

THE CARD COUNTER

Written by

Paul Schrader

## INCARCERATION

1 INT. CASINO - MORNING 1

EXTREME SLOW MOTION CLOSEUPS of a dealer's hand shuffling cards from a shoe onto a blackjack table. The cards fall hypnotically into place.

A dry, measured voice speaks over:

TELL V.O.

I had never imagined myself as someone suited to a life of incarceration. As a boy I was afraid of confined spaces. I feared elevators. When I was older I just wanted to get in the car, roll the windows and drive, drive. Drive wherever my eyes would take me. I was an American kid.

Close ups: players' hands checking cards.

TELL V.O. (CONT'D)

Confinement of any kind was terrifying to me.

Close up. Dealer's hand re-deals.

TELL V.O. (CONT'D)

So, to my surprise, having been sentenced to ten years in prison, I found I adjusted quite well.

CUT TO:

2 INT. LEAVENWORTH PRISON - DAY 2

PRISON MONTAGE. Tableaus from life in a modern prison facility.

--a row of door cells, slots for access

--prisoners dressed in matching prison issue browns sit at metal common tables. They eat standardized meals with plastic utensils. Conversation is minimal. "Correction Specialists" stand watch.

--WILLIAM TELL, 32, lies on a hard bed in his Spartan 6x9 foot cell. He is a muscular man, conservative in appearance. He stares upward, a folded library book on his stomach. ("Meditations," Marcus Aurelius). A bell rings.

Prisoners set down meal trays on four seat tables in the cellblock common area. Tell's voice-over continues:

TELL V.O.

I liked the routine. I liked the regimen. The same activities the same time every day. The same toothbrush, the same clothes, the same toilet, the same food, the same flip-flops, the same conversations. The faces change, but not much. No choices. No anxiety,

Lights out.

TELL V.O. (CONT'D)

I found that I liked reading books. I'd never read a book before. Not all the way through. I found a life for myself that had been beyond my imagination.

--Tell sits on his bunk dealing placing cards from a deck on to the blanket. One by one. He concentrates on each.

TELL V.O. (CONT'D)

It was in prison I learned to count cards.

CUT TO:

### CASHING OUT

3

INT. CASINO - DAY

3

William Tell, 42, sits at a Blackjack table in some casino, any casino, anywhere. Three other players. He has a good stack of chips. The Blackjack Dealer deals.

He wears a grey button shirt, narrow black tie and loose grey/green jacket. His hair is center parted.

TELL V.O.

What separates Blackjack from other games is that it's based on dependent events, meaning past affects the probability in the future. The house has a 1.5 percent advantage.

(MORE)

TELL V.O. (CONT'D)

If a player knows the nature of the cards in the shoe he can turn the house advantage to himself. To do this he has to keep track of every card that is played.

Editing illustrates the points Tell is making.

TELL V.O. (CONT'D)

The count is based on a high low system. High cards, ten, jack, queen, king have a value of minus one. If they are depleted, player's advantage goes down. The low cards, two, three, four, five, six have a value of plus one. The seven, eight and nine have no count value. The player keeps track of every card and calculates the running count.

The Dealer distributes cards from the shoe. The value of each card is labeled by a "+1" or "-1" that graphic on screen, as is the ever changing total plus or minus running count value.

TELL V.O. (CONT'D)

Then the player arrives at the true count, which is the running count divided by the decks remaining. For example, if the running count is plus nine and there are four and a half decks remaining, nine over four and a half gives you a true count of plus two. As true count increases, the player's advantage increases. The idea is to bet little when you don't have the advantage and proportionately more when you do.

William collects his winnings. The Dealer looks at Tell, signals with his eyes: the Pit Boss is watching.

TELL

Well, that's about enough for me.

Tell stacks his chips, stands. Says to the other players:

TELL (CONT'D)

Nice playing with you.

He tips the Dealer and heads for the cashiers' cages. The Pit Boss watches as he goes.

CUT TO:

4 INT. CASHIER'S WINDOW - DAY 4

Tell passes his chips to the CASHIER, waits as the Bill Counter counts out \$840.

CUT TO:

5 EXT. CASINO - DAY 5

OUTSIDE, he's hit with a blinding blast of sunlight. It's about 10 am. He puts on his sunglasses and heads for the parking area.

CUT TO:

**CHECKING IN**

6 EXT. TELL'S CAR, DRIVING - DAY 6

Tell's Toyota passes shops and bars, turns into the an inexpensive motel, a one story structure featuring "FREE cable TV, coffee, wi-fi."

7 INT. MOTEL #1 OFFICE - DAY 7

He enters the small OFFICE, approaches the female DESK CLERK.

TELL

Good day.

DESK CLERK

Good day to you, sir.

TELL

I'd like a single, one night. I'll pay now. I have cash.

DESK CLERK

That's \$46, \$52 with tax. What's your name?

TELL

(gives her \$100 bill)

William Tell.

DESK CLERK

Check out's at noon. You want some coffee? It's free.

TELL

How old is it?

DESK CLERK  
I made it this morning.

TELL  
Why not?

She counts out \$48 in change.

CUT TO:

8 EXT. MOTEL #1 PARKING LOT - DAY 8

Tell walks across the PARKING AREA, coffee cup in his hand. He takes a sip, tosses the rest out. He opens the Toyota trunk, tosses the cup inside, takes out a suitcase and duffel bag. Heads for room number 9.

CUT TO:

9 INT. MOTEL #1, ROOM #9 - DAY 9

Tell places the luggage down, turns on the lights, removes his jacket, sets about his MOTEL ROOM ritual.

First he removes any extraneous items from the room--framed art prints, pillows, ashtray, phone, mirror, reading material, bed cover, TV--places them in the closet. Closes the door. The room is stripped bare.

Bending down he opens the suitcase. Inside are folded white sheets and a plastic container of twine ties.

