

RECLAMATION

by

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FRANK (32) stands with his hands in his jacket pockets, waiting. His clothes have seen better days.

So has he.

He's alone in the empty parking garage. Then, HEADLIGHTS.

A BLACK BMW rolls to a stop in front of him. A DISTINGUISHED MAN in his early fifties gets out of the back seat, wearing a nice overcoat and black leather gloves. He saunters toward Frank.

The DRIVER, a bull of a man, stays behind the wheel, his eyes fixed on Frank.

FRANK

You the councilman?

COUNCILMAN

That I am. And you must be Frank.

The two men regard one another. Neither reaches for a handshake.

FRANK

(breaking the ice)

I've been to a lot of interviews,
but this... this is something else.

COUNCILMAN

An opportunity like this
requires... discretion.

FRANK

So what's the gig?

The councilman reaches into his overcoat and pulls out a SMALL BROWN ENVELOPE. He hands it to Frank.

Frank opens it to reveal a STACK OF HUNDRED DOLLAR BILLS.

COUNCILMAN

Half now, half upon completion.

Frank is stunned. So much money...

COUNCILMAN (cont'd)

Do you follow the news, Frank?

(CONTINUED)

FRANK

Not when I can help it.

COUNCILMAN

The city is reclaiming rundown, buildings, refurbishing them, making them useful again. It's a multi-year undertaking, with literally dozens of contracts. By accelerating that time line, certain funds can be... reallocated.

The councilman produces a FOLDED MAP of the city. He hands it to Frank, tapping on an area CIRCLED IN RED.

COUNCILMAN (cont'd)

There's an abandoned residential building on Main, just east of downtown. The cost of demolishing that building is exorbitant. If it were to, say, burn down... that would save the city a lot of money, don't you think?

The councilman looks to Frank for agreement. Frank nods.

The councilman reaches into his pocket again. This time, he pulls out a REVOLVER.

Startled, Frank holds his ground. The councilman chuckles and extends the gun to Frank, but Frank doesn't take the weapon.

FRANK

I ain't gonna hurt nobody.

COUNCILMAN

I wouldn't ask anything of the sort. I've been told that waving one of these around can help a person avoid unwanted questions.

The councilman continues to hold the gun, a politician's smile plastered across his face.

Reluctantly, Frank accepts.

COUNCILMAN (cont'd)

Excellent.

The councilman talks as he walks back to his car.

(CONTINUED)

COUNCILMAN (cont'd)

It would be nice to hear a news story related to our reclamation efforts by Monday morning, Frank.

The door closes, the car pulls away, and Frank is alone again.

2 EXT. CITY SIDEWALK - NIGHT 2

Frank walks down the sidewalk, his hands back in his jacket pockets. He stops in front of a LIQUOR STORE.

3 INT. FRANK'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT 3

Frank enters a rundown apartment building, much like the one he just agreed to torch. He's carrying a BOTTLE OF WINE under one arm.

As he trudges up the stairs, he ignores the GRAFFITI that mars the walls. He ignores the BROKEN LIGHT FIXTURES. He ignores the ARGUMENT behind one of the doors on his floor.

He stops at apartment 303.

BILLY (O.S.)

How's it goin', Frank?

Frank looks up to see BILLY (26) leaning out the door to 304. Billy's younger than Frank, leaner, and looks like he smokes away his paycheck every week.

FRANK

It's goin'. How's things at the shop?

BILLY

A lot quieter without you around.

They both grin, then share an uncomfortable silence.

BILLY (cont'd)

Work's been picking up lately. I might be able to talk Jamison into bringing you on again, part-time...

FRANK

If he ain't had room for me for two months straight, he ain't gonna have room for me now. Besides, I got another job. City work.

(CONTINUED)

Billy nods and walks back into his apartment. Frank turns back to his own door and unlocks the deadbolt.

The door swings open, revealing a WOMAN and a YOUNG BOY sitting at the kitchen table, working on the boy's homework.

The boy looks up.

CHARLIE

Hey, Dad.

4

INT. FRANK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

4

Frank sits at one end of the table. His wife, SOPHIE (32), sits at the opposite end. Their son, CHARLIE (8), sits between them.

The homework has been replaced with a late dinner. The BOTTLE OF WINE sits in the center of the table.

Frank drains his glass and pours another. Sophie's smiling, still nursing her first glass.

