

ROADKILL

Written by
Mark Souza

Based on the short story "Roadkill"

17611 150th St. S.E.
Monroe, WA 98272
(425) 299-3836
souza.writes@gmail.com

FADE IN:

EXT. TRUCK STOP, WINSLOW ARIZONA - NIGHT

HARLAN THOMAS, late thirties, yawns as he fills his car with gas. His eyes shift from the dollars ticking off on the pump to the last pink glow of light on the horizon.

Behind him a voice calls out.

TED (O.S.)
That's quite a dent.

Harlan startles and spins, nozzle still in hand, and nearly sprays his shoes.

TED, an athletic looking man in shorts and a tee-shirt crouches near the right fender of Harlan's car. He's well tanned, bears the scruffy beginnings of a beard, and looks to be about the same age as Harlan.

Harlan glances around the gas station for cars. There aren't any, other than his. The stranger must be hoofing it.

HARLAN
Make a little noise next time. You
nearly scared the life out of me.

Ted flashes a friendly smile.

He stands and extends his hand.

TED
The name is Ted.

Harlan shake Ted's hand.

HARLAN
Harlan.

TED
Every dent has a story. Am I right?

Harlan looks at his fender and nods.

HARLAN
I suppose you are.

Harlan sizes Ted up, already sure what he wants. He notices the wedding band on his finger.

TED
Where you headed, Harlan?

HARLAN
L.A. Need a ride?

TED
Thanks, I'd be much obliged.

HARLAN
Maybe you can help me stay awake.

Ted snickers as he climbs in.

TED
I guarantee it.

INT. HARLAN'S CAR - LATER

Traffic on the highway is sparse. The lights of civilization slide behind them like the present becoming the past.

TED
What's in L.A.?

HARLAN
Hmm?

TED
Why are you going to L.A.?

HARLAN
Wife and daughter live there. Uh, ex-wife I guess. Still have trouble getting used to that.

TED
Divorced, huh? How long?

Harlan squints as he tries to recall.

HARLAN
Lizzy's thirteen... That makes it seven years now. Wow, where does the time go?

Ted points to a photo clipped to Harlan's sun visor. A girl in black tights stands on point at a ballet bar, a determined look on her face.

TED
That her?

HARLAN

Yup. She's pretty serious about her ballet. Her mother thinks she might be going places.

TED

See her much?

Harlan sighs.

HARLAN

Couple times a year. The dance thing keeps her pretty busy. How about you? Any family?

Ted turns away and stares out the passenger window. At first he doesn't speak. After a few moments:

TED

Can we talk about something else?

Harlan senses fresh scars and picks a safer topic.

HARLAN

How do you make a living, Ted?

TED

I'm a cop.

Harlan studies Ted a moment.

HARLAN

Really?

Ted turns and glares.

HARLAN (CONT'D)

Don't take this the wrong way, but you don't look like a cop. I pegged you for a drifter.

Ted digs out his wallet and flashes a badge.

TED

I work undercover. If I look like a cop, then I'm not doing my job.

He stuffs his wallet back into his pocket.

TED (CONT'D)

So what's your story?

HARLAN

You mean what do I do for a living?

The laugh lines bracketing Ted's eyes deepen.

TED

No, what happened to your fender?
Every dent has a story, remember?

HARLAN

That.

(chuckles)

Wife ran into a light stanchion at
the mall.

Ted gives Harlan a quizzical look.

TED

You remarried?

HARLAN

What?

TED

Did you remarry after your divorce?

HARLAN

Hell no! Once bitten, twice shy.

Ted's expression turns grim.

TED

Then you're lying to me.

Harlan does a double take before turning his attention back
to the road.

TED (CONT'D)

I have a built in lie detector,
Harlan. It comes with the job.
People lie to me every day. You
said your wife wrecked your car.
But you've been divorced seven
years and this car is only four
years old. It's just bad math. Am I
right?

Harlan tightens his grip on the steering wheel, but doesn't
answer.

TED (CONT'D)

Try again, and don't lie this time.
I'll know if you do.

HARLAN

Why the third degree?

The muscles under Ted's cheeks strum.

TED

A jogger was hit and killed along
this stretch of road last month.

HARLAN

You accusing me?

TED

I'm just looking for the truth.

Harlan stares out at the darkness beyond his headlights. He glances over at Ted who stares back at him waiting for an answer.