Unfolding the sheets, Tell starts wrapping the furniture in white cloth. The coffee table. He uses the twine ties to secure the linen to the table legs.

The end table is next. Then the desk. Then the chair. The bed headboard.

The entire room is wrapped in spectral white like the ghostly furnishings of someone long departed.

He then removes his laptop from the suitcase, places it on the sheet wrapped table. He opens it, turns it on. Beside he places an open composition book. A ball point pen beside the journal.

He sets an empty glass and a bottle of whiskey on the table.

He saves the information, picks up the ball point pen, begins to write in longhand in the composition book. Pours himself a drink.

## A GAMBLING FRIEND

10 I/E. TELL'S CAR - DAY 10

11 INT. GRAND OPENING CASINO - DAY 11

En route he spies an aging gambling compadre, SLIPPERY JOE, floral shirt, sideburns and cowboy hat. They exchange greetings.

SLIPPERY JOE  
--re-opening's--

TELL

They're working things out.  
Mistakes get made. Always happens.

SLIPPERY JOE

They're introducing a new room for  
Pai Gow poker. High limit, really  
high limit.

TELL V.O.

House odds 11 percent.

SLIPPERY JOE

And plenty of suckers.

TELL

Those Asian gamblers are pretty  
crafty.

SLIPPERY JOE

Not so much as we think. What are  
you going to play?

TELL

Maybe a little Blackjack. See how  
it goes.

SLIPPERY JOE

There are some cool cats here.  
Downtown Brown, some others. You  
should meet them.

TELL

I've met enough people.

SLIPPERY JOE

(checks his watch)

Let's go over to the Washa Casino.  
Fifteen minutes away. Sit in on the  
poker tournament. That's always a  
gas to watch.

TELL

Ah, Slippery...

SLIPPERY JOE

Com'on, Mr. B, we're going. Let's  
watch some poker. Buy me a drink.  
Follow me.

Slippery Joe guides Tell to the exit.

CUT TO:

12

INT. WASHA CASINO, GAMING FLOOR - DAY

12

Slippery Joe strides through rows of slots with a sense of entitlement. William Tell follows behind.

They approach the pit area featuring the "World Poker Tournament." They stand at a rail where high top table overlook the gaming pit.

The "tournament" is down to final table. A viewing area has been set up. An overhead cam displays the final table on flat screens. Slip checks his watch:

SLIPPERY JOE

Shit, they're down to the final table.

They stand at the rail.

SLIPPERY JOE (CONT'D)

"World fucking tournament." Kiss my balls.

TELL

What's your problem, Slip?

SLIPPERY JOE

Me? I ain't got no problems.

A Waitress approaches. Slippery waves her on, they turn their attention back to the tournament. One player stands out. This is MR. USA, 30, replete with nativist hubris. He wears an American flag shirt, blue pants and a "USA" baseball cap.

Mr. USA wins a pot. He throws his fists upward and chants: "USA, USA, USA." Two LACKEYS in the audience join in: "USA, USA..." The other players hide their disgust. Tell watches with detachment.

Tell spots someone looking at him. She sits against the wall. An attractive black woman, 40, in a fetching outfit. Black dress, big red Jackie O rhinestone studded sunglasses.

He looks away, then looks back. Damn right. She is looking at him. He turns his attention back to the poker pit.

SLIPPERY JOE (CONT'D)

What an asshole, that guy, Mr. USA.

TELL

It's working for him.

SLIPPERY JOE

He plays it for all it's worth.  
Born in Ukraine, the asswipe. He's  
got a website. I came all the way  
here for this? Where you on to  
next?

TELL

There's a law enforcement  
convention in Atlantic City. ISC.  
Cops are always good. They have a  
few drinks and they think nobody  
can touch them.

Mr. USA wins another pot ("USA! USA!"). It's down to two  
players.

LA LINDA, turns her attention from the final table back to  
Tell. Seems more interested in him than the game.

Walks over.

LA LINDA

Mind if I join you?

TELL

Be our guest.  
(he nods)  
I recognize you.

LA LINDA

We've played before.

TELL

Three, no, four times. Horseshoe  
Baltimore, Caesar's Atlantic City,  
Foxwoods, Harrah's Philly.

LA LINDA

That's right.

TELL

You binked an inside straight at  
Foxwoods.

LA LINDA

No explaining luck.

Mr. USA's opponent goes all in on the flat screens. USA  
calls. The room hushes. The River. Three Aces. USA wins. Slip  
heaves with disgust.

SLIPPERY JOE

I'll let you two youngsters be. I  
want to play some dice.

He walks off.

LA LINDA

I knew him when he was called  
Slippery Joe.

TELL

Linda, right?

LA LINDA

"La Linda." "LL." Like Lucky Lady.  
(beat)  
I've watched you play. You count  
cards, right?

TELL

I'm not that smart.

LA LINDA

But you win.  
(he shrugs)  
That means you count cards. How do  
you avoid getting backed off?

TELL

I've been backed off.

A WAITRESS stops by. He orders a beer. She orders a Tom  
Collins. The poker players and officials clear the table. Mr.  
USA heads off with his entourage. We hear Tell's thoughts:

TELL V.O.

The man never saw a day of service.  
I'd like to run that red, white and  
blue flag straight through his  
mouth and out his asshole.

LA LINDA

Yet here you are.

TELL

It's a matter of degree. The house  
doesn't mind players who count  
cards. They don't even mind players  
who count cards and win. What they  
don't like are players who count  
cards and win big. It's how much  
you win and how you win it. I keep  
to modest goals.

LA LINDA

That's what I want to talk to you about. What's your name again?

TELL

William Tell.

LA LINDA

I suppose you have ID to that effect.

TELL

Want to see it?

LA LINDA

I've watched you play poker. I wonder why you always play low stakes games. You're a crackerjack.

TELL

I play within my means.

