

THE GAMBLER

by

Gary M. Howell

Copyright 2023
garymhowell@gmail.com

This script may not be produced in any way without the express written consent of the screenwriter. All rights reserved by the screenwriter.

FADE IN:

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - MORNING

An antiseptic room devoid of character. A lanky, ordinary-looking man, JOE FERGUSON, 35, sits in a chair, a look of shock and disbelief on his face.

Across from him sits DR. WILLISTON, 60, cherubic yet stately, closes his chart and clasps his hands over his belly.

DR. WILLISTON

I know this is difficult to hear, Joe. The cancer you have is almost undetectable until it's too late.

JOE

I don't understand, I feel fine, other than the upset stomach.

DR. WILLISTON

And the blood in your stool, and your fatigue, and your loss of weight. The scans show it's extremely widespread. I'm afraid there's simply nothing we can do.

Joe buries his face in his hands.

JOE

How long...?

DR. WILLISTON

Can never be certain of these things, but a few weeks at best based on how much it has spread. I'd suggest you get your affairs in order pretty quickly.

EXT. JOE'S RESIDENCE - EVENING

A hardscrabble house in a middle class neighborhood. It's in dire need of a new paint job. Weeds have merged with the hedges.

The skyline of the Las Vegas strip can be seen in the distance.

INT. JOE'S RESIDENCE - EVENING

Inside, the house resembles the doc's office. Threadbare, sparsely decorated. In need of tender loving care.

Joe sits at his dining room table and eats a bowl of cereal as his dinner. Between bites, he sorts through the mail. A steady parade of bills.

Exasperated, he tosses the bills aside, goes to the KITCHEN, and pulls a beer from the fridge.

He pops open the can and leans against the fridge, exhausted and overwhelmed.

Looking out the kitchen window, he observes the Vegas skyline. He walks over to window, deep in thought. Takes a long draw on his beer.

JOE

Fuck it. Why not?

EXT. LAS VEGAS STRIP - AFTERNOON

Joe moves quickly down the sidewalk in front of the Bellagio resort. A small duffel bag hangs across his back. The dancing fountains sway in tune to a Frank Sinatra song.

BUCK CALLAWAY, 33, thin, unshaven, with a wild shock of hair, follows behind, trying to keep up with Joe's pace.

BUCK

You can't be serious about this.

Unfazed, Joe moves on toward the Bellagio entrance.

BUCK

I mean, it's one thing to drop a couple of hundred dollars at a table, but this is, what? Twenty-five, thirty thousand?

JOE

Seventy-two thousand.

BUCK

Jesus H. Christ, Joe. You lose and how are you going to survive?

Buck realizes it as soon as he says it.

BUCK

Shit. I'm sorry.

JOE

Forget it. Won't need any of it anyway. What am I'm going to do, go to Paris? I'll be in hospice before you know it, and that'll be fully covered by my medical insurance.

BUCK

And if you win?

Joe finally stops, faces Buck.

JOE

This is Vegas, Buck. Nobody wins in Vegas except the house.

Joe steps through the entrance.

INT. BELLAGIO - AFTERNOON

Joe and Buck wander through the casino until they arrive at the High Rollers room.

JOE

(to Buck)

Wait here.

Joe steps into the room, and speaks O.C. to the PIT BOSS, a nicely dressed middle-aged man straight out of a Scorsese movie.

Buck watches the conversation go back and forth. Joe shows the contents of the duffel to the Boss, who signals a CASINO WORKER over to take the bag. The worker disappears into a side room.

While he waits, Buck slides a dollar into a slot machine, presses the spin button. Diamond, Diamond, blank. Joe's right. No one but the house wins.

JOE (O.C.)

Buck.

Buck looks over to see Joe waving him in.

Joe sits at a blackjack table, the only player at the table. A large number of black chips are pushed in front of him by the dealer.

PIT BOSS
Seventy-two thousand.

Joe nods, pushes all the chips onto the bet circle. The dealer looks back to the boss, who nods his okay.

DEALER
Seventy-two thousand, single deal.
Good luck, sir.

This catches the attention of the small amount of people in the room. Everyone stops what they are doing to watch.

BUCK
For God's sake, Joe. Think about--

Joe holds up a hand to silence Buck. His eyes are transfixed on the chips in front of him.

The dealer shuffles the deck and gives Joe the opportunity to cut the cards. Joe declines. The dealer nods and starts to distribute the cards.

DEALER
Cards coming out.

The first card comes to Joe face down, then the dealer deals himself a card down.

The next card to Joe comes face up. An eight. Joe frowns, but not nearly as hard as he does when the dealer's next card comes up -- an ace.

BUCK
Shit.

Joe flips his under card over. It's another eight.

DEALER
Sixteen.

JOE
Welp. Maybe this wasn't such a good idea after all.

He drums his fingers on the table. After what seems like an eternity considering it:

JOE
Hit me.

The dealer takes the next card, flips it over and slides it in front of Joe.

Joe sucks in what seems like all the oxygen in the room.
It's a three.

DEALER

Nineteen.

Joe waves his hand over the cards. Gets up from his chair
and as the dealer flips over his hole card, we--

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. BELLAGIO HOTEL - AFTERNOON

Joe exits the front door, the bright sun blinding him.
From behind, we see him watch the fountains move slowly
back and forth.

The zen moment is interrupted by his cell phone ringing.
He looks at the number, then answers.

JOE

Hello?

DR. WILLISTON (V.O.)

Joe, it's Dr. Williston. I've been
going through your scans, and,
well, I don't know how to tell you
this. I'm awfully embarrassed, but
I'm also pleased to tell you the
scans we had were not your scans.
Terrible mix-up to be sure, but
good news for you. Looking at *your*
scans, looks like you just have a
really bad ulcer.

Joe, dazed, hangs up the phone just as Buck comes out the
front door. Buck holds the duffel bag, which looks twice
as big as it did when they first arrived.

BUCK

I guess you were wrong, huh? Vegas
always wins?

Joe smiles as a cute young lady sashays by.

JOE

I've won big twice today. Let's
see if I can make it three in a
row.

(to woman)

Hey! You ever been to Paris?

FADE OUT