazy, Char.

CHARLOTTE

I'm sorry. It's just...

The phone rings. Charlotte answers.

CHARLOTTE

Yes, he is, just a minute.

(beat)

Tom, it's for you.

TOM

(takes phone)

Avery, well, well.

(beat)

No, that's all right, it's not that late. What do you want?

(pauses, laughs)

Well, what do you know? Sorry, Avery, I've got a new job already.

(pause)

It's the Seattle Downtown Improvement Society, I'm on contract.

(pause)

You don't say?

(pause, Tom's face darkens)

You wouldn't.

(pause)

Jesus, Avery, after all we've been through together. We were friends.

(pause)

Yeah, yeah, whatever, go for it.

Tom hangs up.

CHARLOTTE

Tom, what's going on?

TOM

Avery says the SDIC is a former client. He says he'll take me to court if I take the contract.

CHARLOTTE

Why on earth?

TOM

He says if I won't work for him, I won't work for anyone. He's just a stupid, ugly man. He can't help it. It's his nature.

CHARLOTTE

You're not even upset about this? What are you going to do?

TOM

Let him sue. He won't win.

CHARLOTTE

How do you know?

TOM

(points to the screen)
It's all right here.

CHARLOTTE

Fuck.
(beat)
I should have gone to Minneapolis.

CUT TO:

INT. SDIC OFFICE - DAY

Tom and Eldwin are looking over some papers.

TOM

So, what do you think?

ELDWIN

Tom, I don't know what to say. This is far beyond my expectations. You've hit it out of the park, lad. I'm speechless. I'll deliver this next week. Tom. Thank you. You'll receive your payment in full from the association in the mail.

TOM
Eldwin, there's one problem.

ELDWIN
Hesslich?

TOM
Yeah. How did you know?

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY

Tom stands at a bus stop. Daniel approaches, this time well dressed and groomed.

DANIEL
It's you!

TOM
I'm sorry, I...

DANIEL
You dropped the want ads in my hat
a few weeks ago.

TOM
What?
(remembers)
Oh, right ... that was you?

DANIEL
Amazing what soap and water can do.
I just wanted to thank you. I found
a job, thanks to you.

TOM
Well, what do you know? That's
awesome, man. Congratulations.

DANIEL
Thanks. My name is Daniel, Daniel
Crowe.

TOM
(pause)
I'm Tom Borland.

They shake hands.

DANIEL
Funny, your name sounds familiar.

TOM

Yeah, I get that a lot.

(beat)

So what kind of work are you doing?

DANIEL

It's a research job with a law firm. Believe it or not, I actually have a fine arts degree from WSU. I got kind of lost there for a while, tried some drugs, and messed things up. And I may have overdosed on existential literature as well.

(beat)

But when you dropped that hundred dollar bill and the want ads on me, something sort of clicked inside. A light went off. It's hard to explain. I think you may have saved my life, Tom.

TOM

(uneasy)

Whoa, I don't know about that.

DANIEL

I do. It can be rough out here, especially at night. I've only be down here a few weeks. Some people practically live their whole lives on the streets. I heard in winter it gets really bad.

TOM

I bet.

(beat)

So ... you're an artist?

DANIEL

Yeah, mostly illustrations, I can do some computer stuff but I prefer traditional media. I had some chalk for sidewalk drawings but it got stolen, along with just about everything else I had.

(beat)

I was beginning to think I was going to die out here, to be honest with you.

TOM

You seem fine to me.

(pause)

(MORE)

TOM(cont'd)

Hey, have you got time for a coffee? I'm working on something that you might be interested in.

DANIEL

I certainly owe you that much. After all...

TOM

I know, I know.

(beat)

I saved your life.

The two men laugh and attempt an embrace. They then walk up the block towards a coffee shop.

CUT TO:

INT. LAKEWOOD SENIORS MANOR - DAY

Ernie and Chester are in a small, dark room with purple velvet curtains, an upholstered chair, and Chester's bed. A small low window looks out on an adjacent brick wall.

Ernie is hanging pictures on the wall in front of the bed.

