

TETCH

Based on
Excerpt from novel
Rituals of Solace

GENRE: Drama, Proof of Concept

LOGLINE:

At a confluence of life crises, a young man returns home to attend the funeral of an uncle who raised him after his parents died, reacquaints with some he left behind, and learns the circumstances that shaped the behavior of a drunken relative who disrupts the mourning.

FADE IN

1 EXT./INT. AUTOMOBILE - DAY 1

Late afternoon, an automobile passes along a rural road through fields of dead cornstalks interspersed with fields of cotton heavy with bolls ready to harvest.

DRIVER

BRAD MCDERMOTT is deeply distracted. He occasionally glances at a piece of white paper, folded into a neat three inch square lying on the passenger seat beside him.

2 INT. ART STUDIO - DAY 2

MICHELLE MCDERMOTT, Brad's soon-to-be ex-wife, gazes out a window. She moves to a table, sits and begins to write on a plain white piece of paper, reading the words V.O.

MICHELLE V.O.

Dear Brad,
We've never shared difficult things well. So I can't describe this hole in my heart. But I can't pretend it will change nor face the rest of my life with it. I know you love me and though it will be hard to believe, I love you. Somehow that's not enough...

3 EXT. AUTOMOBILE - DAY 3

Brad turns from the road onto a dirt drive leading to his destination, the McCoy Home - a creole-style farm house nestled among cornfields and pastures.

DRIVER'S SIDE DOOR

Brad exits, stretches then walks toward the front porch. Eight MOURNERS from the community seated on lawn furniture and on the porch watch his approach. At the steps to the porch, an elderly man, STOKELY MCCOY, rises from a rocking chair, smiles, and extends a palsied hand in greeting.

STOKELY

Go on in, boy. Believe they're
'spectin' you. Good to see ya
again, been a while...

Bradley shakes the proffered hand.

BRAD

Thanks, Stokes. Nice to see you're
still kicking. Too bad Sattie
ain't.

Stokely pauses, reflecting.

STOKELY

Reckon we'll all miss Sattie. Ain't
many made in his mold no more. Go
on in and say your howdies. When it
gets too thick, come on back out.
We'll sit and talk for a spell.

Brad smiles, edges around and enters the house through a screen door behind Stokely.

4 INT. MCCOY HOME - SAME TIME

4

Brad pauses for his sight to adjust. INETTA, a short elderly woman, startles him from the gloom.

INETTA

Bradley, son, we're so glad you
could come. Are you hungry? There's
a passel o' food in the kitchen.

BRAD

No, Aunt Inetta, had a late lunch
on the way in.

INETTA

Why child it's nigh on to dark. You
must be hungry. Won't you go fix
yourself a plate?

Inetta studies Brad for a moment, then hooks her fleshy arm
around his and ushers him toward the kitchen.

INETTA (CONT'D)

Now I won't hear of it. Just march
yourself in there and don't be shy.

Brad balks.

BRAD

I really wanted to see Aunt Minnie
Ree. Where is she?

Inetta persists.

INETTA

She's upstairs resting. This has
been terrible hard on her and she's
finally dropped off to sleep.
She'll be happy to see you later.

KITCHEN

The kitchen table and counter tops are laden with a variety
of food. Inetta melts back into the hallway. Brad collects a
plate and utensils then begins a circuit, spooning on small
portions. Distractedly, he reads names on labels on the
dishes that identify the contributors. A SLOW-MOVING ELDER
delays his progress. Murmurs of conversation from an
adjoining parlor attract his attention.

PARLOR

Brad peruses the mourners. RACHEL PRESLEY, an attractive blond woman, his high school sweetheart, catches his eye. He watches her for a moment before sauntering in her direction. At a few steps away, their eyes meet, she smiles.

BRAD

Hi, uh, how've you been? Uh, you're looking good. Uh...

RACHEL

You always were the one to turn a girl's head.

Rachel laughs, Brad ducks his head. He places the plate on a side table beside a telephone and jams his hands in his pockets.

BRAD

So many years later but almost like the day we met...

RACHEL

I hope you're not uncomfortable. I'll leave.

BRAD

No, no, just...

RACHEL

I knew you would come. He meant so much.

BRAD

Wouldn't have gotten along after my folks passed if not for him and Minnie Ree.