LA LINDA

There's no reason to do that. You could get someone to stake you. MTT. Seven million payout. 100K freeze out.

TELL

That's what you do? You run a stable?

The waitress brings their drinks.

LA LINDA

I can get someone to stake you. One hundred percent. On my word.

TELL

I prefer to work under the radar.

LA LINDA

I thought you were a gambler.

(he shrugs)

So tell me, Bill, you ever been in prison?

TELL

Why would you say that?

LA LINDA

I can tell when someone's been inside. It's a gift I have.

TELL

Here's the problem with having a backer. He puts up the money, you split the winnings. That's all good. But if you lose you pay the losses back out of future winnings. That only makes sense. And slowly you build Weight. Go to a poker website and look at the top ten winners. Millions in winnings. Fifty percent of them are under water, swamped in debt they'll never repay.

LA LINDA

That's possible. But you can always quit.

TELL

(smiles)

Quit?

A tell tale shrug indicates quitting is outside the realm of possibility.

LA LINDA

You said you didn't play for money. Then why play?

TELL

It passes the time.

LA LINDA

So, Bill, pass some time with me. Let's play some poker.

CUT TO:

13 INT. CASINO CARD ROOM - NIGHT

13

Tell and La Linda sit at a low stakes Texas Hold 'Em table (\$2/\$5). It's late at night, and several of the players seem exhausted. Cards are distributed, bets are made.

TELL V.O.

In poker the player does not play against the house. He plays against other players. The house takes a cut. Two things are necessary. Knowledge of the mathematical odds. Knowledge of your opponents.

(MORE)

TELL V.O. (CONT'D)

Poker is all about waiting. Hours  
pass, days pass, hand after hand,  
each hand like the hand before.  
Then something happens.

POKER PLAYER #2 sets down the River. No bets. La Linda  
watches as Tell turns over his hole cards and collects the  
modest pot.

CUT TO:

**THE WEIGHT**

14 INT. MOTEL ROOM #2 - NIGHT

14

A motel room. Let's call it number two. Extraneous  
furnishings removed. Furniture individually wrapped in white  
cloth. Faint street lamps through blinds and curtains.

Tell, wearing boxers, writes in his journal. Takes a sip.  
Across the back of his shoulders words are tattooed in  
script:

"I trust my life to Providence, I  
trust my soul to Grace"

...with crossed American flags on each shoulder.

TIMECUT: Lights on.

He lies clothed on the bed. Seen from above.

Tell's journal lies open on the linen wrapped desk. The  
laptop is closed beside. A glass with whiskey residue stands  
next to a pint bottle. There is writing in the journal.

TIMECUT: Lights off. William Tell sleeps under the sheets.

His voice plays over:

TELL V.O.

There is a Weight a gambler can  
accrue by accepting financial  
backing. It's like any Weight a  
person in debt accrues. It builds  
and builds. It has a life of its  
own. There also is a moral Weight a  
man can accrue. This is the Weight  
created by his past actions. It is  
a Weight which can never be  
removed.

FADE TO BLACK.

**POLICE EXPO**

FADE IN:

A15 EXT. ATLANTIC CITY, ESTABLISHING - NIGHT (SECOND UNIT) A15 \*

ATLANTIC CITY. Bright lights, big city. Caesars, the Tropicana, Bally's, Harrah's, The Golden Nugget, the Borgata.

15 INT. ATLANTIC CITY CASINO - NIGHT 15

CLOSE UP. Player (Tell) indicates a hit. Red five gives him 19. CLOSE UP. Dealer's hole card turns over. Ten and five. Dealer gets a ten, busts.

Scene from a distance, William Tell, looking spiffy--the black tie, grey shirt--stands, collects his winnings, works his way through the gambling pit.

He stops to examine a poster detailing ISC West Expo events at the Convention Center. Two LAW ENFORCEMENT TYPES step on the escalator. He follows.

CUT TO:

16 INT. ISC WEST CORRIDOR - NIGHT 16

Tell rides the escalator from the casino floor to the convention center. The Law Enforcement types step off the escalator. A sign designates the ongoing ISC "International Security Conference & Exposition WEST EXPO" events.

The convention corridor is a hive of activity. Multiple booths devoted to security interests. Guns, cars, bikes, surveillance devices, uniforms. A row of vendors sell T-shirts, caps, books etc.

Each room has a notice board indicating the day's activities. Tell notices a lecture by Major John Gordo (ret), about "Recent Developments in Interrogation and Truthfulness." He finds the room, steps inside, takes a seat.

CUT TO:

17 INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT 17

JOHN GORDO, muscular, 60, military in demeanor, speaks:

GORDO  
...polygraphs have been  
historically the problem child of  
investigation and law enforcement.  
(MORE)

GORDO (CONT'D)

We know it's often right but it's  
not always right.

(MORE)

GORDO (CONT'D)

The instrument typically used to conduct polygraph tests consists of a physiological recorder that assesses three indicators of autonomic arousal: heart rate/blood pressure, respiration, and skin conductivity. Specific incident testing. The cumulative research evidence suggests that CQTs detect deception better than chance, but with significant error rates, both of misclassifying innocent subjects (false positives) and failing to detect guilty individuals (false negatives). 1991 The Supreme Court again rejected the use of polygraph tests as evidence.

This may soon change. Vocat Electronics has developed 12 point facial recognition software...

He illuminates a power point drawing of a human face with recognition points.

GORDO (CONT'D)

...which uses a proprietary algorithm to interact with CQT detection. This software, called STABL, is in the Beta testing phase. Vocat will soon be offering a test version of this software to qualifying law enforcement and public incarceration agencies. Vocat makes no great claims but it feels this advance in "possible" truth detection needs some field experience. How reliable is it? How does it work? That's what I want to get into next.

He brings up another slide: "MPD STABL test 2019"

GORDO (CONT'D)

I have prepared this power point demonstration with a volunteer from the Milwaukee Police Department...