CHESTER

I don't know why you're doing this, son. You know I can't see. Whose pictures are they, anyway?

ERNIE

They're pictures of you, and me, and mom.

CHESTER

You don't have to.

ERNIE

I want the nurses to get a better idea of who you are.

CHESTER

And you think that's going to help?

ERNIE

Humor me, dad.

CHESTER

(pause)

Tell me about the room.

ERNIE

(lying)

Well, it's very bright, with lots of windows. It's pretty big, too. There's a terrific view of Puget Sound. It's a great place, Dad. And I've heard the staff is terrific as well. They're not all immigrants like in other places.

CHESTER

They're all immigrants in this land, son. Maybe some day our stories and legends will win them over and change their ways, especially their ways with Nature.

A large elderly female caretaker enters the room.

CARETAKER

It's time for your bath, Chester.

CHESTER

Son, come here.

Chester pulls Ernie down to his face by the shirt and whispers.

CHESTER

Is she pretty?

ERNIE

(lying)

She's a knockout, Dad.

CUT TO:

INT. HEARING ROOM - DAY

Tom and Stan sit on one side of a table.

The door opens. Avery and his brother, AARON HESSLICH, enter. Behind them enters JUDGE ALBERT WEINSTEIN. They take their seats. Tom and Avery trade awkward glances.

A court reporter sits at one end of the table, the judge at the other, and the combatants opposite.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Charlotte is doing laundry. She leans under the desk to retrieve a stray sock.

Next to the sock is a folded sheet of paper. She opens and reads, still on her knees under the desk.

CHARLOTTE

I don't believe this ... "The Legend of Coyote."

(pause)

Coyote liked to play tricks and disguise his identity. He was a very good trickster. But one day he went too far and jumped off a cliff overlooking the ocean so that he too could dance like the blackbirds.

(looks up, shakes head)

He was badly hurt when Wolf, who was an old friend of Coyote, found him and explained how the Great Spirit exists in Nature, and how every living thing has its way of being.

(stands up)

You can know the spirit of Crow in this world, but you cannot be him. If you want to dance like the blackbirds, you must trust in him, and be his friend. This is the only way.

(pause)

Oh, Tom ... What is this?

CUT TO:

INT. HEARING ROOM - DAY

JUDGE WEINSTEIN

In this matter, it is agreed by both parties that my decision will be final and not subject to appeal. The position of the plaintiff, as I see it, is that the defendant willingly took intellectual property belonging to the plaintiff and did so to secure personal gain through another employer.

(MORE)

JUDGE WEINSTEIN(cont'd)

The position of the defendant is that the material in question originated in concept after a contractual termination was signed by both parties.

Tom glares at Avery.

JUDGE WEINSTEIN (cont'd)

I would like to now ask for submissions of evidence in order to assess the divergent positions of the parties and to render a judgment.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

CHARLOTTE

Coyote followed Wolf's advice, but Wolf warned him that the way of trust was fraught with many pitfalls.

(pause)

Ugly Man will hate you, because he cannot know you. He fears you and will try to kill you. You must stop the Ugly Man. Trust in your friends, like Crow, to help you.

(pause)

The gun!

Charlotte rushes to the night table on Tom's side of the bed.

She pulls out a box and rummages for a key on the dresser.

She opens the box, showing only the empty foam imprint where a handgun was stored.

CUT TO:

INT. HEARING ROOM - DAY

JUDGE WEINSTEIN

May I see the evidence files, please?

Stan passes the judge a thin folder. Aaron does the same. The judge peruses both, and looks up quickly.

JUDGE WEINSTEIN

Well, I might get home to watch the Mariners lose another game after all. I have reached a decision in favor of the defendant.

AARON

But you didn't even read any of the evidence!

JUDGE WEINSTEIN

I don't have any evidence from you, sir.

Judge Weinstein tosses the file toward the brothers. It falls open and a number of twenty dollar bills slide out.

AARON

What is this?

JUDGE WEINSTEIN

You tell me.