RACHEL

Is that man still in prison?

BRAD

Not for long enough, but no. Plea bargain for vehicular homicide while DUI gave him a chance at parole.

RACHEL

Sorry.

BRAD

Well, nothing else to be done.

RACHEL

What have you been up to over these years?

BRAD

Casual pleasantries or bloody details?

RACHEL

You decide.

BRAD

Maybe we could get a beer or coffee before I leave.

RACHEL

Minnie Ree said you made the big time in Atlanta, big house, gorgeous wife, expensive car, country club and exotic vacations. Sound right?

BRAD

You can always count on the Minnie Ree telegraph. Mostly right, largely past tense.

Rachel looks puzzled.

BRAD (CONT'D)

Still have the car, at least for now.

Brad shrugs and grins. They laugh.

BRAD (CONT'D)

So, not exactly a bowl of cherries for you?

RACHEL

Your leaving was hard...I guess I...well, water under the bridge.

BRAD

Kind of late for sorry. Heard you didn't grieve too long.

Rachel flashes.

RACHEL

It was a year before Frank. I needed somebody who would stay.

BRAD

Minnie said he left.

RACHEL

But not before Frank Jr. and Tiffany. Said he wanted them.

BRAD

You don't sound bitter.

RACHEL

I've cussed him many times for making me do it alone but they're precious, wouldn't trade them for anything. You and, Michelle, was it, have any?

BRAD

None, one less complication.

RACHEL

Your dinner has gotten cold and
I've got to pick up the kids.

Rachel tears a piece of paper from a notepad near Brad's plate and scribbles on it.

BRAD

Just getting Inetta off my back.
The dogs will eat well tonight.

RACHEL

Call me.

She hands Brad the paper, kisses his cheek, then leaves. Brad touches his cheek as he watches her exit.

5 INT. ART STUDIO - DAY

5

Michelle continues her letter.

MICHELLE V.O.

The last thing in the world I want
is to hurt you. Please forgive me.
Once I thought us yin and yang but
there's only simmering differences,
no resolution...

6 INT. MCCOY HOME, MINNIE REE'S BEDROOM - DAY

6

MINNIE REE MCCOY lies listlessly on her bed. A knock sounds on the door, Brad enters, walks to the side of the bed, sits and takes her hand. She brightens and sits up. They embrace.

MINNIE REE

I didn't get to say goodbye. Every
night, last thing for sixty years,
we kissed.

She weeps.

MINNIE REE (CONT'D)

He went to bed, fell asleep
early...I didn't want to wake
him...

BRAD

Sattie knew you loved him.

MINNIE REE

Said down at Fosters he didn't feel
no pain, like a balloon busted
inside and he just bled away. None
of us knowed he had something like
that...

BRAD

He was out plowing when you and I
spoke a few weeks ago.

MINNIE REE

Don't seem right. He was a fine man
and the good Lord should'a took
others afore him. But son, take my
lesson to heart. If you love
someone, don't go to sleep without
a kiss and tellin'em.

Minnie Ree collapses back onto the bed, covers her eyes with
a hand. Brad stands to leave.

BRAD

Get some rest. I'll be just
downstairs.

Minnie Ree nods behind her hand. Brad watches for a moment
then exits.

STAIRWAY LEADING FROM BEDROOM TO FIRST FLOOR

Brad starts down the stairs. Conversational murmurs grow
louder as he reaches the bottom. Mourners flood from the
parlor toward the front door. He joins.

7 EXT. MCCOY HOME - SAME TIME

7

Brad and the mourners emerge onto the front porch. From the drive comes the sound of a motor revving loudly, tires squalling. The group watches anxiously for the vehicle's arrival. Dusk is arriving rapidly.

DRIVEWAY

Traveling way too fast, the car fishtails as it enters the yard.

INTERIOR CAR

TETCH, the driver, over-corrects.

YARD

A cloud of sandy dust billows out behind the vehicle. Just before plowing into a group of parked cars, it veers away but clips the end of one and ricochets off to center a huge, old oak.

NEAR HOUSE

Brad and the mourners start en masse toward the mangled heap. Dusk is arriving rapidly.

INTERIOR CAR

Tetch slumps over the wheel, car horn blaring, sad country song playing full volume on the radio.