The police volunteer is fitted with testing paraphernalia.

William Tell sinks slowly into his seat. This is growing increasingly unsettling. His hand raises to his face.

He stands up, about to leave.

CIRK BAUFORT, a 20 year-old boy in a Pewpew Tactical T shirt, approaches him, stops alongside. He turns his head to Tell, speaks sotto voce:

CIRK  
You remember him?

Tell, cautious, gives him the eye. Cirk hands William a piece of paper with a handwritten name and number:

CIRK (CONT'D)  
This is my phone number. I'm  
staying here.

Cirk walks off. Tell is left holding his card. He looks back at Gordo's presentation. Exits.

CUT TO:

18 INT. ROULETTE TABLE - NIGHT 18

Tell stands at a roulette table, places ten black hundred dollar chips on red.

TELL V.O.  
The smartest bet for a novice is  
red/black in roulette. Your odds  
are 47.4 percent. You win you walk  
away. You lose, you walk away. It's  
the only smart casino bet.

CUT TO:

### **THE ABU GHRAIB DREAM**

19 INT. MOTEL #3 - NIGHT 19

William Tell restlessly tosses on his motel bed.

His journal is open on the sheet wrapped desk. The most recent entry reads: "A young man approached me. A boy. He gave me a card."

We close in on William's eye as the screen format expands to accommodate his dream state.

CUT TO:

20 INT. ABU GHRAIB PRISON, IRAQ - NIGHT 20

NIGHT. 2003. Tier 1A. Abu Ghraib prison. Iraq.

This is both William Tell's memory and his dream. It is shot with a 250 degree spherical camera which, when projected, shows a curvilinear (fisheye) perspective.

Objects at the center of the screen appear in normal perspective and are progressively distorted as they radiate to the edges of the frame.

Tell's dream is ONE CONTINUOUS STITCHED SHOT. It is Tell's POV but he also appears in it. It goes on and on, nightmarish and unending, fluctuating between real and surreal, remembered and imagined.

Tier 1A: a rectangular mustard yellow two story prison block with barred cells on either side. It's old and in disrepair: peeling paint, stains on the concrete floor, uncollected trash.

--a naked Iraqi prisoner strung up handcuffed, his back to cell door bars, standing on his tiptoes

--a line of seated cowering Iraqi prisoners in orange jumpsuits and olive polypropylene military sandbags over their heads. Patrols. MP in desert camos strikes one with a white baton.

--William Tell's voice: "Where's my shoe?"

--prisoners beg for mercy ("altaawul lilrahma!")

--Tell briefly appears, has one booted foot, one bare foot. He asks: "Has anyone seen a shoe?"

--a sheet covers a cell enclosure. Screams from behind.

--a female voice yells at a prisoner: "We're all locked up here together!"

--the NOISE, the noise, the noise. The cacophony. Guards yelling until their voices go hoarse, MPs yelling in megaphones directly into detainee's ears, metal music, rap music, fucking Eminem.

--a barking dog

--Tell: "How do I get out of here? My shoe..."

--clicking cameras

--feces, urine

--"my shoe!"

--An MP instructs a naked prisoner to simulate masturbation. Camera flash.

--MP voice: "TIME TO WAKE UP!"

--A female MP restrains a barking German Shephard. An orange suited prisoner cringes.

--a distant soldier's voice sings: "I wish I was in the land of cotton, Old times there are not forgotten; Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie Land."

FADE TO BLACK.

### CIRK'S STORY

FADE IN.

21 EXT. MOTEL #3 - NIGHT 21

Dead of night. William Tell exits his room, gets into his Toyota and drives down the deserted street.

CUT TO:

22 INT. TELL'S CAR - NIGHT 22

Empty streets reflect on the windshield.

CUT TO:

23 INT. AC CASINO - NIGHT 23

Only the hardcore gamblers remain. He walks past vacant tables, enters an elevated bar area.

He speaks to the BARTENDER before sitting:

TELL  
Johnny Walker. Double, neat.

He takes a seat overlooking the floor, takes out his cell phone, the card he was given and dials the number.

TELL (CONT'D)  
Cirk?  
(pause)  
You gave me a card earlier tonight  
with your phone number on it.  
(pause)  
I'm here at the bar.  
(MORE)

TELL (CONT'D)  
The one by the elevators.  
(pause)  
I'll wait.

Tell disconnects the call as the Bartender sets down his drink. He sips, watches the action.

TIMECUT. Cirk, disheveled, emerges from the corridor, walks toward him. Steps alongside.

TELL (CONT'D)  
You want a drink?

CIRK  
I'll have one of those.

Tell motions to the Bartender:

TELL  
Another. The same.  
(to Cirk)  
Let's sit.

They sit across from each other.

TELL (CONT'D)  
So what was that about?

CIRK  
What?

TELL  
You giving me your name and phone number.

CIRK  
You remember Major John Gordo?  
(no response)  
Of course he's not a Major anymore.  
He just uses that title.

TELL  
What are you talking about?

CIRK  
PFC Tillich. Isn't that your name?  
It was at the time. I've done my research. I know your case.

TELL  
Who are you?

The Bartender drops off their drinks.

CIRK

Cirk Baufort. Cirk with a "C." My father was Roger Baufort. John Gordo was his trainer, his mentor. First at Guantanamo, then Bagram. He taught my father in the arts of "Enhanced Interrogation." In fact he came up with that term. Before that it was called torture. Rumsfeld liked the sound of it. "Enhanced Interrogation." Gordo was at Abu Ghraib as a private contractor. My father visited him there.

TELL

Roger Baufort? The name doesn't ring a bell.

CIRK

He was mostly at Bagram. Gordo shuttled between the various places. Dark sites.

TELL

Is this story going somewhere?