SOPHIE

So, Frank. You gonna tell us how the interview went?

FRANK

I got the job.

SOPHIE

(excited)

Yeah?

FRANK

(flat)

Yeah.

She looks at the wine bottle.

SOPHIE

I'm guessing it pays better than Jamison's.

FRANK

It pays plenty.

SOPHIE

What kind of work is it?

Frank doesn't answer. He focuses on his food, avoiding eye contact. Sophie narrows her eyes.

(CONTINUED)

Charlie senses the change in mood at the table.

SOPHIE (cont'd)
Frank? What kind of-

FRANK
I don't know, Sophie... reclamation
or something.

Frank looks up for the first time. Sophie's asking for more.
He wants to be honest with her, but he can't.

FRANK (cont'd)
It pays good. That's what matters.

She's been married to him long enough to know when he's
hiding something.

SOPHIE
Tell me what your gonna be doing,
Frank.

FRANK
(defensive)
I'm gonna be taking care of you and
Charlie. I'm gonna be taking care
of this family.

Sensing the pending argument, Charlie steps in.

CHARLIE
I made a new friend today, Dad.

FRANK
(ignoring Charlie)
Work ain't exactly easy to come by,
you know. And the bill's ain't
gonna pay themselves.

CHARLIE
His name's Pete. He lives up on
four.

SOPHIE
Frank-

FRANK
(still ignoring Charlie)
I hate living in this shithole. We
deserve better. If I can do
something to get us out of here...

(CONTINUED)

CHARLIE

(quietly)

He says he's got a treasure map.

Sophie's been here before. Another fight over money. She wants to yell and scream and go at it. Instead, her eyes fixed on Frank, she turns the volume down.

SOPHIE

(firm)

Charlie, go to your room.

CHARLIE

But mom-

SOPHIE

Now, Charlie.

Charlie stands, gives his parents a "please don't do this" look, then mopes away.

The sound of Charlie's door closing down the hall echoes in the stillness.

Sophie continues to stare, defiant, but not angry.

SOPHIE (cont'd)

I need you to tell me that this job doesn't involve anything illegal.

Frank returns her gaze, but doesn't answer.

SOPHIE (cont'd)

Jesus, Frank-

FRANK

I ain't hurting nobody, Sophie. I'm just helping a guy get around some red tape, that's all.

SOPHIE

What are you thinking, Frank? Huh? Is this a one-time deal?

FRANK

I don't know.

SOPHIE

What if something happens to you? What if somebody does get hurt?

Frank doesn't want to have this conversation.

(CONTINUED)

FRANK

I gotta go.

He stands and walks away from the table. Sophie moves as if to say something, but she doesn't know what.

With a soft SLAM of the front door, Frank leaves Sophie at the table, alone.

5 EXT. ABANDONED APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT 5

Frank stares up at the empty building. In one hand, the MAP. In his other hand, a RED GAS CAN.

Frank moves toward the building.

6 INT. ABANDONED APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT 6

Frank steps over the CLUTTER and GARBAGE of a building that hasn't seen an inhabitant in years.

He stops and listens. Silence.

FRANK

Hello?

No answer. Good. Just making sure.

Frank finds a load-bearing wall and pounds on it. This is as good a place as any.

He douses the wall in GASOLINE, then places the gas can and map where they're sure to be destroyed by the fire.

One final look around the room, then Frank produces a small BOX OF WOODEN MATCHES. He strikes one and watches it burn.

Last chance, Frank. You in or out?

He tosses the match on the floor. His face GLOWS ORANGE as the fire comes to life.

7 EXT. PAY PHONE - NIGHT 7

Frank drops in a few coins, dials a number, then waits for an answer. Someone picks up.

COUNCILMAN (O.S.)

Yes?

(CONTINUED)

FRANK

It's done.

COUNCILMAN (O.S.)

Impressive. Much quicker than I expected. If you're chomping at the bit for another opportunity, perhaps we could meet tomorrow evening to discuss. Same place?

FRANK

Sure.

The phone clicks off. Frank just stands there, holding the receiver in his hand.

8 EXT. SIDEWALK - NIGHT 8

Frank doesn't go home. Instead, he spends the night roaming the streets, thinking.

He walks until the sun comes up.

9 INT. FRANK'S APARTMENT - MORNING 9

Frank creeps into his apartment, trying not to make noise. Not that it matters.

