

THE LOWER CORTEX

by Bob Clyman

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CHARACTERS

TOM	40; pleasant, compliant, anxious to please
SUMMERLIN	40s; mentally nimble, seductive
WOMAN	21; a college junior; intellectually aspiring but living on borrowed ideas

When the symbol, /, appears towards the end of a sentence, that marks where it should be interrupted by the following speech.

(AN OFFICE IN THE PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT OF A UNIVERSITY.
TOM WILSON, A 40-YEAR-OLD MAN, SITS ACROSS A DESK FROM DR.
SUMMERLIN, ALSO IN HIS FORTIES)

SUMMERLIN

Comfortable?

TOM

Very.

SUMMERLIN

Because you see a little tense.

TOM

I've just never done this before.

SUMMERLIN

You do understand I'm not that kind of psychologist? We're strictly research like it said on the flyer.

TOM

Not gonna ...

(USING HIS FINGERS AS QUOTATION MARKS)
... 'shrink' me, then?

SUMMERLIN

(A GOOD-NATURED CHUCKLE)
Not today.

TOM

Or put me in a maze and shock me?

SUMMERLIN

Like we do with rats, you mean?

TOM

Why rats, by the way? I've always wondered.

SUMMERLIN

Why not? They're affordable, and they get the job done.

(LOOKING AT HIS CLIPBOARD)
Do you prefer 'Thomas' or 'Tom'?

TOM

That would be Tom.

SUMMERLIN

And, forgive me for asking, you're how old?

TOM

Today's my birthday.

SUMMERLIN

Really?

TOM

Forty. The big one. You could say I'm halfway there, but I say I've still got halfway to go.

(A SHORT LAUGH)

Try and analyze that.

SUMMERLIN

And you heard about us how?

TOM

My office is two blocks from campus. Sometimes I wander over instead of lunch. Read the bulletin boards, that sort of thing.

SUMMERLIN

Right, the flyer.

TOM

See what rock groups are playing, that sort of thing. Not that I go. You ask me, it's been all downhill since the Moody Blues.

(BEAT)

I have been to some wonderful lectures here. The Peloponnesian Wars. Anything about outer space, I believe it all.

(A SHORT LAUGH)

So, should we start?

SUMMERLIN

First a few simple questions. Let's us screen out the occasional kook.

TOM

Uh-oh.

SUMMERLIN

You pre-test normal ... and I've every reason to think you will ...

TOM

Fire away.

SUMMERLIN

Can you tell me what 14 plus 20 is, Tom?

TOM

That would be 34.

SUMMERLIN

And 44 take away 10?

TOM

That would also be 34.

SUMMERLIN

How about two times 17?

TOM

Uh, 34.

SUMMERLIN

(MAKING A NOTE)

Seem to know your numbers. Did anything strike you about the answers you gave?

TOM

They were all 34?

SUMMERLIN

(MAKING A NOTE)

Short-term memory intact. Now ... did you treat those numbers purely as numbers? Or did you see them as some sort of code ... a channel leading you into a world which is rich in hidden meanings that pertain directly to you?

TOM

(BEAT)

Purely as numbers.

SUMMERLIN

If you should happen to laugh in a crowded room, do you know right away the laughter is yours?

TOM

(SLIGHT BEAT)

As opposed to somebody else's?

SUMMERLIN

I'm not allowed to clarify.

TOM

I know the laughter is mine.

SUMMERLIN

Excellent. You'd be surprised at some of the answers I get. Any hobbies, Tom?

TOM

Hobbies. I love to read. Fiction. I love the whole idea of fiction, if you know what I mean. I'm always after an outlook that packs the most in. Read the classics ... that's where you'll find your nuggets. Do you want to know how many times I've read THE ODYSSEY?

(BEAT)

A lot. Not to mention ... Jesus, the kind of minds it must've taken to build the Acropolis ...

SUMMERLIN

I know what you mean. That feeling you get the first time you walk up the steps?

TOM

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Actually, I've only seen pictures. I mean, Christ, the air fares alone.

SUMMERLIN

Sure.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

And as far as work goes, what do you do that office of yours?

TOM

We market software. Mostly small business applications.

SUMMERLIN

Interesting.

TOM

Can be.

SUMMERLIN

Would you describe yourself as happy there?

TOM

Why, is that important?

SUMMERLIN

Before we can start, I need a sense of who 'Tom' is. Without that, the choices you make will mean nothing to me. They'll just be a lot of behavior.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

So, tell me about your problem at work.

TOM

Who said there's a problem?

SUMMERLIN

You did.

TOM

I did?

SUMMERLIN

Just about. All I did was connect the dots.

TOM

Must be fun being a psychologist. All that reading between the lines.