8 EXT./INT. CAR - SAME TIME

8

The group arrives, stares at Tetch. He leans back from the steering wheel, bleeding from a gash on his forehead.

Stokely arrives with a lantern. Empty beer cans are piled beside Tetch and on the floor. Brenda Lee wails, "I'm sorry...so sorry...".

TETCH

Ain't none of y'all gonna help me
outta this thing?

MOURNER 1

Turn off the radio, Tetch. We can
hardly hear you.

Tetch dims the music. He props back against the headrest and closes his eyes. Blood from his wound forms a sticky, ghoulish, mask.

MOURNER 2

Tetch, we called the ambulance.
Take'em twenty minutes to get here.
The rescue folks was down at the
café.

TETCH

Pleeeaaassee don't let me die out
here, y'all. Didn't mean no harm.

The group shifts uneasily on their feet. A few meander toward the house.

TETCH (CONT'D)

I swear I didn't...poor
Sattie...poor old Sattie. Didn't
mean...I swear...

MOURNER 2

Stay with us, Tetch. Ambulance will
get here soon, they'll hep you.
Won't be long.

TETCH

Y'all goin' let me die out here?
I'm jus' a drinkin' man, didn't
mean no harm. Can't feel my legs,
y'all, can't see. Hep me, hep me...

MOURNER 1

Think I hear'em off in the distance
now. Just sit still. They're gonna
have to cut you out, the doors are
jammed tight.

TETCH

Don't care 'bout ole Tetch cause
he's a drunk. What I ever done to
any y'all, huh? Fuck all y'all for
lettin' me die out here. You can
all go to hell!

MOURNER 1

No need for that kinda talk, Tetch!
Ain't Christian.

TETCH

I'm sorry y'all. Jus' no good for
nothin'. Better if I was stretched
out down at Foster's 'stead of
Sattie.

Tetch begins to weep, escalating into wracking, whole-body,
sobs. Offended and disgusted, the group leaves except for
Brad and Stokely. An ambulance arrives.

AMBULANCE

Paramedics REEDY WINTERS and ELWOOD JOHNSON, boil out of the
doors. Reedy begins to glove up.

REEDY

How's he seem?

STOKELY

Got a nasty gash on the noggin.
Been talkin' to us though. Y'all
bring them big ole pinchers? Them
doors is jammed shut.

Reedy stops gloving and studies the wreck. Tetch seems asleep
or unconscious.

REEDY

We did but I know a trick or two to
keep from using them.

Reedy, a large, strong, man, grabs the driver's door handle
and yanks it open with a mighty heave then resumes gloving.
The commotion rouses Tetch.

TETCH

That you, Reedy?

REEDY

Yeah, it's me, Tetch.

TETCH

Ain't seen you since my wreck out
on the Redlands Road.

REEDY

Thought you'd gone off the bottle.
What happened?

TETCH

First one thing, then the other.
Hard for a drinking man to stay
dry.

Reedy mops blood from Tetch's wound with gauze pads and
saline then applies antibiotic and a pressure bandage.

REEDY

Don't look like nothin' serious.
Won't know till they make x-rays.

TETCH

Make sure you get them boys outta'
the back now...

Reedy looks past Tetch at the piles of beer cans in the rear seat.

REEDY

Ain't nobody back there, Tetch.

TETCH

Sure there is...Marty and Willis.

Reedy puts a neck brace on Tetch. With Elwood's assistance, they move him onto a gurney.

TETCH (CONT'D)

Who you think's working the
'mergency room tonight? Careful,
careful, don't bounce me around
like last time you was puttin' me
on your buggy.

REEDY

You was fifteen feet down in that
ditch and the sides was real steep!
Reckon we coulda jus' left you down
there.

TETCH

You got them boys out, right?

REEDY

Yeah, Tetch, they're okay.

Reedy and Elwood wheel the gurney to the ambulance. Brad and Stokely follow. Stokely peers in as Elwood closes the back double doors.

STOKELY

Tetch, we'll check on you in the
morning.

Tetch raises one hand and gives a thumbs up. The ambulance departs, revolving lights fading into the night. Brad douses the one operational headlight on the wreck and turns off the radio. Stokely shifts the lantern to his other hand, leans on his walking stick and the two start toward the house.

BRAD

Tetch might have gotten worse since I've been gone, what with that squalling fit. But I noticed you weren't leaving until they took him.