AARON

Whoa. Hang on, now. There's been some sort of mistake

JUDGE WEINSTEIN

Perhaps I should recommend a set of charges against you, Mr. Hesslich, for conspiracy to commit bribery of a state official.

AARON

What?

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Charlotte dials the phone frantically.

CHARLOTTE

C'mon, Tom. Answer the phone. Where are you?

CUT TO:

INT. HEARING ROOM - DAY

STAN

Your honor, it is our intention to seek damages in this matter.

(MORE)

STAN(cont'd)

My client has suffered a grave indignity as well as damage to his professional reputation, not to mention the emotional hardship borne by himself and his family by way of this absurd litigation.

JUDGE WEINSTEIN

Save it, councilor. I have a better idea. I'm going to spare us all the time and suffering. Further to my previous judgment, damages in the amount of \$25,000 are to be paid to the defendant.

(pause)

Furthermore, the plaintiff's right to future litigation in any form relating to professional matters against the defendant is hereby revoked.

(striking his gavel)

That is all. This matter and this proceeding are closed.

CUT TO:

INT. COURTHOUSE HALLWAY - DAY

Everyone is filing out of the hearing room into a hallway.

Tom's cell phone rings.

TOM

Hey, honey. I was just about to call you.

CUT TO:

INT. COURTHOUSE HALLWAY - DAY

TOM

How's that?

(beat)

Oh, I got rid of that last year. I thought the kids might start snooping around so I didn't think it would be safe in the house. I guess I forgot to mention it.

(pause)

Jeez, Charlotte. Are you all right? You sound like you've seen a ghost or something.

(MORE)

TOM(cont'd)

(pause)

What's that? Oh, yeah ... we won!

CUT TO:

EXT. COURTHOUSE - DAY

Tom walks down the steps of the courthouse, holding a briefcase. He meets Daniel there.

DANIEL

How did it go?

TOM

Case dismissed.

DANIEL

Suspicion of bribery?

TOM

How did you know that?

DANIEL

Remember that job I was telling you about ... as a researcher for a legal firm?

TOM

(mind straining)

Okay ... Wait a minute ... of course! You're a research assistant with a law firm ... with Aaron Hesslich's law firm!

DANIEL

I came out here to deliver my file on you. When I saw you here everything sort of clicked, the light bulb went on.

(pause)

I don't know why I did it, but hey, I mean, you know...

TOM

Yeah, I know.

(beat)

I saved your life. I guess I owe you some moeny...

DANIEL

Forget about it.

Avery and Aaron descend past them on the courthouse steps.

AVERY

Well, well. So it's not just my clients, huh? You're raiding my employees now too, Borland?

(to Daniel)

And you, you're a dead man, an unemployed dead man.

Tom and Daniel smile as Avery and Aaron retreat.

TOM

(hoisting briefcase)

I've got some documents to deliver myself.

DANIEL

Is it finished?

TOM

Yep. C'mon, let's go.

They walk down the courthouse steps together laughing. Tom puts an arm around Daniel's shoulder.

CUT TO:

INT. SENIORS MANOR - EVENING

Chester is in bed alone, dozing, listening to the television. His head perks up.

TV REPORTER

The city's new "Help the Homeless" campaign is in full swing, and mayor Larry Towers says there's already been a significant impact on the downtown core.

MAYOR

I can't take full credit for this tremendous success, the Seattle Downtown Improvement Society came up with the idea. We just sort of tagged along and tried to help them wherever we could. So far, our shelters and food banks are reporting phenomenal decreases in demand. It's truly been an amazing success.

REPORTER

I understand you may now be communicating with other major cities about the program? Is that true?

MAYOR

Yes, we're talking with cities like Los Angeles, Houston, San Francisco, even as far away as Hamburg, Germany. We still feel that the state and federal levels of government have a role to play, especially in facilitating certain documentation for these people, but that hasn't yet been hammered out. However, both Olympia and Washington, D.C. have expressed interest so we'll be convening to determine what assets and services they can bring to the table.

REPORTER

Sounds like a win-win-win-win situation.

(beat)

So there you have it, a single idea crystallized into action on Seattle's streets now takes on global importance in the fight against poverty.