SUMMERLIN

Is it your boss who's the problem?

TOM

My boss ... how can I put this? My boss, frankly speaking's, a small man. No vision.

(SLIGHT BEAT, CONFIDING)

I'd like to see us go global. My only problem is access. To my boss's boss. Which I'd have if I switched to Don Butterworth's group down the hall. Would also put a few dollars in my pocket.

SUMMERLIN

Can you?

TOM

Don'd love to have me, but the people upstairs want somebody else ... nowhere near my qualifications ...

SUMMERLIN

Doesn't seem fair.

TOM

I don't have to tell you who's getting it.

SUMMERLIN

(BEAT, THEN UNDERSTANDING)

Ah.

TOM

Don't get me wrong. I'm not a racist. Other than the sense we're all racists. In this country. You can't avoid it.

SUMMERLIN

True.

TOM

Not like my father, for instance. The nights I've spent listening to him rant and rave ... my mom with this tight, little smile ... and I do understand ... Affirmative Action ... which I support ... in principal.

SUMMERLIN

But we still need to take each case on its merits.

TOM

Exactly. That's all I'm saying. Exactly.

(BEAT)

Well ... I guess there are worse jobs. At least, I have a job. If I quit, what would I do? I went to college ... little school in Wisconsin. Not really much of a school, but there was this one course on Plato ... every Tuesday and Thursday at three ... you should've seen me ... I was always raising my hand. No one ever tells you what the world'll be like.

SUMMERLIN

And this is a terrible time to be looking.

TOM

Tell me about it.

SUMMERLIN

The stories I hear.

TOM

Tax and spend. Both parties. I blame the entire government. It's one thing to use an occasion egg, but for Chrissake, you don't kill the goose.

SUMMERLIN

I see what you mean.

TOM

And you know who pays for it?

SUMMERLIN

Us?

TOM

Exactly. Everything's backwards.

SUMMERLIN

Is it my imagination, or does a pound of fish cost more than a steak?

TOM

Tell me about it.

SUMMERLIN

Just to have your teeth cleaned.

TOM

I had a crown put in last month. 800 dollars. How do you budget for something like that?

SUMMERLIN

You can't.

TOM

Had to borrow from my father again.

SUMMERLIN

Uh-oh, here it comes.

TOM

Big mistake.

SUMMERLIN

Any little chance he gets to run you down?

TOM

With a bank, all it costs you is interest.

SUMMERLIN

People can be so superior.

TOM

'He never had to borrow from his father.' Thanks, dad. Now twist it in.

(BEAT EMBARRASSED, AS SUMMERLIN WRITES ON CLIPBOARD)

SUMMERLIN

This is fine, by the way. These are exactly the sort of things I need to know.

TOM

I'm not taking too much of your time?

SUMMERLIN

This is one of the perks of my job. The chance to meet interesting people.

TOM

Thank you. And you're an excellent listener.

SUMMERLIN

Like any job, this one can get to feel pretty routine. I don't often talk to someone who sees things as clearly as you.

TOM

Let me tell you, sometimes it feels like a curse.

SUMMERLIN

(BEAT)

Tell me something, Tom. Here it's your birthday ... a beautiful day ... what made you decide to come up?

TOM

Just doing my part. Where would we be without research?

SUMMERLIN

Now the real reason.

TOM

The real reason. Does there have to be a real reason?

(A SHORT LAUGH)

All right. Maybe ... and this'll sound silly, but maybe I wanted to ... take a risk for once in my life. Everything I normally do, I buy a map first ... bring clothes for every possible weather ... so when I wandered over, and there was your flyer ...

SUMMERLIN

Because of the girls in their cutoffs?

TOM

Excuse me?

SUMMERLIN

When you wander over, is it to watch the girls in their cutoffs?

TOM

No.

SUMMERLIN

It's all right ... who wouldn't? The way they flop on the grass ... their shoes kicked off ... knees slightly bent ...

TOM

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Well ...

SUMMERLIN

Exactly.

TOM

I suppose there's no harm in looking.

SUMMERLIN

Never has been, never will.

TOM

There's one in particular. Jenny. Her friend calls her Jen. Blonde ...

SUMMERLIN

Naturally.

TOM

Total knockout. Tiny waist. Nice bosom, not enormous. Which is fine. Big bosoms ... I've never seen the point.

SUMMERLIN

And the friend? Is she pretty as well?

TOM

Nothing special. Maybe a seven. Why?

SUMMERLIN

A lot of the men I talk to desire a particular girl ... but they also want the friend.

TOM

Not this guy. Sorry, I'm not into that, thank you very much.

SUMMERLIN

Describe her.

TOM

Jen?