STOKELY

Son, ain't much more pitiful than a drunk on a cryin' jag. But I reckon all God's creatures got a purpose. 'Sides, Tetch ain't always been this way and he's flesh. Most of the kin won't claim him but you never turn your back on blood. Never.

9 EXT. REAR PORCH MCCOY HOME - NIGHT

9

Stokely and Brad settle into a couple of large rocking chairs. Ceiling fans rotate overhead. Crickets chirp.

BRAD

Stokes, tell me about Tetch before the bottle. Who is Marty and Willis?

Stokely digs his old meerschaum pipe from his overall chest pocket and clinches it between his teeth before answering.

STOKELY

Tetch grewed up a good boy. Name wuz Louis then, didn't drink nor smoke. Went to Sunday School, sung in the choir...

He draws on the empty pipe twice.

STOKELY (CONT'D)

Played baseball like you. Purdy good at it. Hard worker, didn't quit the fields till dark, ever day 'cept Sunday.

BRAD

What happened?

STOKELY

Graduated high school 'bout '67. Got a govment notice he had to go help with a fight cross the water. Everbody feared he wouldn't make it back. Fooled'em. Weren't Louis no more when he come back. No sir, weren't Louis...

BRAD

Go on...

STOKELY

Only told me once how things wuz. Close to hell on earth as a livin' man might see. Reckon I'll carry it to the grave.

10

EXT. SOUTHEAST VIETNAM JUNGLE - NIGHT - FLASH BACK

10

Louis, WILLIS and MARTY, on break from patrol, recline against a tree, smoking.

MARTY

Last night with you boys...ain't gonna miss it neither. Freedom bird tomorrow, layin' in sweet Janie's arms by Friday.

WILLIS

You can shove that short timer's
stick up your ass.

(laughs)

Gonna have to run some Jody off
when you get back anyways.

MARTY

Fuck you, lifer.

WILLIS

Nope, finally got my orders, FIGMO,
baby! I'm short!

LOUIS

You bastards gonna leave me with
some fucking new guys and a
shake'n'bake when First cycles out?

(beat)

Yeah, Willis? How long?

WILLIS

Twenty days...and I'll be humpin'
it to the nearest LZ.

LOUIS

Shit! I'm a long ways out.

MARTY

Them cherries got to have old boots
show'em how to wipe their ass,
Louis. Hell, you done your up, just
ghost on out.

WILLIS

Yeah, baby, get the brown bar to
pogue your ass. John Wayneing just
boo coo dinky dau.

LOUIS

Hell no. Shamin' is for you two
shit birds. I'll make it. Out in
ninety.

FIRST SERGEANT passes the three.

FIRST SERGEANT

On your feet soldiers. Movin' in
five. DX those smokes and grab a
hat. Be alert, expect contact.

The three watch First Sergeant walk away, rise, shoulder
their packs and pick up their weapons.

LOUIS

You two boonie rats don't be diddy
boppin' jus' 'cause you're headed
back to the WORLD.

Willis steps away from the tree first. Marty follows.
Suddenly the sickening, metallic, clink of the arming
mechanism for a Bouncing Betty anti-personnel mine sounds
from beneath Marty's foot. He jerks his foot back, launching
the exploding charge canister.

MARTY

Betty!

The night lights up. Percussion knocks Louis to the ground.
Further up the line troops fire wildly into the bush.

LOUIS

Shell shocked, Louis crawls forward. He finds Marty, torso
shredded. The cacophony of conflict fades to silence for
Louis.

LOUIS

Marty!

MARTY

Jus' hours, Louis...

LOUIS

Medic! Medic! Hold on Marty, you'll
be okay...syrette's on the way.

MARTY

Janie...

Tears spring from Louis' eyes as he stares at Marty's lifeless body. He belly crawls forward, searching for Willis. In a deep hole at the edge of the trail, Willis lies impaled on punji sticks.

WILLIS

FIGMO...make it back to the WORLD
for me, Louis?

Willis tries futilely to sit up. Light leaves his eyes.

LOUIS

Lay chilly, man. We'll...

A MEDIC arrives, too late.

MEDIC

Sorry about your buddies, man.

Lengthy pause.

LOUIS

Don't mean nothin'.