(beat)

Reporting live from city hall, I'm Melissa Wong.

CHESTER

That's it, Tom. You're half-way there.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

SUPER: THREE MONTHS LATER

Tom and Charlotte and having a lazy brunch: eggs, newspapers, coffee, letters, toast, magazines.

CHARLOTTE

Hey, Tom, there's a letter here from some publishing company for you.

TOM

Open it.

CHARLOTTE

Okay.

(opens the letter)

Well, what do you know, it's a check. Say, what is this?

TOM

How much is it for?

CHARLOTTE

It says one hundred and seventeen thousand dollars. What is this Tom? It's made out to you!

TOM

They must be in the stores then...

CHARLOTTE

What are you talking about?

TOM

Come on, let's walk down to the bank and deposit this check.

Tom pulls out a pen, endorses the check, and puts it in his pocket.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - MORNING

Tom and Charlotte stroll down a mid-town residential block towards a busier intersection of the neighborhood.

CHARLOTTE

Before you tell me about that money, I have something to confess, Tom.

TOM

So do I.

CHARLOTTE

Me first, okay?

TOM

Sure.

CHARLOTTE

I thought you wanted to kill Avery.
I thought you were losing your
mind.

TOM

What?

CHARLOTTE

I found a piece of paper. The
legend. I didn't know what it was.
I got scared. You were acting so
strange.

(beat)

When you went off that cliff it
seemed like you didn't care if you
lived or died. Then I found the
poem or whatever it is and I
figured if you wanted to commit
suicide, maybe you wanted to take
someone with you.

(pause)

Are you the Coyote, Tom?

TOM

You mean this?

Tom pulls Amy's photocopy from his pocket and hands it to
Charlotte.

TOM

Yeah, I guess I am the Coyote.

CHARLOTTE

Doesn't this stuff frighten you?

TOM

Not any more.

CHARLOTTE

Why not?

TOM

You'll see.

CHARLOTTE

(passes paper back to Tom)

Where did this come from?

TOM

Amy, the girl from the bar, do you
remember?

(off her eyes)

(MORE)

TOM(cont'd)

Of course you remember her... Well, she worked at the library. She gave it to me just before I left.

CHARLOTTE

So what does it mean? What's this got to do with you? What's this got to do with us?

TOM

I told you, you'll see.

They round a corner and stand in front of a bank. Tom stops and waits.

CHARLOTTE

Well, aren't we going in?

TOM

I'd rather do something else with this, honey. There's going to be more where this came from.

Tom pulls out an envelope and inserts the check, licks it, seals it.

CHARLOTTE

What are you doing?

He drops the envelope into a mailbox next to the bank entrance.

CHARLOTTE

Tom!

TOM

(looking across street)
I think I see it.

CHARLOTTE

Tom, honey, you're scaring me again. What's going on?

Tom takes Charlotte's hand and dashes across the street towards a bookstore.

CUT TO:

EXT. BOOKSTORE - MORNING

A little breathless, they sweep up to a bookstore window.

Copies of a children's book are stacked in a pyramid.

Charlotte peers in.

CHARLOTTE

(reading through window)

The Legend of the White Coyote. By Tom Borland. Illustrated by Daniel Crowe.

(dumbstruck)

So this ... is what you were writing ... a children's book.

(looks up at Tom)

Why didn't you tell me?

TOM

I wanted to be sure this was all real ... I mean, after everything that happened ... well, you know.

CHARLOTTE

It's incredible! Wait until the girls find out.

TOM

Um, well...

CHARLOTTE

They already know?

TOM

I needed a valid control audience to proofread the chapters.

CHARLOTTE

When did you write this, at the cottage?

TOM

No, it was after. In the park.

CHARLOTTE

The park?

TOM

Oh, boy. Here we go.

(pause)

Okay. You know that shrink, Dr. Cohen, who you wanted me to see?

CHARLOTTE

Wanted you to see? You mean you didn't go? What about all those appointments you went to?

TOM

(holds up the book)
Chester mentioned something about
being outside when the words would
come.

CHARLOTTE

You mean?