SUMMERLIN

The very first words that come into your mind.

TOM

Let's see ...

SUMMERLIN

There's a certain look you have when you're censoring. You give it away.

TOM

I guess I was.

(A SHORT LAUGH)

And this stays between us?

SUMMERLIN

The only people reviewing my notes will be me and the team.

TOM

(SLIGHT BEAT)

I'm sorry, the team?

SUMMERLIN

A very impressive group. Senior people. Of course, I'm not allowed to say, but if I were, you might even recognize some of their names. So this woman, Jen, sounds pretty special.

TOM

She has very intelligent eyes. Loves to read ... the French, more often than not. And her voice ... I like her voice. A lot. Voices often bother me. I'm very sensitive to register. No, the attraction is more than physical. And maybe ... just maybe ... a little bit mutual.

SUMMERLIN

The plot thickens.

TOM

Sometimes when I pass, I can almost feel her eyes burning a hole in me. But when I turn, she's talking to her friend. Whether she's shy ... or afraid ... I mean, I am a bit older. Although for the right woman, that's a plus. And I feel if it weren't for Ellen ... that's my wife, Ellen ... because I've never cheated on her. And sometimes a woman can sense when a man is off limits.

(BEAT)

Not that there's anything wrong with Ellen. Wonderful woman. An editor ... loves words. Endless patience with me and the girls. We have three. Here ...

(SHOWING SUMMERLIN A WALLET PHOTO)

That's Heather, the oldest. Wants to be a dancer ... constantly starving herself. And Lizzie ... just turned nine, she's our lawyer ... from the day she was born, nothing has

ever been fair, according to her. Terrific kids. I guess you could say I'm a little prejudiced.

(A SHORT LAUGH)

Oh, and Samarra, of course. She's the baby.

SUMMERLIN

Pretty name, Samarra.

TOM

When Ellen was pregnant, we called her Sam. That way, if she turned out to be a boy ...

SUMMERLIN

I'm sorry.

TOM

About what?

SUMMERLIN

I can hear how much you wanted a son.

TOM

(BEAT)

Well, after two girls ... truthfully, that's the only reason I agreed to ... in fact, since there are tests now ... but Ellen said no ... it's unnatural and what if the needle ... so I said fine. I just assumed that with two girls, this time ... although as it turns out ... Ellen's doctor was telling us later with two girls, the odds are you'll have a third, which I think ... although she swears ... Ellen already knew. Maybe I'm wrong, but that's what I think.

(BEAT)

You're amazing. And you could tell that just from my voice?

SUMMERLIN

It's my job, Tom. Some men lay bricks.

TOM

I've never told anyone that. Not that Samarra isn't terrific. All three girls. I had a sister, so I was prepared for the fact that girls are more demanding.

SUMMERLIN

As prepared as one can be.

TOM

Especially for someone like Lizzie. The number of times I've had to listen to her about Paula ... a friend who goes to a nicer summer camp. I tell her it's not a question of 'fair,' Lizzie, we just can't afford ... and so what if yours is a Y camp? They're both in Vermont. Christ, they're even on the same lake. But somehow ... and I'm sure you've heard this, I wind up feeling humiliated. I know I'm not poor. Some people live in a cardboard box, but I feel poor.

(BEAT)

We should probably start. Don't you have other people to do?

SUMMERLIN

Tom ... and maybe I'm overstepping my bounds, because sure ... I could sit here and ignore all my years of training ... people walk by strangers who are screaming and covered with blood every day, so maybe you're asking why can't he? Why is this man whom I barely know saying, 'No, this can't go?'

TOM

What can't go / on?

SUMMERLIN

I'm doing it for two reasons. Partly because I like you, but also I'm just protecting myself. If two years from now you should jump off a roof, and I saw it coming, did you know that I can be sued?

(TOM STARTS TO OPEN HIS MOUTH)

Sure, it's unfair, but that's the world we live in.

TOM

Jump off a roof? Aren't you being a little hard on Ellen?

SUMMERLIN

Interesting ... did you notice? Here we've been saying all sorts of things ... your kids ... turning 40 ... but the minute I mention 'jump off a roof,' your mind goes straight to Ellen.

TOM

Oh.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

I just thought ...

SUMMERLIN

Yes, apparently.

TOM

Then you didn't mean ... ?

SUMMERLIN

It doesn't matter what I mean, Tom. I don't have to live with her.

TOM

Maybe I wasn't being fair ... see, I'm not always good at describing, but Ellen's very ... all right, good, here's an example. I wrote a few poems once ... a kind of haiku ... only longer, and Ellen said they were good ... very good. But I told her, 'No, I want the same objectivity you'd show some writer you've never met.' 'In that case,' she said. 'I'd have to tell the writer I don't hold much hope. There's no sense of structure and most of the ideas are mush.'