Sophie is seated at the table, waiting with TWO CUPS of coffee.

SOPHIE

Where've you been, Frank?

FRANK

Work.

SOPHIE

All night?

FRANK

I needed some time to think.

Silence.

Sophie stands and walks to face her husband.

SOPHIE

You can get another job.

(CONTINUED)

FRANK

We're barely keeping up.

SOPHIE

We can cut back.

FRANK

Where, Sophie? Look around. Where
can we cut back?

Her patience is stretched thin, but she's not ready to give up. She steps closer and wraps her arms around his waist.

SOPHIE

We've been through tougher times.
Maybe-

An alarmed look crosses her face. She pulls away.

At first, he doesn't understand the sudden change, or why she's staring at his jacket.

Then he gets it. No point trying to lie about it.

He pulls out the GUN and lays it on the table.

Sophie covers her mouth with her hands. She looks at Frank with a mix of shame and disbelief. She turns to walk away from him, and stops.

Charlie is standing there, his eyes glued to the gun.

Frank puts the gun back in his pocket, but he's knows it's too late to try hiding it from either of them.

Sophie doesn't know what to say.

Frank squats down.

FRANK

Come here, Charlie.

Charlie obeys, moving cautiously.

Frank puts a hands on his son's shoulder.

FRANK (cont'd)

I have to carry that around for my
new job. If somebody tries to hurt
me, I use it to scare them away.

(CONTINUED)

CHARLIE
Are there bullets in it?

Frank hesitates.

FRANK
I ain't ever gonna use it. And I'm
the only one here who's ever gonna
touch it. Understand?

Charlie nods. Frank stands up.

FRANK (cont'd)
I gotta get some rest. I'm working
again tonight.

He walks out of the room. Sophie pulls her son close.

10 INT. FRANK'S BEDROOM - MORNING 10

Frank opens his closet door and pulls down a LOCK BOX. He fishes his keys out of his jacket pocket and unlocks it.

The box contains some CASH, and a stack of PICTURES. The picture on the top is of a younger Frank and Sophie holding a newborn baby.

Frank places the BROWN ENVELOPE and the GUN in the lock box before closing it again.

11 INT. PARKING GARAGE - NIGHT 11

Frank's back in the same parking garage. The councilman's car rolls up. This time, he doesn't get out.

Frank walks up to the car as the councilman rolls down his window. He hands Frank another MAP with a KEY taped to it.

Frank pulls off the key, then looks at the map and frowns.

FRANK
This is my building.

The councilman smiles.

FRANK (cont'd)
You gotta be crazy if you think I'm
gonna torch my own building. I live
there. With my family.

(CONTINUED)

COUNCILMAN

I know.

Not what Frank was expecting to hear.

COUNCILMAN (cont'd)

There's a man in that building who's done work for me in the past. He's considering a discussion with the police department. I need you to make sure that doesn't happen.

FRANK

I told you I ain't hurting nobody.

COUNCILMAN

I told you I wouldn't ask. I need you to make sure he doesn't talk. How you choose to accomplish that is entirely up to you.

FRANK

Look. Maybe I ain't the best guy for the job-

COUNCILMAN

I think Sophie would disagree.

Frank freezes in place, ice in his veins.

COUNCILMAN (cont'd)

You work hard to take care of your family, Frank. To provide for Sophie and little Charlie. I can't imagine how worried they would be if you didn't come home. If you were... unable to come home.

Frank bites his tongue, glaring at the councilman.

COUNCILMAN (cont'd)

Even worse, I'd hate to see you come home to an empty apartment.

The unspoken threat hangs in the air.

FRANK

What's the guy's name?

COUNCILMAN

Apartment 405. You don't need to know his name.

The councilman tosses another BROWN ENVELOPE at Frank.

(CONTINUED)

COUNCILMAN (cont'd)
Buy your family something nice.

The councilman signals his driver to go.

Frank absently rubs the KEY to apartment 405 between his fingers as he watches the car drive away.

12 INT. CHARLIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

12

Charlie's room is sparse. Not a lot of toys or gadgets, but he does have a DESK and a few BOOKS scattered about.

A PICTURE of Charlie with his mom and dad takes a position of prominence on his desk.

Charlie lies on his bed, reading a comic book. There's a TAP-TAP-TAP at his window.

He turns to see a BOY about his age on the fire escape.

CHARLIE

Pete!