CIRK

The beauty of the scheme was that Gordo, once he became a private contractor, could not be prosecuted for crimes not on American soil. But my father was not so lucky. He was dishonorably discharged, got addicted to oxycodone--he'd been injured, drank heavily, beat my mother, beat me. My mother left without saying a word. Without a suitcase. That left only me to beat. Until he shot himself. That was four years ago. He was MP 18 X-Ray. I believe you were MP 96 Bravo.

TELL

And then?

CIRK

I got out of high school, lived with a relative, gave college a try. Didn't work. Debts. I decided to get into it. Investigate for myself. Find out what really happened. To set things straight.

TELL

And what does your mother say?

CIRK

She made her choice.

TELL

Do you know where she is?

CIRK

No.

TELL

And how am I involved in this?

CIRK

A handful of soldiers--"bad apples"--  
-were punished. Those really  
responsible are still walking  
around, giving lectures at  
conventions, getting honorary  
degrees. The apples weren't bad.  
The barrel they lived in was bad.  
And I'm going to set it right.

Pause. Neither man speaks.

CIRK (CONT'D)

When I recognized you at John  
Gordo's seminar--and I recognized  
you instantly--I thought to myself,  
"Here's a man who might want a  
piece of what I'm going to do"

TELL

And what's that?

CIRK

Capture him. Torture him. Kill him.  
(Tell waits)  
They made you the fall guy. They  
fucked you, PFC Tillich--

TELL

My name is Tell--

CIRK

Whatever. They reamed you. You were  
in the photos. No one else was  
prosecuted. Just the soldiers in  
the photos. They put you in Hell.  
Then they blamed you for it.

(MORE)

CIRK (CONT'D)

You got the barracks at Leavenworth. Gordo got R&R in Kuwait.

TELL

They say that revenge is like taking poison and hoping the other guy dies.

CIRK

That's good. I never heard that one.

TELL

Cirk, you need to back off. I've spent a lot of time thinking the exact same thoughts as you are thinking now. They eat you alive.

CIRK

You're going to tell on me?

TELL

No, I'm not. It's your life.

CUT TO:

**RIDE WITH ME**

24 INT. MOTEL #3 ROOM - MORNING

24

Morning. William Tell, awake, lies in bed. He sits up, picks up his cell phone, enters a number.

TELL

Cirk with a "C"?

(beat)

This is Bill Tell.

(beat)

You want to ride with me? I'm a card player. I go from city to city, casino to casino, card room to card room. It gets lonely. I'd like some company. You want to join me? I'll cover the costs.

(beat)

Whatever you feel like.

(beat)

We'll put it in long term parking. You can get it whenever you want.

(beat)

Good. I'll be over in an hour.

Disconnects the call. Starts unwrapping the furniture.

CUT TO:

25 INT. AC CASINO, HOTEL CORRIDOR - DAY 25

Tell knocks on a door.

CIRK O.S.  
Who is it?

TELL  
Tell.

The door opens and Tell enters.

CUT TO:

26 INT. AC CASINO HOTEL ROOM - DAY 26

INSIDE THE DARKENED ROOM, Tell strains to see. He opens the curtains, FLOODING the room with light. He surveys the room. It's a mess. Room service meals, discarded clothes, messy sheets, fast food detritus and empty beer cans.

TELL  
(incredulous)  
You live like this?

Cirk shrugs.

TELL (CONT'D)  
Let's get your shit together and  
get on the road. My car's in  
fifteen minute parking.

CUT TO:

### **SPORTS BOOK**

27 INT. TELL'S CAR - DAY 27

Tell and Cirk cruise down the interstate in his Toyota. Heavy metal plays on the radio.

TELL  
Turn that damn music off.

CIRK  
Who are you, God?

TELL

If you'd actually ever been there  
you'd never want to hear metal  
music again in your life. Turn it  
off.

It takes Cirk a moment to realize "there" means Abu Ghraib.  
He turns the radio off.

CIRK

Where are we going? You never told  
me.

TELL

You didn't ask. There's a racino at  
Delaware Park. Delaware casinos are  
tied into race tracks. An  
electronics convention. I have good  
luck with electricians.

CIRK

I'm not much into cards.

TELL

You like sports?

CIRK

Yeah.

TELL

They have a great sports book.

CIRK

Yeah, but it costs money. How much  
is this going to cost me...

Tell's thoughts play over:

TELL V.O.

Who is this insolent little prick?  
How did I ever end up here? I  
should just pull to the side of the  
road now, toss him on the ground,  
and stomp on his fucking head until  
it cracks wide open.

CIRK

...I played fantasy football a  
while back with the guys but I  
don't suppose that counts.

TELL

What about college? What happened  
there?

CIRK  
It wasn't for me.

TELL  
How much debt you got?

CIRK  
(shrugs)  
Some.  
(beat)  
A lot.

TELL  
You want to go back?

CIRK  
I got out of the mood.

TELL  
You got any interests?

CIRK  
What do you mean?

TELL  
Things you might want to do. An  
occupation, a business, any goddamn  
interests?

CIRK  
(hard)  
I got interests.

CUT TO:

28      EXT. DELAWARE DOWNS RACINO - DAY (SECOND UNIT)      28  
Establishing.

TELL V.O.  
Sports book is a world to itself.  
There are two factors...

CUT TO:

29      INT. DELAWARE DOWNS SPORTS BOOK - DAY      29  
They enter the DELAWARE PARK SPORTS BOOK, a kaleidoscopic  
array of betting boards and live sports events. It's like  
entering a video game.

TELL V.O.

...One is inside information about the teams. Since there are a hundred games playing around the world at any moment, that's a lot of information...

Tell is speaking to Cirk. His dialogue which has been "voice over" switches to person to person communication:

TELL

...The other is the psychology of betting public which dictates the movement of the line but the house has algorithms quicker, better and faster than you, so unless you have inside info, sports betting is just for fun. Here's a couple hundred bucks. Pick two teams, make some bets and have some fun. I'm gonna play some Blackjack.