(A SUDDEN LAUGH)

That's Ellen for you. I won't say it didn't hurt, but you can't buy that kind of honesty. Me, a poet. When I think of the hours I might've wasted.

SUMMERLIN

(BEAT)

Tom ... here's what I think you're trying to say. A little boy reaches out. He's brought his mother a dead bird with some daffodils around it. Out of love, but she screams ... and in that moment, he becomes the scream. He goes to his room and tries touching himself, but he's young, and nothing happens. Sound familiar.

TOM

(BEAT)

Uh-huh.

(BEAT)

Well, no, not really. Although I see what you mean ... I think.

SUMMERLIN

Things have a way of changing so slowly we never see it happen. Remember at the beginning ... the way she played with her hair when she listened to you ... the smell of her perfume in your car ... her voice on the phone ... and the first time she let you kiss her, you thought you'd feel safe forever.

(BEAT)

Where did all of that go? Don't you ever wish ... I don't know ... you could just start over?

TOM

What ... leave Ellen?

(BEAT)

No. The only reason I paused is because after 15 years the love ... I'm sure you've heard this before, but it stops being bells and whistles, so you have to adjust ... especially ... no matter how much you love them, with three ... somewhat difficult kids, but if you chose ... and here's my point ... the right woman, because I didn't settle. Plenty of other guys wanted her. Guys she liked better than me, but I wouldn't budge. And when they finally drifted away, I was still there. Happy ending ... I got the girl.

SUMMERLIN

(BEAT)

I guess what I'm really asking is ... if you could kill Ellen, and no one would know, would you do it?

TOM

(BEAT, THEN A SUDDEN EXPULSION OF NERVOUS LAUGHTER)

Why, is that how I sounded?

(BEAT)

What a question. I'm sorry, I don't think that's funny.

SUMMERLIN

It wasn't a joke.

TOM

So she had three girls? Even in China, they don't kill a woman for that.

SUMMERLIN

True, there's always divorce. Only try to imagine divorcing her. The embarrassment ... the accusing eyes of your children. Not to mention the cost. And where would you live? Some squalid little apartment? Not so different from the first one you had, and you loved that place, but then you had your whole life ahead of you. Whereas now ... while she keeps the house ... the friends ...

TOM

Yes, I think you've made your / point ...

SUMMERLIN

Granted, you could make new friends. Lonely men like yourself ... Tuesday nights in the basement of some Unitarian church ...

TOM

(SUDDENLY FLARING)

Look, I don't kill people, that's not what I do, and you've got no right to ask!

(LOOKING AT HIS WATCH)

When are we going to start?

SUMMERLIN

(BEAT)

You're absolutely right, Tom. I made the mistake, because I felt a connection, of assuming ... so I bolted ahead. I guess I owe you an apology.

TOM

(BEAT)

Forget it. And I probably shouldn't be yelling at you. For all I know, you're low man on the totem pole. You've got a job just like I do. Maybe three little girls of your own to feed.

SUMMERLIN

I didn't mean you should actually kill her. I don't even know your wife, which is why we have laws.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

I only meant ... what if there were an easier way? How often do you get a chance ... on your lunch break ... to think in extremes?

TOM

To sort of pretend?

SUMMERLIN

Just two men on a nice afternoon.

TOM

I guess there's nothing wrong with pretending.

SUMMERLIN

A chance to get to know your animal past. Maybe you don't even know you have one, but it's the color in your cheeks ... the purpose in your stride. Do you know what the animal past loves most of all? Payback. And children should learn this in school. When someone bloodies our nose in the schoolyard, don't we want to take him apart? Not just to get even. We want him to die. And teacher should help us accept that animal truth. But instead, we're ushered into an empty world of gesture. A handshake ... a smile. Our exquisite rage choked off. Take you, for instance. I like you, Tom. Like and, yes, I feel sorry for you. Because you're cut off. Oh, sure, there are moments when you look at Ellen in the wrong kind of light ... or she laughs too loud ...

(BEAT)

A simple exercise. It's a little outside of what we'll be doing ... have you got a few extra minutes?

TOM

(LOOKING DOUBTFULLY AT HIS WATCH)

Well ...

SUMMERLIN

Good, it'll only take a couple of minutes. Close your eyes.

(TOM HESITATES, THEN DOES)

A little bit tighter. Now ... let's just forget about killing Ellen.

TOM

Good.

SUMMERLIN

Of course, you don't want to kill her. She's a very special lady. And besides, this is not about Ellen. Just let your mind follow one of the others, until he and you are alone. That black man down the hall from you who's stealing your job ... any one of those blond boys tossing a Frisbee outside who might be having Jenny tonight.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Eyes nice and tight?