TOM

It seems fairly rational to me now.
I mean, it's not like I hear voices
or talk to myself or anything.

CHARLOTTE

Who's Daniel Crowe?

TOM

I met him the same day I got the
job. He's an amazing artist,
sweetheart, you'll love the
illustrations. I'll tell you all
about him.

CHARLOTTE

(excited)
Okay later, come on.

Charlotte drags Tom into the store.

CUT TO:

INT. BOOKSTORE - MORNING

She grabs a book from the pyramid and opens it.

CHARLOTTE

You dedicated it to me?

TOM

Who else?

CHARLOTTE

(reading)
In a time long ago in a land not
far away White Coyote lived among
the many other animals in the
forest. White Coyote had a happy
life. During the day he played
games with his friends, running
through the tall grass and chasing
rabbits between the trees.

(MORE)

CHARLOTTE(cont'd)

At night, White Coyote made his bed under the stars and dreamed of mountains and rivers and many other wonderful places. But one night Coyote had a dream he could not forget. He dreamed of his friend, Crow, who could fly far above the forest.

TOM

(snatches book)

All right, that's enough. If you read any more, they'll make you buy it.

FADE OUT.

CUT TO:

EXT. RIVER'S EDGE - DAY

Chester sits by the river in meditation. At times, various animals come to sit by him, the crow, the coyote, and the wolf. Chester's mind fills with a vision of his consciousness soaring above the forest.

CUT TO:

INT. SENIORS HAVEN - DAY

The nurse brings a tray with some food and a letter into Chester's room. Chester is asleep.

NURSE

It's time for your lunch, Chester.
There's a letter here for you too.

CHESTER

(waking up)
The letter is here?

NURSE

(setting the tray down)
That's right. Would you like me to read it to you?

CHESTER

Yes, please.

NURSE

(opening the letter)
Dear Chester...

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Chester's dead body now lies on the forest floor as the dream-visions continue.

Now stop-frame photography of growing cells and roots shooting downward, blending with scenes of babies and baby animals, windswept grasses and billowing clouds spilling across the screen in a darting mosaic representing the interconnection of all life forms.

CUT TO:

INT. SENIORS HAVEN - NIGHT

Ernie enters Chester's room. Chester appears asleep. On the bedside table lies an envelope. Ernie picks it up and a check flutters out. He reads the letter aloud.

ERNIE

Dear Chester.

(whispering)

Please accept this gift. It was your vision, not mine.

(pause)

Tom.

(picks up fallen check)

Jesus.

Ernie puts the check in his pocket and looks down at his father. His face darkens. He touches Chester's cold forehead and begins to cry.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tom and Charlotte are reading in bed.

CHARLOTTE

(closing her book)

Do you think you'll write any more books, Tom?

TOM

I don't think I could handle it.

CHARLOTTE

So what's next?

TOM

I've been getting some calls. I'm sort of doing the rounds of a bunch of other non-profits in the city. You know, add some crackle to cancer research, a bit of sizzle into saving the whales.

CHARLOTTE

You sound jaded already.

TOM

Are you kidding me, compared to that snake oil business I was in before?

(pause)

You know, I just realized, I haven't talked to Eldwin since I delivered the campaign materials.

CHARLOTTE

You should go see him, and thank him for rescuing you.

TOM

(beat, remembering)

What?

CHARLOTTE

You know, for offering you the job. It's turned everything around, don't you think?

TOM

(verging on recollection)

Yeah.

CHARLOTTE

(offbeat)

Linda won't squish wood bugs any more.

TOM

She won't what?

CHARLOTTE

You know, since she read your book. She told me even wood bugs have a role to play in the great scheme of things.

TOM

That's what she said?

CHARLOTTE
Well, more or less.

The telephone rings.

CHARLOTTE
(looking at clock)
It's kind of late to be calling.
(picking up phone)
Hello?
(pause)
Yes, just a moment. Tom, it's Ernie
for you.

