

## 24

Several days passed. I wasn't doing much, just going to the track, coming in and playing with the poem. I worked in 3 areas: the poem, the short story and the novel. Now, it was 4 with the screenplay. Or was it 4? Without the movie was I a screenplay writer? Jim Beam wasn't dancing.

Then Jon phoned. "How are the horses?"

"They are all right. Hey, how are you, anyhow?"

"I'm all right . . . just wanted to let you know what's happening . . ."

"Yes? . . ."

"Well, after the cancellation, first thing François and I did was to get drunk for two days and nights . . ."

"A cleansing, right?"

"Yes. So, after that I went down to the Firepower building in an attempt to see Friedman and find out why he cancelled the movie. It was a shocker to me."

"Me too . . ."

"So, I went down there. The guard wouldn't let me in. Evidently Friedman had given orders for me not to see him."

"Son of a bitch."

"Yes, he is sometimes. Anyhow, I went to the other entrance, there are two entrances . . ."

"Yes, I know."

"I know the lawyer there. So I told the guard that I wanted to see

the lawyer and he let me in. But I didn't go see the lawyer, I went down to Friedman's office and I walked right in there."

"Good . . ."

"Friedman looked up and saw me. He said, 'Why, hello, Jon, how are you?' I told him that I was fine. I decided not to ask him why he had cancelled the movie. That was his business, anyhow. So I told him, 'Now we are going to get somebody else for this movie.' And he asked, 'Have you gotten anybody else?' and I told him that I hadn't. Then I said, 'Now we are going to get somebody. And when we do, I want your word on something.' 'Like what?' he asked. 'Well, when we get somebody we are going to have them pay you all your expenses up to date on your pre-production costs.' 'Good,' he said. 'But,' I told him, 'I want your word that you will allow the movie to go forward under those conditions and that Firepower will not ask for additional monies.' 'Fine,' Friedman told me, 'go ahead. Get somebody else. I agree to the terms. And good luck to you.'"

"And that was it?"

"Yes, we shook hands and I left. I believe that he was delighted with the possibility of recovering pre-production costs."

"Now all we gotta do is find somebody."

"We have . . ."

"What?"

"You see, all the time we have been dealing with Firepower, even after they signed to do the movie we have been secretly seeking other backers. We never quite trusted Firepower. So when one of the other backers found out the movie had been cancelled he jumped right in."

"Oh? Who are these people?"

"It's Edleman, a *big* real estate operator in the east. His west coast man is Sorenson. We've checked everything out. The money is there, it's real. And they say, 'Yes, we have the money. Yes, we want to do the movie. Let's do it.'"

"Are you sure these guys are all right?"

"The money is there. They are established. We are better off than with Firepower. And they love the screenplay and the actors. They are ready to roll. The papers are being drawn up. We sign Thursday afternoon."

"Beautiful, Jon. I'm happy for you. For me too."

“The movie would have been made anyhow. I was determined about that. But now we can do it right away.”

“I’m proud of you, Jon.”

“I’ll keep you up to the moment. Goodbye.”

“Do that. Goodbye, Jon . . .”

The next phone call was a couple of days later.

“Son of a bitch!” Jon said.

“What is it?”

“Firepower has backed down! They know about Edleman and Sorenson. NOW THEY ARE DEMANDING BETWEEN \$500,000 AND \$750,000 EXTRA!”

“WHAT?”

“Friedman went back on his word. I got him on the phone, I said, ‘But you told me you wouldn’t ask for anything more! You gave me your word!’ ”

“What did he say?”

“He didn’t say anything. He hung up. Now I can’t contact him. He won’t take calls from me. I’m going on a HUNGER STRIKE!”

“What?”

“A HUNGER STRIKE! I’ve got my bottle of water and a little low-back chair and I’m going to sit out in front of Firepower and starve myself!”

“Now?”

“Yes, I’ll be down there in ten minutes!”

“You don’t mean it . . .”

“Of course, I mean it!”