HARLAN

I hit a deer.

TED

(skeptically)
A deer?

Harlan nods.

FLASHBACK: HARLAN'S STORY

Headlights track the road as Harlan's car navigates a curve.

TED (O.S.) (CONT'D)

How did that happen? You nod off,
drift off the road and hit
something you assumed was a deer?

Something unidentifiable moves just beyond Harlan's low beams.

HARLAN (O.S.)

No, nothing like that. This doe
just appeared in my headlights. I
tried to swerve, but it was too
late.

TED (O.S.)

You sure it was a deer?

Near the edge of the headlights stands a deer.

The image shifts and for a fraction of a second it's a jogger.

Then a deer again.

The headlights close in.

HARLAN (O.S.)
What's that supposed to mean?

TED (O.S.)
It was dark. You were tired. Maybe
you only thought it was a deer.
Maybe it was something else.

Then it's a jogger. A thud rocks the car.

HARLAN (O.S.)
It was a deer!

TED (O.S.)
Then why lie to me? People hit deer
all the time. It's no big deal. But
you're still covering something up.
Why?

The tail lights brighten.

The car squeals to a stop.

The backing lights come on.

The car backs onto the shoulder.

HARLAN (O.S.)
It's not that simple.

TED (O.S.)
No? Then explain it to me.

Harlan climbs out from the driver's side.

HARLAN (O.S.)
The damn thing didn't die right
away. I wanted to get it off the
road so it wouldn't cause an
accident, but it was kicking and
thrashing. I couldn't get near it.
So I...

He drifts to the back of his car and opens the trunk, pulls
out a tire iron, and trudges to where the deer thrashes.

RETURN TO SCENE

HARLAN (CONT'D)
I beat it to death with a tire
iron.

TED

I suppose I could talk to the local road crew to corroborate your story. See if they remember picking a deer carcass off that stretch of road.

Harlan still looks disturbed. He faces Ted and swallows hard.

HARLAN

They won't. I didn't leave it. I... I tossed it in my trunk and dressed it out when I got home.

Ted stares at Harlan, his expression at first incredulous, slowly registers his disappointment.

TED

Congratulations. My lie detector finally stopped chirping.

HARLAN

Am I in trouble for poaching or something?

Ted eases back in his seat.

TED

I'm no game warden. I could care less what you have in your freezer. Your secret is safe with me.

Harlan focuses his attention on the road. Silence stretches uncomfortably between them.

Ahead, an oasis of light from a roadside truck stop fractures the darkness.

A neon sign on one side of the main building reads "CAFE".

TED (CONT'D)

Go ahead and pull in here. They have the best cherry pie in Arizona.

Harlan turns into the lot and parks near the door of the cafe.

EXT./INT. CAFE - CONTINUOUS

Harlan and Ted climb from the car.

Harlan leads the way.

INSIDE

A bell on the door chimes as he enters.

Booths with vinyl covered banquettes. 1960's decor. Country music plays from a jukebox. Sparse crowd.

He turns back and Ted isn't with him.

A waitress greets him and seats him by the window.

She hands him a menu.

WAITRESS

Can I start you off with coffee?
You look like you could use some.

Harlan nods and she leaves.

He turns his attention outside.

Ted wanders pump to pump greeting cars as they pull in.

Ted strikes up a conversation with a trucker refueling his rig.

Harlan notices the truck's dented front fender.

The driver smiles and nods and Ted climbs into the cab.

HARLAN

(to himself)
Every dent has a story. Poor
bastard.

WAITRESS

What was that?

A startled Harlan, looks up at her.

HARLAN

Nothing.

WAITRESS

What looks good to you?

He hands the menu back.

HARLAN

On second thought, could I get that
coffee to go? I still have a long
drive ahead of me.

WAITRESS

Sure thing.

He follows the waitress to register.

She pours coffee into a Styrofoam cup and rings him up.

His attention drifts to a bulletin board behind the counter.

In the middle, between notices for lost dogs and pick-up trucks for sale, is a Xeroxed image of Ted.

Above Ted's face are the words:

\$20,000 REWARD FOR INFORMATION ON THE HIT AND RUN DEATH OF
OFFICER TED SCHREYER

The waitress follows his gaze.

WAITRESS (CONT'D)

Oh, that was so sad. Nicest guy in
the world. Whoever did it left him
to die beside the road like some
animal.

FADE OUT.