TOM
Ernie's calling?
(taking phone)
Hello, Ernie? How are you?
(pause)
Oh, no. I'm so sorry to hear that.
Are you all right?
(pause)
I'm so sorry.
(pause)
Oh.
(pause)
Of course, yes, that's what he
would have wanted, I'm sure.
(pause)
Of course we'll come. If you need
anything before just let me know.
(pause)
Okay.
(beat)
I'm going to miss him, Ernie.
(pause)
Bye.
(to Charlotte)
Chester passed away.

CHARLOTTE
Tom, I'm so sorry.

TOM
That was Ernie.
(pause)
There's going to be a ceremony on
Tuesday at the tribal center north
of Shelton. Can the girls miss a
day of school?

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY

Tom returns to Eldwin's Pike Street office. Entering the building Tom shudders.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE - DAY

The rooms are empty. Tom wanders about. He takes out his cell phone dials.

TOM

Can you please give me the number
for the Seattle Downtown
Improvement Society?

(beat)

Yes, that's right.

(beat)

On Seneca Steet? No, that's not
possible. Are you sure? Okay,
thanks.

Tom clicks off and dials again.

TOM (cont'd)

Yes, can you please connect me with
your marketing department.

(beat)

Eldwin Wolfe, please.

(beat)

Eldwin, yes. Wolfe.

(beat)

Never heard of him? But he's your
marketing director.

(beat)

But that's impossible! Eldwin and I
worked together on a marketing
campaign. The "Help the Homeless"
blitz, you must have heard of that?

(pause)

Contracted out? To whom?

(pause)

Tom Borland?

(totally confounded)

But I don't understand.

(beat)

I'm sorry? Okay, I must have made a
mistake. By the way, doesn't the
Society have an office downtown, on
Pike Street?

(MORE)

TOM(cont'd)

(pause)

I was afraid you'd say that.

As Tom is speaking his eyes move about the room. His gaze settles on the window ledge, where he had seen the crow before.

Outside the window, on the outer ledge, he sees an object.

His phone arm drops as he approaches the window, on which rests his missing wristwatch.

He opens the window, pulls the watch in, reads the back.

"To my darling Tom. Thanks for ten great years. Charlotte."

CUT TO:

EXT. SKOKOMISH TRIBAL CENTER - DAY

Ernie greets Tom, Charlotte, Charlie and Linda at the entrance to a large log building. They stand beside an ornately carved cedar door.

ERNIE

Hi, Tom, thank you for coming. This must be Charlotte, and let's see, uh, Charlie and Laura, right?

LINDA

My name's Linda, it means pretty in Spanish.

ERNIE

It sounds pretty in English.

LINDA

Hah, hah, hah. Did you hear that, Charlie?

CHARLIE

No.

CHARLOTTE

Girls, please, I don't want any quarrels today.

ERNIE

So you're Charlotte
(beat)

I can see why Tom found it so hard to be away from you.

CHARLOTTE

Tom told me quite a bit about you and your father. I was sad to hear the news. Are you all right?

ERNIE

I don't know why I thought he'd make it in one of those places. It killed him.

(pause)

I killed him.

CHARLOTTE

I'm sure that's not true, Ernie. You can't blame yourself. Tom told me how he lived alone before.

ERNIE

I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said anything. With my father's health over the years I've been waiting for this day for a while, I guess, but now that it's here it seems surreal somehow.

TOM

(embracing Ernie)

Come on, let's go inside.

CUT TO:

INT. CULTURAL CENTER - DAY

They enter a large bright unfurnished room with walls of yellow pine.

Chester is laid in a ceremonial burial canoe, a large vessel tapering up at both ends and supported by four massive posts in a square frame at its center.

About 30 people are gathered cross-legged on the floor. Tom and the others take their places. Tom eyes Daniel across the room.

An elder now rises and speaks a few words in the Twana dialect.

He gestures to Ernie, who rises forward and climbs a ladder to lay items into the canoe: an axe; a water jug; an eagle feather; and a book.

A drum beats slowly while two men chant counter-rhythmically in a despondent tone.

Now Ernie descends from the ladder and speaks to the group.

ERNIE

(from a folded paper)

Thank you all for coming today to honor my father's passing from this life to the next.