Cirk takes the C notes, studies the betting board. William adds a couple Twenties.

TELL (CONT'D)

That's walking around money.

Tell takes out his phone as he heads to the casino floor. He enters a number.

TELL (CONT'D)

(on phone)

Yeah, hold on a second. It's too damn noisy here.

CUT TO:

30 INT. DELAWARE DOWNS MEN'S ROOM - DAY

30

He walks into the restroom.

TELL

That's better. La Linda is that you?

(pause)

I'm at Delaware Raceway.

(pause)

Electricians. I've been thinking about what you said the other day. Having some second thoughts. I may be interested in what you were talking about.

(MORE)

TELL (CONT'D)

(pause)

I realize that. I just thought we could take the conversation to the next step.

(pause)

After this, back up to AC.

(pause)

Okay.

CUT TO:

**LA LINDA PART TWO**

31 INT. MOTEL ROOM #4 - NIGHT

31

MOTEL ROOM. NIGHT. William Tell sits at his sheet wrapped desk, writing in his composition book.

TELL V.O.

Is there an end to punishment? Is there a limit to the amount of effort it takes to merit expiation? Is it possible to know when one reaches the limit?

FADE TO BLACK.

32 INT. TELL'S CAR - DAY

32

FADE IN.

Highway sign: Atlantic City 25 miles. Cirk rides shotgun.

TELL

There was a guy, back when I was serving time, he took a couple of metal spoons, broke them apart, bent them over, then swallowed them. True. They took him to the infirmary, cut opened his stomach, took the spoons out. Nobody could figure out why. I guess he wanted the attention.

They ride on.

TELL (CONT'D)

You ever been in prison? Arrested for anything?

CIRK

No.

Tell nods, keeps driving.

CUT TO:

33

INT. TIENS - DAY

33

Tell and Cirk sit at an Asian themed bar and restaurant. They exchange small talk:

CIRK (O.S.)  
...Seattle

TELL (O.S.)  
Never played the Northwest. Not  
sure why. Canada...

La Linda walking their direction in a fashionable jacket and slacks. Winding her way through the casino. She approaches.

TELL (CONT'D)  
Madame, join us.

She sits.

TELL (CONT'D)  
La Linda, I'd like you to meet the  
young man formerly known as Cirk  
Baufort. Now we just call him "The  
Kid."

CIRK  
That's Cirk with a "C."

LA LINDA  
(extends hand)  
Pleased to meet you, Kid.

They shake hands.

TELL  
The king of sports book, the Kid  
is. Yesterday, two for two. Two  
games. Hit them both. On a double  
pop.

LA LINDA  
I want his mojo.

William smiles, turns to Cirk:

TELL  
La Linda and I have something we  
want to discuss. Maybe...

CIRK  
(taking the hint)  
Sure. I'll give the slots a whirl.

TELL  
Bet small, lose small.

Tell and La Linda watch as he walks off.

TELL (CONT'D)  
He's a good kid.

LA LINDA  
A little surprised but what the hell. What this thing you wanted to talk about?

TELL  
I think I may want to build up a nest egg. To do that I need a backer.

LA LINDA  
That's a dramatic turn.

TELL  
You woke something in me.

LA LINDA  
Is that a good thing or a bad thing?

TELL  
I don't know.  
(pause)  
It was the Kid. He needs help.

LA LINDA  
Money will do that?

TELL  
It's a start.

LA LINDA  
Money cuts two ways.

TELL  
He's got debts. Where do we start?

LA LINDA  
You're sort of known so you're not that far away from a tournament. Hop on one of the WSOP tours.

(MORE)

LA LINDA (CONT'D)

There's an event every week. You  
can move up fast if you're willing  
to travel.

TELL

I am.

LA LINDA

We can stay on the East Coast.  
Tease 'em. The Atlantic Freezeout.  
How's that for a name?

TELL

I'm down. Not with the name.

LA LINDA

At some point your past is going to  
come up. You realize that.

TELL

I've got ID.

LA LINDA

Sooner or later.

TELL

Vegas?

LA LINDA

That's where the money is.

TELL

Do I have to meet the backer?

LA LINDA

Not necessarily. For some it's an  
ego thing. Others don't really  
care. I'll find someone suited to  
you.

TELL

I get my nest egg, I bail. Two  
years max. That's the end of it.

LA LINDA

I wish I could believe you.

TELL

(looks her in the eyes)  
Believe.

She feels his desire. Oh boy. This is a moment.

LA LINDA  
I'm too old for this.

LL stands. She moves to exit, then stops, returns. She kisses the top of William's head. Then retreats.

FADE TO BLACK.

**GREATEST POKER HAND EVER PLAYED**

FADE IN.

\*

A34 EXT. POCONOS - DAY (SECOND UNIT)

A34

\*

Moving car shot. We ride through wooded Pennsylvania hills.

\*

"WELCOME TO POCONOS RESORTS." A large sign indicates the direction and distance to various Poconos resorts and casinos.

\*

\*

\*

Ahead is a large modern adirondack style casino resort complex. We pass by.

\*

\*

34 EXT. CHAT N' CHEW CAFE - DAY

34

Poconos restaurant. Storm clouds in the distance.

CUT TO:

35 INT. CHAT N' CHEW CAFE - DAY

35

\*

"All Day Breakfast." Tell, across from Cirk, pushes away his plate, sips his coffee.

TELL

The other day you asked me, what was the greatest poker hand ever played? I can only speak for what I've seen and this was the best one I ever saw.

\*

He removes a deck of cards from his pocket, shuffles it one handed. Cirk is impressed. He motions to the WAITRESS to remove the plates. He waits as she does. Thanks her.