TOM

Um.

SUMMERLIN

Are you picturing someone?

TOM

Not exactly.

SUMMERLIN

Try doing that, please.

TOM

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Should the person be standing or sitting?

SUMMERLIN

I can't do this all by myself, Tom. Use your imagination.

TOM

And I'm supposed to be, what ... ?

SUMMERLIN

(SHOWING A SLIGHT IMPATIENCE)

Tom.

TOM

I see ... you mean, killing him.

SUMMERLIN

And there's no way you can be caught.

(TOM IS BEGINNING TO SQUIRM UNCOMFORTABLY)

Remember, this is just an exercise. Only the things you want can happen in here.

TOM

Sorry ... I'm not getting much.

SUMMERLIN

Take your time.

TOM

It's all pretty fuzzy.

SUMMERLIN

You're doing just fine.

TOM

Does it matter what kind of gun?

SUMMERLIN

(SLIGHT BEAT)
As long as it shoots, right?

TOM

This is starting to give me the creeps.

SUMMERLIN

Tom, what I'm about to tell you is true ... and you'll know it the moment I speak. These are perfectly normal thoughts you're having.

TOM

They are?

SUMMERLIN

I know you're thinking they mean you're a freak ... but I'm gonna let you in on a secret. Everyone thinks he's a freak.

TOM

Is this something to do with hypnosis? Because I'm not really sure what we're doing right now.

SUMMERLIN

Tom, when you fly somewhere on a jumbo jet, do you ever actually see the pilot? And yet you put your life in his hands.

(SLIGHT BEAT)
I'm referring of course to the team. Some of the things I've been saying to you may seem prying or off the wall, but trust me ... they've been designed by the team to appear that way. To throw you off. To have the very effect they're having.

TOM

(BEAT)
Can I ask you something?

SUMMERLIN

In this room, there is no such thing as an improper question.

TOM

No, you are going to find this totally wild. Because your flyer was vague ... which you must have intended ...

SUMMERLIN

Go on.

TOM

... and as I was walking up the stairs ... I have no idea where I read this ... that when they come on campus, they pretend it's for something else. To avoid having their cover blown.

SUMMERLIN

So you're wondering ... if I'm the CIA? And if this is all an elaborate test to see if we want to recruit you?

TOM

I told you it was wild.

SUMMERLIN

Not at all. But I would like to turn the question around. If I were here to recruit you, how would you rate your chances so far? Only before you answer, let me give you some honest feedback.

(BEAT)
I sense there are hidden currents deep within you, Tom. Wellsprings of power that frighten but also excite you. A capacity for testing the limits ... a reservoir of which the average man only dreams. As you can imagine, these are qualities I don't run across every day.

TOM

(BEAT)
Wow.

SUMMERLIN

I can see I've struck a nerve.

TOM

Have you ever. Because it's funny ... I've always seen myself as being apart. Somehow different.

SUMMERLIN

Somehow better than?

TOM

(SEVERAL BEATS, THEN A QUIET EXCITEMENT)

Yes.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

It's an unpopular thing to admit nowadays. Not very ...

(USING HIS FINGERS AS QUOTATIONS)

... 'correct.'

SUMMERLIN

Were you an athlete in college, Tom?

TOM

Not really.

SUMMERLIN

I find that hard to believe.

TOM

Well, I try to work out.

SUMMERLIN

Because sometimes I'll get an image, and you know what image I'm having of you?

Atlas struggling to hold up the world.

TOM

Really?

SUMMERLIN

The inner strength of the man, Tom. And the terrible weight on his shoulders.

TOM

(LEANING FORWARDS WITH BARELY RESTRAINED EXCITEMENT)

Can I tell you a secret? For years I've had this feeling there's been a mistake. As though somehow, I and the life I'm supposed to be leading got separated at birth. And that other life is somewhere out there ... waiting for me. You don't like to dwell on these things, so when I passed a sign one day that said, 'There are no accidents,' I kept on walking. I didn't want to think it was my fault. That I had denied myself again and again. Then this morning, I don't know, but I couldn't sit still. I felt on fire. So I rushed over here, and there was your flyer. 'Find out the limits of who you are.'

SUMMERLIN

Tom, I know you're thinking I may be involved with the government. Well, the truth of the matter is, maybe I am, and maybe I'm not. What you need to know is there's a group of very special people out there with a set of ideas on what has to happen next, and those people are extremely aware it isn't going to happen without the right people on board ... people like you.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Now whether such people exist in fact or only in theory, I need to know if I am here to recruit you ... only there's one condition ... you'll have to decide right now ... and once you've taken the leap, there'll be no turning back ... would you be willing to give up everything?