The Medic stares at him for a moment then scrambles off. Suddenly Louis leaps to his feet and blindly empties a clip from his M-16 into the bush. First Sergeant races up.

FIRST SERGEANT

Stand down, Soldier!

First Sergeant notices the bodies of Marty and Willis then places a hand on Louis' shoulder.

FIRST SERGEANT (CONT'D)

We'll get'em on the first bird out,
son. But now we gotta get back in
the ball game.

First Sergeant leaves. Louis crumbles to his knees.

11 EXT. REAR PORCH MCCOY HOME - NIGHT - RETURN TO PRESENT 11

Stokely pulls on the meerschaum again. Brad is entranced.

STOKELY

As you might imagine, Louis wanted revenge. Weren't too long afore he got his chance...

12 EXT. SOUTHEAST VIETNAM JUNGLE, CHU LI PROVINCE - DAY - FLASHBACK

First Sergeant and Louis are behind cover at the edge of a clearing watching the entrance to an enemy tunnel.

FIRST SERGEANT

You see the entrance, over there?

LOUIS

No where?

FIRST SERGEANT

Thirty yards out, between us and that fake termite mound.

LOUIS

Fake?

FIRST SERGEANT

Yeah, disguises a ventilation hole.

LOUIS

Yeah.

FIRST SERGEANT

Stay here, eyes on. I'm flanking with some of the squad. Got a tunnel rat comin' up from the rear but it'll take a little while. Charlie shows, engage. We'll come runnin'.

Louis nods understanding. First Sergeant creeps away. Time passes, almost lulling Louis to sleep. Suddenly, there is movement at the entrance.

TUNNEL ENTRANCE

A VIET CONG (VC) emerges stealthily into the barrel of Louis' 45 Caliber. Louis pulls the trigger, VC brains splatter from the back of his skull. Another VC emerges from the tunnel, bayonet fixed. Louis' pistol jams but he parries the VC's thrust and unsheathes his K-Bar knife. Hand to hand, back and forth. The VC over extends himself with a thrust. Louis buries the knife in his abdomen, slicing vertically then horizontally. The VC drops his weapon, falls to the ground, clutching desperately to hold in his intestines. Louis drops to his knees, reclines back on an elbow.

VC

(Speaks unintelligibly in Vietnamese)

LOUIS

Toi khong biet. (I don't understand)

The VC glares at Louis.

VC

Du ban!

LOUIS

Fuck you too, you gook bastard.
Marty and Willis said hi.

Stokely turns the meerschaum upside down and taps it to remove ashes though it contains none. The noise snaps Brad's trance.

STOKELY

...said you might think killin' is
killin' but you don't know your
measure to your steel goes in a
man's gut, watch them loops
crawling out. Him tryin' to hold'em
in and life fadin' from his eyes.
Somewhere, somebody's waitin' for
him to come home and he ain't

BRAD

Stokes, many other people know
this?

STOKELY

Reckon not, or they give no sign.
But that ain't all...

14 EXT. SOUTHEAST VIETNAM JUNGLE, AMERICAN LANDING ZONE - DAY 14
FLASH BACK

Louis walks out the jungle from his last patrol. First
Sergeant brings up the rear of the squad. A transport
helicopter arrives to take them to base.

FIRST SERGEANT

Well, soldier, you made it. Headed
back to the WORLD.

LOUIS

Reckon so, Sarge.

FIRST SERGEANT

Got plans?

LOUIS

Not really...maybe get a plot of
land. Missed farming...

FIRST SERGEANT

Country boy, eh?

LOUIS

Suppose so.

First Sergeant extends his hand to shake. Louis takes off his helmet, tucks it under his arm and extends his hand.

FIRST SERGEANT

Better keep that lid on, soldier,
you ain't out...

Louis grins, withdraws his hand and puts his helmet back on. Immediately, VC ambush the LZ in a hail of small arms fire. First Sergeant is struck and dies instantly. Louis is frozen, his vision fades to black.

15 INT. ARMY M.A.S.H. TENT - DAY - FLASH BACK

15

Louis regains consciousness. An incredibly painful headache fogs his vision, he feels the tubes attached to needles in his arms and the gauze bandage around his head. A DOCTOR stands beside him.

LOUIS

Where am I?

DOCTOR

2nd Surgical in Chu Lai.

