

TEMPEST ROAD

by
Steven Clark

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Email: SAClark69@verizon.net

FADE IN:

EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

A light glows from inside. Two cars in the driveway. Cricket chirps interrupted by the clink of dishes from the

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

ASHLEY BROUSSARD, 34, figure-hugging red pajamas, unloads the dishwasher. She's at her wits end. Examines a dish, removes a stain with her nail.

Leaning against the counter is GARY, 36. Arms folded. Tense. So close to blowing his cool.

Ashley struggles to keep her voice low.

ASHLEY

A kid in Colorado committed suicide over something like this. I'm not gonna let her become a statistic.

GARY

What *he* is, is a boy, Ash. Pure and simple. That's what God intended him to be.

ASHLEY

God, or whatever, intended him to be a girl. Can't you see that? He's six now, Gary. Okay? Six...

GARY

I know hold old he is.

ASHLEY

He's been saying he's a girl since he was three. You know what he asked me the other day? He asked me why God messed up and made him a boy.

Gary pounds his fist into his open hand.

GARY

By all natural law he's a boy. He should be playing with basketballs and footballs. You're buying him dolls and dresses.

Ashley rises from the dishwasher, puts the plate down.

ASHLEY

You're embarrassed, aren't you? You're embarrassed of her.

GARY

You're right. I am embarrassed. He, she -- whatever -- is ruining this family. And you're buying into it. Feeding it.

Gary turns his back on her, opens the door.

ASHLEY

Where the hell are you going?

GARY

Out. I can't take this shit anymore.

She tightly grips his arm.

ASHLEY

You're drinking again.

He jerks his arm away, almost sends her flying.

GARY

Let go of me. And who the fuck could blame me if I was?

He slams the door hard enough to rattle the cabinets.

Ashley puts her hands down on the counter, stares out the window. From down the hall, a quiet voice --

CHARLIE (O.S.)

Mommy?

She wipes her face. Composes herself.

ASHLEY

I'm coming, honey. Mommy's coming.

EXT. BAR - NIGHT

The local watering hole -- SIT 'N SIP -- illuminated in flickering red neon. Two cars out front.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

The lights are down low, a quiet country tune plays. Clean place. The polished mahogany decor looks almost inviting.

Behind the bar is BILL DOWNING. Closing in on retirement age, he dries a glass with a bar rag.

Seated across the bar is Gary. On edge but loosening up. He fingers the rim of an empty rocks glass.

BILL

More club soda?

Gary nods.

GARY

Yeah.

Bill fills the glass.

The *ting ting* of a bell above the door as it opens.

MONICA, late-thirties, struts in. A tired looking bar fly in a denim skirt with knock-off heels.

She sits a few seats down, lights a cigarette and drops her cheap bag on the bar. Her eyes immediately find Gary.

Bill hustles over, greets her with a kiss on the cheek. He makes her a colorful drink, sets it down.

She motions for him to come in close.

Bill nods, shuffles back to Gary. He places down a shot glass, pulls out a bottle and carefully pours.

Gary's eyes widen.

BILL

From the lady down yonder.

It's so tempting and he wants it bad. Very bad. He stares at it long and hard.

Finally --

MONICA

If you're not gonna drink it the least you can do is say thanks.

A reluctant grin. A shameful pause.

GARY

Thanks.

She sips her own drink, elegantly flips her long chestnut hair. Despite a worn appearance, her voice is seductively smooth.

MONICA

You're welcome. You know, I don't think I've seen you here before. New around these parts?

GARY

I don't really... come here that much.

MONICA

Married?

GARY

Twelve years.

MONICA

Some girls have all the luck, huh?

Gary runs his finger along the rim of the glass, then quickly removes it as if he had touched a hot stove coil.

MONICA

Kids?

He laughs to himself.

GARY

Yeah. A boy.

MONICA

(defiant)

I have a boy, too. Haven't seen him in years.

GARY

How come?

She finishes her drink.

MONICA

Differences.

HUM HUM.

Gary reaches into his pocket, pulls out his cell. Checks it but doesn't answer.

MONICA

That her?

GARY

Yeah.

Gary rises. He's gotta leave. A ten hits the bar, then a look in Monica's direction. He grabs the shot glass, raises it to his lips, closes his eyes and --

-- pours it down his throat.

He blinks, shakes his head. It's been a long time. He takes a step, stumbles slightly. His feet pull him Monica's way. When he gets close enough, she grabs him by the arm.