TELL (CONT'D)

2012. Indian casino in Iowa.  
Blackbird Bend. Omaha Nation. 10k  
tournament.

\*

\*

\*

(MORE)

TELL (CONT'D)

Goldie, Asian player, wore a lot of  
gold, and Alex Karesco, WSOP  
champion, you may have heard of  
him. Alex's got pocket queens,  
diamonds and clubs...

\*

Tell spreads the deck out face down across the table. To  
illustrate his point, removes without looking a queen of  
diamonds and a queen of clubs, turns them face up.

\*

TELL (CONT'D)

Alex had nine eight of diamonds...

\*

He removes two additional cards from the spread, turns them face up: Nine of diamonds. Eight of diamonds. Cirk is dumbfounded:

\*

CIRK

How do you do that?

TELL

Practice. I was in a place where I had a lot of time on my hands. Now comes the Flop. Ten of spades, jack of diamonds, queen of hearts...

\*

(turns over those cards)

\*

There's blood in the water. They both think they're ahead. It goes Check, raise, reraise, Re-reraise, call. Other players fold. Goldie and Alex head to head...

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

Tell arranges face up cards opposing each other with house cards in between.

\*

\*

TELL (CONT'D)

\*

...The Turn: ten of diamonds.

\*

(turns over card)

\*

This time, it goes bet, call. Now there's only one card that gets Goldie out. There's a 2% chance the River will come the seven of diamonds. Alex has a 98% chance of winning the hand with queens full of tens. Goldie looks at the damage. He doesn't even have a pot sized bet left behind. He makes this little sucking sound like the Asians do...

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

(mimics it)

\*

...then he goes all in. Alex calls and here comes the River: seven of diamonds...

\*

\*

\*

\*

(turns over card)

Straight flush beats a full house. Goldie wins.

\*

\*

CIRK

You saw that game?

TELL

(collects cards)

Haven't been to Iowa since.

The Waitress returns, coffee pot in hand.

TELL (CONT'D)

Yeah, top us off.

(waits till Waitress  
leaves)

This plan you have, about Major  
Gordo, you given it more thought?

(MORE)

TELL (CONT'D)

He's a big guy. You're not. He's right out of fucking Call of Duty. How you gonna do that?

CIRK

There would need to be a tranquilizer. Ketamine. Combined with Telazol. It can be administered by a dart pistol.

TELL

Where did you find out about this?

CIRK

The internet.

TELL

And you have it?

CIRK

Just the ketamine. It's amazing how easy it is to buy. I ordered it on a lark. Three days later it arrived.

TELL

This isn't very well thought out.

CIRK

That's why I need a partner. Somebody with experience. Somebody with expertise. And motive. A strong guy. A guy like you.

TELL

I'm thinking of starting a business. Not this gambling thing, a real business and I may be in the market for a partner. Somebody young. Interest you?

CIRK

Depends what business it is.

TELL

Let's roll back your scenario a bit. You've located John Gordo and shot him with a dart. He's gaga. What next?

CIRK

I'd strip him naked. Put a hood on him. One of those green military sandbags. They sell them on eBay.

(MORE)

CIRK (CONT'D)

Handcuff him, string him to the ceiling to keep him from sleeping. Make him try to jack off. Hit him on the legs.

TELL

You hear about this from your father?

CIRK

No. He never talked about it. He kept it inside.

TELL

He beat you?

CIRK

That's in the past.

TELL

The body remembers. It stores it all.

(Cirk doesn't respond)

Do you want to hear about it? Does that interest you?

CIRK

What?

TELL

You know what. You're dying to hear.

(Cirk nods)

The noise. The smell. Feces, urine, oil, explosives, bleach, sweat, smoke, all day, every day. Sand spiders, camel spiders, snakes, ants as big as cockroaches. The heat. The fear. The adrenaline jack. Mortars. The sheer noise of it. And blood. The only way to survive was to rise above. Rise and laugh. Surf the craziness. To see a grown man shit and piss on himself! Sing the song. The Noise. The fucking Noise. The noise.

(beat)

We were all trapped in there. In the same shit, shit, shit, shit hole. Them and us. Am I trying to justify what we did? No. Nothing can justify what we did. Your father understood that. If you were there you could understand.

(MORE)

TELL (CONT'D)  
 Otherwise, there's no  
 understanding.

FADE TO BLACK.

**FIRST TOURNAMENT**

FADE IN.

36 INT. POCONOS CASINO - DAY 36

Tell, La Linda and Cirk enter silhouetted by daylight. They pass through clanging slot machines following signs that point to "Poconos Poker Classic."

CUT TO:

37 INT. POCANOS REGISTRATION - DAY 37

They pass merch booths as they approach the tournament room. Thirty blue felted tables glow under fluorescents.

Professional poker players mill about, exchange small talk. Most are white, thirtyish. Backpacks and baseball caps. Each has his/her own "look". Some wear logo patches indicating sponsors: "888poker," "WSOP.com," "PokerStars."

Tell, ID in hand, queues up at a table. Cirk holding back, looks at gaudy merch.

MINNESOTA, an obese Asian chap, approaches La Linda:

LA LINDA  
 Minnesota! When was the last time?

MINNESOTA  
 Orlando?

LA LINDA  
 Oxford Downs. That's right. You were with Clicky Dick.  
 (makes clicking sound)

MINNESOTA  
 You heard what happened to him?

LA LINDA  
 (nods)  
 I didn't even know he was sick.

MINNESOTA

Nobody did. Thrombosis. Not enough exercise.

Mr. USA approaches at a distances, his Two Lackeys holding up USA signs.

MINNESOTA (CONT'D)

I'd like to put a cap in that motherfucker.

LA LINDA

Take it smooth, Minnie--and exercise those legs!

Minnesota chuckles as he walks off. She turns to Tell:

LA LINDA (CONT'D)

They call him Minnesota Fats cause of the movie. Ain't many fat people in professional poker anymore. I just call him Charlie Two Chins.

CIRK

Why's that?