TOM

Right now?

(BEAT)

I don't know. Maybe I would. Why, do people actually tell you they would?

SUMMERLIN

Only you can determine what's possible. You feel a longing ... but for what? Your rival's desk? Jenny beside you in bed? Or are those just a taste of what's out there? I know a man who is medically blind. The optical nerve in his brain was removed ... and yet he can see. How? By believing that anything's possible.

(BEAT)

Do you see that door over there? What if, on the other side, there was a room? A room just like this? And in that room ... a man?

TOM

Is someone really there?

SUMMERLIN

During that exercise earlier, you asked me a question about a gun. Do you remember?

TOM

Yes, you said a gun, and I asked you what kind it was.

SUMMERLIN

I never mentioned a gun.

TOM

Yes, / you ...

SUMMERLIN

I never mentioned a gun. Now did you actually picture the gun?

TOM

No.

SUMMERLIN

Not even in a general way?

TOM

Maybe in a general way.

SUMMERLIN

Was it something like this?

(SUMMERLIN OPENS A DESK DRAWER AND REMOVES A GUN, COCKS IT AND SETS IT DOWN ON THE DESK)

What if you killed that man behind the door, and no one would know?

TOM

(WITH FEAR AND AMAZEMENT)

Is that a real gun?

SUMMERLIN

With real bullets.

TOM

Can you do that? Have a loaded gun in your desk? I mean, this is a fully accredited college. Parents send their children here.

SUMMERLIN

Stay with the question. Could you kill / that man ... ?

TOM

I don't even know him.

SUMMERLIN

Of course not, that's the beauty. If you did, you'd get in trouble. Your rival at work, for instances, you'd have a motive. That's how people get caught. By killing the people they know.

TOM

Wait a second. This is a trick. I've read about studies ... I'll bet this guy is a toy. And there's no other man. There isn't even a room. I'll bet you behind that door is a broom closet.

SUMMERLIN

You're doing what people usually do. You want to reduce this to something you already know.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

The team is looking for men who are special ... men who have ripped out their feminine side by the roots ... only who are those men? You've known for years there's another life you should be leading. I've come to bring you that life.

TOM

My God.

SUMMERLIN

It's men like us, Tom. Men like us. Because everything you've done up till now is just a fantasy, held together by a thread.

TOM

And you mean afterwards ... just so I understand ... I would, what ... leave? Just take off and never even say good-bye? This is crazy.

SUMMERLIN

Don't worry, about your family, Tom. Whenever the team gets involved, we're ready to pick up the tab.

TOM

I couldn't just leave them like that. They need me.

SUMMERLIN

So do we, Tom, only we aren't leeches about it. We're not trying to stand in the way of your future ... we are your future.

TOM

No, I couldn't. You don't know Heather, my oldest ... she's very special, but something there isn't quite right. It's not her fault ... anyone would get frustrated, but then she takes it out on Ellen ... nasty, hurtful, little comments, until Ellen gets a migraine, which means she's flat on her back for two days ... just lies there in the dark playing Brahms, so without me, who'd be there to cook for the girls and make sure they have their baths?

SUMMERLIN

Tom ... and I mean this with no offense, but your family is like some horrible car crash. With a car crash, there's only one thing that matters, and that's walking away from the car alive.

TOM

But you can't expect me to shoot a man ... Even if I were willing, which I'm not, how could I be sure I'd get away with it? Or even manage to hit him ... I've never fired a gun.

SUMMERLIN

I think you already know in your heart we can protect you. And when you pick up this gun, which is already cocked, you'll know how to use it. You're only assuming you'll feel remorse, because that's what happens in books. And the people who wrote them got it from other books.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

An important question, so take as much time as you need. When your mother told you it's wrong to tear the legs off a beetle, did you believe her?

TOM

Yes.

SUMMERLIN

Did you stop right away?

TOM

(SLIGHT BEAT)

To some extent.

SUMMERLIN

You mean you stopped when she was watching.

TOM

Or about to come onto the porch.

SUMMERLIN

'Thou shalt not kill.' We all want to, or why would it need to be said? They don't have to tell you to not kiss the silverware, nobody wants to.

TOM

I've sometimes wondered if I could do it. Say if a burglar ... you know the kind of thoughts as you're falling asleep ... but I never pictured an actual person.

SUMMERLIN

Tom, I know what it is to hold back. The only reason I understand you is because I was you. I wanted to have it all but without getting dirt on my fingers. That just isn't real, Tom ... it wouldn't be life.

TOM

(BEAT)

And there's no other way to join?