(pause)

Chester Bob was a proud Indian, a good father and a wise man. He had many insights and much knowledge of the way of our ancestors. Anyone who met him felt honored and blessed to be in his presence.

(pause)

My father believed in knowledge, and he loved to read. I remember him reading bedside stories to me from Salish legends of the animals and spirits as well as Thoreau, Wordsworth and even Dr. Seuss. My father did not discriminate when it came to learning.

(pause)

Over the years, my father learned many things, but mostly he learned that our land is at risk, that people need to hear the wisdom of our elders and protect the land from destruction. This is why he left the reservation and lived among the white man for so long. He did not betray his people, as some have said, but he aided them by trying to convince the white man of his folly.

(pause)

Chester Bob was a brave man, a man of vision and a man of passion. We should all strive to learn like he did, to pray like he did, to believe like he did, and to act like he did.

(pause)

Good-bye, father, good luck in your next journey.

(pause)

I'd like to close with a few lines that I remember from Shelly, another Whitie my father revered and read to me:

(pause)

Peace, peace!

He is not dead, he doth not sleep.

(beat)

He hath awaken'd from the dream of life.

(pause)

"Men'am'ut" - Welcome home, Dad.

CUT TO:

EXT. CULTURAL CENTER - DAY

The mourners are gathered outside the building. Daniel approaches Tom and his family.

TOM

Daniel ... I'd like you to meet my wife and kids. Charlotte, this is Daniel Wolfe.

CHARLOTTE

Hello, it's nice to meet you. I'm sorry it had to be under these circumstances.

CHARLIE

Did you draw the pictures in Daddy's book?

DANIEL

Yes, I did.

LINDA

Charlie says the coyote's ears are too big.

DANIEL

He needs big ears.

CHARLIE

Why?

DANIEL

So he can hear the spirits talk.

CHARLIE

Oh, yeah.

LINDA

Daddy's got big ears.

TOM

Honey, I'll catch up in a minute.

Charlotte and the girls head for the car. Ernie halts their progress to show off his new boat, which sits on a large trailer in the parking lot. He lifts the girls on board.

TOM

Say, do you remember that newspaper want ad section I gave you?

DANIEL

Do I remember it? Hell, I keep it on me for good luck!

Daniel pulls the paper from his jacket pocket and gives it to Tom. Tom reads and frowns. The address circled in red crayon is the office on Seneca, not Pike Street.

DANIEL

Is something wrong?

TOM

(smiling)

No.

(beat)

Everything's fine.

Tom looks away for a moment towards the sounds of the girls playing on Ernie's boat. When he looks back, Daniel is gone. Tom walks towards the boat.

TOM

Ahoy, Captain Ernie!

ERNIE

Come aboard, Tom.

TOM

(climbs up)

So, this is yours? She's a real beauty.

ERNIE

She was my cousin's boat. I got a good deal. The rest went to charity.

TOM

To charity?

ERNIE

Yeah, to the homeless!

TOM
 (slapping Ernie on the
 back)
 Chester would have been very
 pleased with you, Ernie, I'm sure
 of that.
 (pause)
 C'mon girls, time to go.

They all clamber out of the boat.

ERNIE
 If you ever want to go on a fishing
 trip, look me up.

TOM
 You've got a deal.

LINDA
 Really? We can go out on your boat?

ERNIE
 Any time you want.

LINDA
 Wee!

TOM
 Good-bye, Ernie.

Tom and Ernie embrace warmly. Charlotte, Charlie and Linda
 say goodbye. They all pile into the car and pull away.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAR - DAY

The car is heading down a country highway. The car's sunroof
 is open. Charlie is gazing skyward. She watches a large black
 crow ahead of them, seemingly leading the way.

TOM
 That was a nice service.

CHARLOTTE
 Yes, it was.

CHARLIE
 Hey, look at that crow.

Tom and Charlotte eye each other. Tom begins to smile.

TOM
Here we go.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - DAY

The car is seen as if from the viewpoint of the crow above them. The crow climbs as the car winds its way along the road through the forest below.

THE END