LOUIS

How'd I...

DOCTOR

On a dust off with several
expectants.

LOUIS

It just all went black.

DOCTOR

You're lucky. A round got under
your lid but it went through and
through.

(MORE)

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

We put in a titanium plate but the wound closed well. Won't know it's there after the sutures are removed.

LOUIS

How soon? Unfinished business...

DOCTOR

You're done, son. VSI profile on your discharge. Won't be leaving here until you can walk onto a Freedom Bird.

LOUIS

You got anything for a headache, Doc?

DOCTOR

I'll have them bring you somethin. Try to get some sleep.

The Doctor spins and leaves. Louis drifts into a fitful sleep. At the foot of his bed, the ghosts of Marty and Willis intrude into his dream.

MARTY

Why you, Louis? Why not me?

WILLIS

Yeah, Louis, why you and not me?

MARTY & LOUIS

(maddening unison)

Why you, Louis? Why you, Louis? Why you, Louis? Why you, Louis? Why you, Louis?

The two VC Louis killed coming out the tunnel appear, one on either side of Marty and Louis, and add to the cacophony.

VC

Du ban, Louis! Du ban, Louis! Du
ban, Louis...

They laugh maniacally. Louis snaps awake and screams. He pulls his knees to his chest and sobs uncontrollably.

16 EXT. REAR PORCH MCCOY HOME - NIGHT - RETURN TO PRESENT 16

Stokely gently rocks, pulling on his meerschaum. Brad reflects.

STOKELY

Nobody could hep him with the headaches and the ghosts, so he took to the bottle. Folks thought he'd gone crazy, got tetch in the head. Took to calling him Tetch. That's how you know him today.

Exhaustion suddenly overwhelms Brad. He stretches in his rocker.

BRAD

Thanks for sharing, Stokes. Never knew...folks around here just didn't have much use for him 'cause of the drinking.

STOKELY

One of these times the angel ain't gonna be there for Louis. But I hope you'll 'member him in a good light.

Brad stands and stretches again.

BRAD

Night, Stokes. Guess I'll see you tomorrow at the funeral.

STOKELY

G'night, Brad. We've surely missed
you 'round here. Yep, tomorrow.

Brad winds around the veranda and passes into the house
through a screen door.

17 INT. BRAD'S BEDROOM MCCOY HOME - SAME TIME 17

Brad turns on a lamp, undresses, pulls the folded note from
his pants pocket and collapses onto the bed. A ceiling fan
whirs gently overhead as he begins reading.

18 INT. ART STUDIO - DAY 18

Michelle is completing her letter.

MICHELLE V.O.

This will totally surprise you
which illustrates the situation
better than anything I could say.
There is nothing wrong with you.
You're just Brad, who you were when
we married. Irreconcilable
differences is the best
description. Parting now, we have
time to heal. Friends in Greenwich
Village have invited me and some
galleries in Europe want my work.
My attorney will contact you for
dissolution. Have a good life.
Love, Michelle

She peruses the letter then folds it in half, places it in an
envelope and scribbles "Brad" on the outside. Rising from the
table, she drifts around the studio, covering paintings and
sculptures with protective canvas, closing French doors and
windows. After a last look, she turns off the lights and
exits.

19 INT. BRAD'S BEDROOM MCCOY HOME - NIGHT- RETURN TO SCENE 19

Brad sleeps, Michelle's letter beside him. Tortured dreams intrude.

CGI DREAM SEQUENCE

Reposed outside on damp grass, Brad stares up at a peaceful, darkened, canopy, stars twinkling brilliantly. An unfamiliar constellation, a square shape of fifty stars, seems to approach. Accelerating, the stars morph into heavenly angels brandishing flaming swords. Brad struggles to escape but his arms and legs seem constrained, full scale panic. Just as the angels ready to strike, he suddenly wakes...

LIVE ACTION BEDROOM

Brad shakes uncontrollably in a cold sweat. The bonds in his dream are sheets entwined around his limbs. Glancing at dawn arriving outside a window, he frees himself and sits upright. He crumples Michelle's letter and hurls it at a trash can then finds the scrap of paper with Rachel's number on a night stand beside the bed.

BRAD

Hi. Yeah, now okay? Be there in ten.

Brad rises, dresses and exits the bedroom.

FADE OUT