SUMMERLIN

It's like the Bible says about the Rapture. When the moment comes, you don't say, 'Sorry, there's a pie in the oven.' You set down your plow in the field and without looking back, you walk into the light.

TOM

How did he get here?

SUMMERLIN

That's not your problem.

TOM

How old is he? Does he have children? What kind of job has he got?

SUMMERLIN

You can't deal with this, Tom, by turning it into a bunch of facts.

TOM

I'm just asking, why him?

SUMMERLIN

That's a good question ... why him? Why are three buffalo born when there's only pasture for two? Are those things fair? Maybe not. Does a beetle have a soul? I'm not Hegel, I really don't know. Look at me.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Tom, look at me. We are so alike, it's scary. When I was approached, I said, 'No, they can't mean me. I'm strictly nine to five.' I was a gray little man leading a gray little life. I thought it was fine to be nothing more than the meat on someone else's sandwich.

TOM

(BEAT)

And his family ... ?

SUMMERLIN

Don't worry ... we've reached an understanding with them.

TOM

(BEAT)

Well, I suppose ... for all I know, he's a criminal.

SUMMERLIN

Exactly. No one winds up in a room like that by accident. Because you can disprove mathematics if you're clever enough, but nothing can hold off destiny.

(BEAT)

He's one man ... standing between you and a fresh start. Picture yourself waking up to a sky so bright it hurts your eyes. Walking through Middle Eastern Bazaars where anything can be bought ... any need met. Women with perfect skin. Sultry women who know how to whisper your name in the dark. And any time you get bored, just ...

(SNAPPING HIS FINGERS)

... and turn into someone else.

(BEAT)

Now picture Ellen letting that happen. You can't escape her. The days of the foreign legion are gone ... you can't just run off and disappear. The world has become one vast, global network ... there's nothing left to disappear into. Ellen will tell the authorities, and they'll send a man to find you. The life you were meant to lead will be no life at all. Only we can put you beyond the reach of your past. Only we can erase it.

TOM

And I could go anywhere?

SUMMERLIN

What did you have in mind?

TOM

I've always loved reading about places I've never been. Places I figured I'll never be able to go. Maybe travel along the great trade routes ... Marco Polo chasing after silk and spices ... Alexander sweeping down from Macedonia. Through Persia ... and Greece. To be right where it all began.

SUMMERLIN

Ellen was wrong. You are a poet.

(SLIGHT BEAT)

Greece, huh? Because I'm thinking ... don't hold me to this ...

TOM

There might be something you can do?

SUMMERLIN

The only thing is ... does it have to be Greece?

TOM

That's always been my dream.

SUMMERLIN

I understand. But do you have any idea how many men, when they close their eyes, dream about Greece?

TOM

Yes, but ... who are those men?

SUMMERLIN

(BEAT)

If Greece is really that important, I need you to look me in the eyes and tell me something?

TOM

What?

SUMMERLIN

That you believe having it's possible.

TOM

(HOLDING HIS GAZE FOR SEVERAL BEATS)

I do.

SUMMERLIN

Well, then ... I believe it, too.

TOM

(BEAT, LOOKING AT THE GUN)

And you really think it's okay to do this?

SUMMERLIN

Go ahead ... touch it.

TOM

(TOUCHING IT)

Jesus, a gun.

SUMMERLIN

I always tell first-timers grip the gun with both hands.

TOM

Okay.

SUMMERLIN

And make the first one count. We don't want to lose you.

TOM

(SLIGHT BEAT)

What do you mean, 'lose' me?

SUMMERLIN

I like you, Tom, and I'd hate to see you get shot.

TOM

He has a gun?

SUMMERLIN

Wasn't that clear?

TOM

There's a man in there with a gun?!

SUMMERLIN

You didn't honestly think we would take you in ... give you a whole new life just for shooting a defenseless man?

TOM

This is a joke.

SUMMERLIN

Not at all, Tom.

TOM

No, it has to be a joke.

SUMMERLIN

Am I smiling?

TOM

(BEAT)

Look, I think I gave you the wrong the impression. So I complained? Don't you ever complain, then you feel better?

(SLIGHT BEAT)

It's not like I never have fun. No one enjoys little things more than I do. Browsing for books ... getting an ice cream. And of course, there's always summer. The beach ... when we can get away ... what with the girls. There's another couple we go away with ... he's very clever ... did I happen to mention Ellen's a wonderful cook?

SUMMERLIN

I don't think so.

TOM

She makes this veal dish ... pounds it thin till she's practically sweating and some kind of sauce with olives.

SUMMERLIN

Really?

TOM

Which reminds me, are you married? Because if you really like veal, maybe you and your wife ...