MONICA

You know where to find me if ever...
You know.

He submits. Her warm fingers on his skin. Then he sees it --

Ugly red tendrils of track marks snaking along the inside of her arm. Sprouting from a raised blue vein. Infected.

He recoils, pulls away. He checks his hip on the jukebox, stumbles to the door, opens it. He exits. The door closes. The *ting ting* of the bell above, the music stops and...

EXT. CAR - NIGHT

Parked on the side of a quiet highway. Gary, stone-faced, behind the wheel. Daunting blue and red lights dance across his face.

A portly POLICE OFFICER, forties, makes his way to the car. He checks the registration sticker, looks inside.

POLICE OFFICER
License and registration.

Gary hands it over, the officer checks it.

POLICE OFFICER
Do you know why I pulled you over, sir?

Gary looks down, shakes his head.

GARY
No.

POLICE OFFICER
You were driving erratically back there.

GARY
I received a text from my wife. I thought it might be important.

The officer shines a light in the car, scans around.

POLICE OFFICER
Had anything to drink tonight?

GARY

I quit three years ago.

POLICE OFFICER

But I asked if you've had anything tonight.

GARY

I had one drink a couple hours ago.

SIDE OF THE ROAD - LATER

The officer watches as Gary walks, heel-to-toe, along the yellow line bordering the shoulder.

A car zips by. Crazy LAUGHTER from inside.

POLICE OFFICER

Okay. You don't have to go any further.

Gary stops on the line. He hangs his head, stares down at his shoes. Blue and red lights flashing on the asphalt.

Gary's cell HUMS inside his pocket. He reaches for it --

POLICE OFFICER

Keep your hands out of your pockets!

Gary whips around, does as he's told.

GARY

It's my wife. She want to know--

POLICE OFFICER

I don't care. Never do that. Ever. You wanna get shot?

GARY

No.

POLICE OFFICER

I didn't think so.

The officer hands Gary his license back.

POLICE OFFICER

Gonna let you go with a warning, sir.
You don't appear to be intoxicated.

GARY

Thank you.

The officer heads back to his cruiser.

POLICE OFFICER

And stay off your cell phone.
(opens his door)
Damn things'll get you killed.

Dispatch comes through on his vest radio.

POLICE OFFICER

Roger. En-route.

The cruiser kicks back gravel as it pulls away.

Gary on the side of the road. Deer in the head lights look on his face. He gets his wallet, slides his information back in.

There, in a slip of clear plastic -- a

PICTURE

It's his son. *Daughter?* Can't be more than four. Innocent smile on his face. No troubles or worries. Never been lied to. Just... happy.

Gary searches the sky. Black midnight, few stars. No easy answers anywhere.

He looks back down.

GARY

(softly)
Goddammit.

EXT. MAIN STREET - NIGHT

Few cars on the road this late.

INT. CAR

Gary at the wheel, stopped at a light. Heading home. He turns his head and sees a

24 HOUR CONVENIENCE STORE

The traffic light turns green. He hits his directional and quickly turns in.

EXT. RESIDENTIAL STREET - LATER

Close on a street sign: *TEMPEST RD.* Gary's car ambles quietly down this street. Brake lights shine as he pulls into his driveway.

INT. HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ashley curled up on the sofa, under a blanket, knees at her chest. The television's on but she's not watching. Not really.

From outside, the faint *slam* of a car door.

She doesn't flinch as Gary enters. Just sits there.

He appears. Takes off his coat, drops his keys on a table along with a brown paper bag.

Without looking at him --

ASHLEY

Where've you been?

He picks up the paper bag and places it next to her.

GARY

It's... It's been a weird night.

ASHLEY

(sarcastic)

Really?

He sits beside her, hands between his knees. He looks at her -- hair covering her face, far away eyes. Silent and motionless. A statue of discontent.

The *crunch* of the brown paper bag as --

GARY

I uh... I picked this up.

Gary pulls out a PRINCESS HAIR BRUSH SET, ages 4 and up. The kind you find at a convenience store. Cheap. Broken in a week.

Ashley takes it. Looks at it. The hard lines of her frown start to soften.

She turns to Gary but --

His eyes are closed, slowly lowering his head onto her lap. He doesn't make a sound. He just submits.

She drapes her arms around his head.

GARY

I'm not there yet, Ash. I'm sorry. I'm not there yet, but...

It's a start.

FADE OUT.