When I drove down, there was Jon Pinchot sitting out in front of the building in his little low-back chair. There was the bottle of water. And a crudely made sign:

**HUNGER STRIKE!  
FIREPOWER IS  
LIAR POWER!**

I parked and went around to where Jon was. There were 4 or 5 people staring at him. I knelt down by him.

“Look, Jon. Let’s forget the fucking film. I’ll give you your money back. I don’t need it this bad. Let’s knock this shit off and go get stinko somewhere, huh?”

Jon reached into his coat pocket and handed me a piece of paper.

“I arranged to have this delivered by messenger to Harry Friedman. He got it. This is a copy.” And, he pulled out another paper, “Here is the release agreement.”

I read the first paper he had handed me:

Dear Harry:

Here are the two alternatives I told you on the phone. As you can see they are both acceptable to me. Believe me, when I suggest a solution where I get no money it is not only to save the project but also because *I love you*, much more than you can imagine.

O.K., now you decide. Please do so quickly because I have Edleman who is ready to take over the film and all obligations in all contracts. If Edleman who is ready to take over the film right away does not have this piece of paper (Solution #1 enclosed) signed by you by Thursday afternoon he will not be able to start production on the 19th. Ten important people will have to be hired before then. This leaves us only Tuesday and Wednesday for the takeover of the film by Edleman. If this is not done we will lose Jack Bledsoe as our lead in the film and you will lose around a million dollars. This is suicide for everybody, financially, at any rate. But I must go a step further, as follows: if my movie is not freed by you by tomorrow morning at 9 a.m. like you *promised* me, Solution #2 is that I will start cutting parts off my body and sending them to you in envelopes every day. I am serious. You cannot afford to wait one more day. *It Is a Matter of Life or Death for the Movie.*

love,

Jon

The other piece of paper was called Solution #1 and was headed:

AMENDMENT TO LOAN-OUT AGREEMENT  
FOR DIRECTING SERVICES OF JON PINCHOT

And having been written by a lawyer was almost unreadable, but it seemed to call for Friedman to release the film to Edleman and to keep the money that was coming to Jon.

I handed the papers back to Jon.

“What is Solution #2?”

“The cutting off of the parts.”

“You call that a solution?”

“I guess it should be called a resolution.”

“You aren’t going to do it?”

“Yes, I am. It’s all I know.”

“You’re crazy.”

“No. No. But come with me. I must prepare.”

“Prepare?”

“Yes.”

We were in Jon’s car. “I have the first part I need. The pain-killer. You see I had to go to a doctor for an ingrown toenail. He operated. Then he gave me a pain-killer afterwards. It worked great . . .”

“Where are we going?”

“You’ll see. Anyhow, I had to go back to get the toe checked. I said to the doctor, ‘That pain-killer was great, it lasted ten hours. Tell me about it.’ He told me about it. Then I asked him, ‘Can I see it?’ And he took me to this medicine cabinet and pointed it out. ‘Very interesting,’ I said. We talked a bit more, then I left. But I had a bag with me, a small traveling bag. I left it by the medicine cabinet. Then I left the office, came back. ‘Oh,’ I told the receptionist, ‘I left my bag.’ I went to get the bag and there was nobody around. I opened the cabinet and took the pain-killer.”

“You can’t do this,” I told Jon.

“I must,” he answered.

We were in a hardware store.

“Yes?” the clerk asked.

“I need a saw,” Jon said, “an electric chainsaw.”

The clerk walked over to a wall display and came back with this orange job.

“This is a Black and Decker, one of our finest.”

“Where does the blade go?” asked Jon. “How do you put it in?”

“Oh, it’s quite easy,” said the clerk. He got a blade and fitted it.

Jon looked at it. The blade had very large teeth.

“Umm,” Jon said, “that isn’t quite the blade I was looking for.”

“What kind of blade do you want?” the clerk asked.

Jon thought a moment. Then said, “Something to cut small pieces of wood with. A hard wood.”

“Oh,” said the clerk, “how about this?”