Charlie jumps up and opens the window.

Pete holds up a colorful MAP of shapes and dotted lines, written in crayon.

PETE

Ready for that treasure hunt?

CHARLIE

Yeah. Mom's asleep, and Dad's not home yet. How much money do you suppose there is?

PETE

I don't know. Probably millions. You get half and I get half, deal?

CHARLIE

Deal.

PETE

I'm buying a PS3 with my half. What're you doing with yours?

CHARLIE

I'm thinking about giving it to my dad. Mom doesn't like his new job. If I give him the money, then he won't have to work there anymore.

(CONTINUED)

Pete nods, contemplative.

PETE
I'm still buying a PS3.

CHARLIE
What are you bringing?

PETE
I have a flashlight. Plus this, in
case we run into any bad guys.

He holds up a pocket knife.

PETE (cont'd)
Do you wanna bring anything?

Charlie considers for a moment. Then his eyes light up.

13 EXT. FRANK'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT 13

Frank stands on the sidewalk, staring up at his building.

He checks the map again. He's just stalling, though. He
doesn't want to do this.

He looks at a fourth floor window and sees the light BLINK
out. That's his man, turning in for the night.

Dragging his feet, Frank goes inside.

14 INT. FRANK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT 14

Frank walks in quietly and listens in the darkness.
Everyone's asleep.

Good.

15 INT. FRANK'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 15

Frank reaches for his lock box. Sophie stirs, but doesn't
wake.

Frank gingerly turns the key and unlocks the box.

There's the GUN, right where he left it.

He slips the gun in his pocket, returns the lock box to the
closet, and sneaks out of the bedroom.

Sophie cries silently into her pillow, still pretending to be asleep.

16 INT. FRANK'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT 16

Frank sneaks up the stairs. He's sweating, nervous.

He looks back down the stairs, in the direction of his apartment. The look on his face is almost apologetic.

He climbs the stairs to the fourth floor. He creeps by each door... 401... 402... 403... 404...

Apartment 405.

He takes a deep, trembling breath. He pulls out the key and slips it into the lock, turning it slowly.

CLICK.

He nudges the door open.

17 INT. APARTMENT 405 - NIGHT 17

The place is pitch black, but the floor plan is the same as his apartment. Makes it easy for him to find the bedroom.

Frank moves quietly, but the sound of his POUNDING HEART thunders in his ears. He wipes sweat from his brow.

Frank stops outside the bedroom door.

This is it, Frank. You do this, there's no turning back.

He opens the door.

A MAN stands at the foot of the bed. He's wearing boxers, a yellowing undershirt, and a dirty blue bathrobe. He's holding his arms up, palms out.

MR. 405

Please, man. Don't do this. I've got a kid.

CHARLIE (O.S.)

Dad?

Frank starts, surprised. He turns his head, but he keeps the gun trained on Mr. 405.

Charlie and Pete stand just a few feet away. Pete's clutching his TREASURE MAP in one hand, terrified.

(CONTINUED)

In Charlie's hand, the PICTURE from his desk.

FRANK

Charlie, what are you doing here?

CHARLIE

We're hunting for treasure. (beat)
Is Pete's dad trying to hurt you?

Frank looks back to Mr. 405, just in time to see that the other man has produced a GUN. He's pointing it at Frank.

The world EXPLODES as both men fire.

Time slows down for Frank as he falls to the floor. Before he closes his eyes, he sees Charlie running toward him, crying for his dad.

18 INT. FRANK'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

18

Police bustle around Frank's apartment. An OFFICER sits at the table with Sophie, asking her questions. RED AND BLUE lights play against the window from the street below.

Sophie just stares out the OPEN DOOR, her eyes puffy and red. She's all cried out. She sees an EMT push one GURNEY past, laden with a BODY BAG, then another.

Pete and Charlie sit on the couch, dazed, tired, and in shock. The news is playing on the TELEVISION.

The familiar face of the councilman smiles his politician's smile at the camera.

COUNCILMAN

It's no secret that the city is struggling. In this economy, desperate circumstances often lead to desperate actions, hence the rising crime rate. It's my sincere belief that our urban reclamation project will counter the recession, and in time, lower the crime rate. Ultimately, we'll enable our citizens to enjoy happier, safer, more satisfying lives.

Pete's still clinging to his TREASURE MAP, Charlie to his FAMILY PHOTO.

FADE TO BLACK