SUMMERLIN

What the hell is this?

TOM

What?

SUMMERLIN

Are you telling me you want to back out?

TOM

Not so much that ...

SUMMERLIN

Just go home and pretend that nothing happened today?

TOM

Well, in a way ...

SUMMERLIN

I'm sorry, that's not how this works.

TOM

What's / not ... ?

SUMMERLIN

Don't you remember I told you that once you decided, there's no turning back?

TOM

Well, yes, you did say something / like ...

SUMMERLIN

The reason I always go over that is to keep this from happening now.

TOM

Look, I'm sorry if I ...

SUMMERLIN

The point isn't whether you're sorry. Do you see my watch?
(HOLDING OUT HIS WRIST)

There was a moment when I could've called this off. That moment's gone.

TOM

What do you / mean?

SUMMERLIN

I think you know what I mean, Tom.

TOM

The flyer said 20 minutes. I'm already late for a meeting.

SUMMERLIN

It's time to go in.

TOM

I don't want to. I'm happy enough. Christ, there are people out there with cancer.

SUMMERLIN

Tom ...

TOM

Please ...

SUMMERLIN

I'm sorry.

TOM

No.

SUMMERLIN

It's time.

TOM

Please, I'm frightened.

SUMMERLIN

That's only natural.

TOM

No, I am really frightened.

SUMMERLIN

Who wouldn't be?

(AS TOM RUNS TOWARDS THE DOOR HE FIRST ENTERED)

The door you came in is locked. We can sit here and argue whether that's 'fair,' but the decision is out of my hands.

TOM

(BEGINNING TO CRY OPENLY)

I don't want to die.

SUMMERLIN

Try to focus, Tom. This is your chance. Things that would take some yogi 30 years on a mountain to learn, you can find out in the next 30 seconds. You came here to learn who you are. Find out.

TOM

No.

SUMMERLIN

Tom ...

TOM

I don't have to go.

SUMMERLIN

We're out of time.

TOM

You can't make me go.

SUMMERLIN

No, I can't, but I also can't keep him from coming in here.

TOM

(BEAT)

You mean ... ?

SUMMERLIN

He knows it's time. All he has to do is decide, and what do you think your odds will be then?

TOM

He wouldn't do that.

SUMMERLIN

No?

TOM

Why would he? I'm not the sort of person somebody shoots. I was just bored, that's all. If it wasn't for that flyer, I would be eating lunch.

(WITH REVULSION AT THE PUDDLE FORMING AROUND HIS SHOES)

Oh, God, look at me.

(BEAT)

Maybe he's a pacifist ... just a few problems at home. Don't you ever find when you least expect it, people turn out to be nice?

SUMMERLIN

Every moment you hesitate is a chance for him to grow stronger ... to imagine himself with a woman like Jen ... to picture himself standing over you ... ready to walk out of here into a life that could've been yours.

(BEAT, TOM IS WEEPING)

Tom, were you lying to me?

TOM

No.

SUMMERLIN

What you said about being special and leading another life ... are you really just an ordinary man?

TOM

No, not inside I'm not.

SUMMERLIN

Because as much as I want this for you, if you're not right for us, I'll do what I can to call it off. I've never tried before ... no one's ever asked, so all I can promise is I'll make the call.

(BEAT, THEN GOING TO THE PHONE)

As you like. It was only a dream anyway ... I mean, about Greece.

(TOM LOOKS UP AT HIM)

Don't apologize. It's not a crime to be ... average.

(HE STARTS TO DIAL)

TOM

Don't.

(BEAT)

Where in the room is he sitting?

SUMMERLIN

It's different each time.

TOM

And don't call me average.

SUMMERLIN

(BEAT, PUTTING DOWN THE PHONE)

All right.

TOM

Because I'm not.

SUMMERLIN

I don't work on commission, Tom. If this doesn't feel right, just / tell me.

TOM

All my life ... my whole life ... because of people like him ...

SUMMERLIN

Don't do it out of fear ... or to please me. It has to come from the heart.

TOM

Fuck him, he thinks he can kill me. Fuck them all!

(WITH A SUDDEN MOVEMENT, HE BURSTS INTO THE OTHER ROOM, QUICKLY DISAPPEARING FROM VIEW. A SINGLE SHOT IS HEARD. AFTER SEVERAL BEATS, SUMMERLIN GETS UP, WALKS TO THE DOOR TOM FIRST CAME IN)

SUMMERLIN

Yes.

(HE FLICKS OFF THE LIGHT SWITCH, AND THE ROOM GETS BLACK, EXCEPT FOR THE SPILL OF LIGHT FROM THE OTHER ROOM. LIGHT FADES. END OF ACT ONE)