He attached a new blade. It had fine teeth, very close together, sharp.

“Yes,” said Jon, “that’s what I want. That will do.”

“Cash or credit card?” the clerk asked.

Back in the car and driving back to resume the hunger strike I asked Jon, “You’re not really going to do this, are you?”

“Of course, I am going to start with the little finger of the left hand. What good is it anyhow?”

“That’s what you use to hit the ‘a’ key on the typewriter.”

“I’ll type without using ‘a’s.”

“Listen, friend, isn’t there any way to turn this whole thing around and just forget it?”

“No. Not at all.”

“And you’re going to be there at 9 a.m.?”

“In his lawyer’s office. I will plug it in. I will do it unless the film gets released.”

I believed him. It was the way he said it: a simple statement of fact without melodramatic overtones.

“Will you wait for me before you walk into the lawyer’s office?”

“Yes, but you must be on time. Will you be there on time?”

“I’ll be there on time,” I said.

We drove back toward Firepower.

## 25

I was there at 8:50 a.m. I parked and waited for Jon. He rolled up at 8:55 a.m. I got out and walked over to Jon's car.

"Good morning, Jon . . ."

"Hello, Hank . . . How are you?"

"Fine. Listen, what happened to the hunger strike?"

"Oh, I am still on that. But more important is the cutting off of the parts."

Jon had the Black and Decker with him. It was wrapped in a dark green towel. We walked into the Firepower building together. The elevator took us up to the lawyer's office. Neeli Zutnick. The receptionist was expecting our arrival. "Please go right in," she said.

Neeli Zutnick was waiting. He rose from behind his desk and shook hands with us. Then he returned, sat down behind his desk. "Would you gentleman care for some coffee?" he asked.

"No," said Jon.

"I'll have some," I said.

Zutnick hit the intercom button. "Rose? Rose, my dear . . . one coffee, please . . ." He looked at me, "Cream and sugar?"

"Black."

"Black. Thank you, Rose . . . Now, gentlemen . . ."

"Where's Friedman?" Jon asked.

"Mr. Friedman has given me full instructions. Now . . ."

"Where's your plug?" Jon asked.

"Plug?"



"For this . . ." Jon pulled the towel away revealing the Black and Decker.

"Please, Mr. Pinchot . . ."

"Where's the plug? Never mind, I see it . . ."

Jon walked over and plugged the Black and Decker into the wall.

"You must understand," said Zutnick, "that if I had known you were going to bring that instrument I would have arranged to turn off the electricity."

"That's all right," said Jon.

"There's no need for that instrument," said Zutnick.

"I hope not. It's just . . . in case . . ."

Rose entered with my coffee. Jon pressed the button on the Black and Decker. The blade sprang into action and began to hum.

Rose nervously tilted the coffee cup just a bit . . . just enough to spill a touch of it on her dress. It was a nice red dress and Rose, a heavy girl, filled it nicely.

"Wow! That *scared* me!"

"I'm sorry," Jon said, "I was just . . . testing . . ."

"Who gets the coffee?"

"I do," I told her, "thank you."

Rose brought the coffee over to me. I needed it.

Rose exited, giving us a worried look over her shoulder.

"Both Mr. Friedman and Mr. Fischman have expressed dismay at your present state of mind . . ."

"Cut the shit, Zutnick! Either I get the release or the first piece of my flesh will be deposited . . . *there!*"

Jon tapped the center of Zutnick's desk with the end of the Black and Decker.

"Now, Mr. Pinchot, there is no need . . ."

**"THERE IS A NEED! AND YOU'RE RUNNING OUT OF TIME! I WANT THAT RELEASE! NOW!"**

Zutnick looked at me. "How is your coffee, Mr. Chinaski?"

Jon squeezed the trigger of the Black and Decker and held up his left hand, little finger extended. He waved the Black and Decker about as the blade furiously worked away.

**"NOW!"**

**"VERY WELL!"** yelled Zutnick.

Jon took his finger off the trigger.

Zutnick opened the top drawer of his desk and pulled out two legal-sized sheets of paper. He slid them toward Jon. Jon walked over, picked them up, sat back down, began reading.

"Mr. Zutnick," I asked, "can I have another cup of coffee?"

Zutnick glared at me, hit the intercom.

"Another cup of coffee, Rose. Black . . ."

"Like in Black and Decker," I said.

"Mr. Chinaski, that isn't funny."

Jon continued to read.

My coffee arrived.

"Thank you, Rose . . ."

Jon continued to read as we waited. The Black and Decker lay across his lap.

Then Jon said, "No, this won't do . . ."

"WHAT?" said Zutnick. "THAT IS A COMPLETE RELEASE!"

"All of clause 'e' must be deleted. It contains too many ambiguities."

"May I see those papers?" asked Zutnick.

"Certainly . . ."

Jon placed them on the blade of the Black and Decker and passed them over to Zutnick. Zutnick took them off the blade with some disgust. He began reading clause 'e.'

"I see nothing wrong here . . ."

"Delete it . . ."

"Do you really intend to cut off one of your fingers?"

"Yes. I may even cut off one of yours."

"Is that a threat? Are you threatening me?"

"Consider this: I have nothing to lose here. Only you have."

"A contract signed under these conditions can be considered invalid."

"You are making me sick, Zutnick! Eliminate clause 'e' or my finger goes! NOW!"

Jon hit the button. The Black and Decker sprang into action again. Jon Pinchot stuck out his little finger, left hand.

"STOP!" screamed Zutnick.

Jon stopped.

Zutnick was on the intercom. "ROSE! I need you . . ."

Rose entered. "More coffee for the gentleman?"

"No, Rose. I want this entire contract revised and run out again, but eliminate clause 'e,' then return it to me."

"Yes, Mr. Zutnick."

We all just sat a while then.

Then Zutnick said, "You can unplug that thing now."

"Not yet," said Jon. "Not until everything is finalized . . ."

"Do you really have another producer for this thing?"

"Of course . . ."

"Do you mind telling me who?"

"Of course not. Hal Edleman. Friedman knows that."

Zutnick blinked. Edleman was money. He knew the name.

"I've read the screenplay. It seems very . . . crude . . . to me."

"Have you read any other of Mr. Chinaski's works?" Jon asked.

"No. But my daughter has. She read his book of stories, *Cesspool Dreams*."

"And?"

"She hated it."

Rose was back with the new contract. She handed it to Zutnick. Zutnick gave it a glance, stood up and walked it over to Jon.

Jon reread the whole thing.

"Very well."

He walked it over to the desk, bent over, signed it. Zutnick signed for Friedman and Fischman. It was done. One copy each.

Then Zutnick laughed. He looked relieved.

"The practice of law gets stranger all the time. . . ."

Jon unplugged the Black and Decker. Zutnick walked to a small cabinet on the wall, opened it, pulled out a bottle, 3 glasses. He sat them on his desk, poured around.

"To the deal, gentlemen . . ."

"To the deal . . ." said Jon.

"To the deal," the writer chimed in.

We drank them down. It was brandy. And we had the movie again.

I walked Jon to his car. He threw the Black and Decker into the back seat, then climbed into the front.

“Jon,” I asked from the sidewalk, “can I try you with the big question?”

“Sure.”

“You can tell me the truth about the Black and Decker. It will never get further than this. Were you really going to do it?”

“Of course . . .”

“But the other parts to follow? The other pieces. Were you going to do that?”

“Of course. Once you begin such a thing there is no stopping.”

“You’ve got guts, my man . . .”

“It is nothing. Now I am hungry.”

“Can I buy you breakfast?”

“Well, all right . . . I know just the place . . . Get into your car and follow me . . .”

“All right.”

I followed Jon through Hollywood, the light and the shadows of Alfred Hitchcock, Laurel and Hardy, Clark Gable, Gloria Swanson, Mickey Mouse and Humphrey Bogart, falling all around us.