LA LINDA

More chins than a Chinese phone book.

(winks)

Thanks for the straight line.

Tell hands his ID to the TOURNAMENT CLERK.

TOURNAMENT CLERK

You're in MR.TELL. Here is your seat. 3 o'clock.

He looks at the print out: "BLUE PIT, Table 22, Seat 4."

LA LINDA

She didn't ask for a Rewards Card?

TELL

Nope.

LA LINDA  
You get a lot of free shit that  
way. I'm compt'ed.

TELL  
But you're in their data base.

LA LINDA  
You are already.

CUT TO:

38

INT. POCONOS CASINO - DAY

38

The tournament is underway. A motley assembly. Eight to nine players plus TOURNAMENT DEALER at each of thirty tables overseen by casino employees.

Each player is in his/her zone. The hush of quiet voices, cards being dealt, chips clicking.

TELL V.O.  
The preferred poker variant for multi-table tournaments is no limit Texas hold 'em. It encourages large pots and large raises. Everyone has the same buy in. You play until you are out of chips. The house takes a 10% rake. The prize money is split between the top five players. The winner doesn't take all. Not like TV.

The Dealer deals: two cards to each player.

TELL V.O. (CONT'D)  
Before the hole cards are dealt the players to the left of the button must post small and big blinds. This stimulates action and the blinds go up every hour. The rest of the cards are common cards: the Flop, three cards, the Turn and the River. The Turn, the River can instantly turn a losing hand into a winner. That's hold 'em's betting appeal.

Tell rechecks his hole cards: pair of kings. On the table: 9,8,9,J, A. The only remaining player holds an ace and deuce. Tell goes all in, signaling he has three of a kind.

The opposing players folds. Tell discards his cards, collects the pot.

CUT TO:

39 INT. POCANOS CASINO BUFFET - DAY

39

Tell shares soup, salad and coffee with Cirk and La Linda as Casino customers crowd the buffet. She turns to Cirk:

LA LINDA  
Did you get bored?

CIRK  
(shrugs)  
Played some slots.

LA LINDA  
You should read a book.  
(blank response)  
I'll buy you one.

CIRK  
(offended)  
I've read books.  
(to Tell)  
What is it with her?

LA LINDA  
(egging him)  
Name one.

CIRK  
One what?

LA LINDA  
One book.

CIRK  
It was called Poker for Dummies. I  
think you may have read it.

They laugh.

LA LINDA  
I like him.  
(to Tell)  
You made it to Dinner Break. I  
musta fired two dozen tournaments  
before I lasted that long.

CIRK  
How many are left?

TELL

Four tables. Should be done tomorrow.

LA LINDA

You ever played Kansas City?

TELL

I don't think so.

LA LINDA

Let's see how this one goes.

CIRK

How much cards do you play?

TELL

Let's see, seventy hands an hour, eight to twelve hours a day, six to seven days a week--it adds up.

LA LINDA

Don't you do anything else?

TELL

Like what?

LA LINDA

Anything. Going to a park, a ball game, a concert, a museum--

CIRK

A museum?

LA LINDA

(to Cirk)

I'll get you a book. It's called Museums for...

ALL THREE TOGETHER

...Dummies.

LA LINDA

Ba doom.

(to Tell)

I mean just to do something else. For variety.

TELL

I like playing cards.

LA LINDA

You want to know the name of your backer?

TELL

Should I?

LA LINDA

No. Just curious.

TELL

I trust you. "L.L."

CUT TO:

40

INT. POCONOS CASINO - NIGHT

40

The tournament is down to its final table. Mr. USA, Minnesota, William Tell and two others. A couple dozen onlookers watch. The hour is late.

Minnesota busts and stands. The other players greet him with professional courtesy as he leaves. Mr. USA extends his hand to Minnesota.

LL and Cirk watch from the refreshment area across the room. Overhead camera feature elite tables on flat screens.

A player pushes out a multi stack of chips. People take note.

CIRK

(looking at screen)

That's 800,000 dollars. Where do they get that money?

LA LINDA

Jeez Louise, Kid. Slow down.

(beat)

You see those black chips? What do they say?

CIRK

Ten thousand.

LA LINDA

Ten thousand what? Ten thousand bits of beans or pennies, ten thousand grains of rice? That's not money. Those are prize points. We just call them dollars. It's good publicity.

CIRK

So how much is it?

LA LINDA

Depends on the buy-in and the split. A game like this, there's about three hundred thousand in play. The winner will get 150, runner up 70 to 80 and so on. Poker used to be played in the basement. Internet changed that. We play in the ballrooms now.

(beat)

You know who he is?

CIRK

Who?

LA LINDA

Bill Tell. Whatever his real name is. You know who he is, don't you?

CIRK

All I ever heard was William Tell. Why you think he has another name?

LA LINDA

You've been around him. He's a mystery. There's something I can't figure out.

(Cirk shrugs)

I was wondering, am I in any danger?

CIRK

Of what? Falling in love?

LA LINDA

Don't be a child. What is his past?

CIRK

I haven't asked.

LA LINDA

What are you two doing together?

CIRK

I've got no goals. I'm just along for the ride. One day at a time.

TIME CUT: Two players left. A new deal. Mr. USA, holding queen pair, charges out of the big blind with a hefty bet. Tell holds a ten and jack of spades. The Flop. Nine of spades, ten of hearts, six of spades. Tell has two routes to win: a spade flush or straight. USA bets, Tell raises, USA calls. The Turn. Three of diamonds. USA bets, Tell calls.

The River. Ace of Hearts. Tell is caught and he knows it. But the pot is too big to walk away from. He calls. He loses.

"USA! USA!" Tell extends his hand to the winner.

CUT TO:

41 INT. POCANOS BAR - NIGHT

41

La Linda , Tell and Cirk enter. She holds a cashiers check.

LA LINDA  
180 thousand for a week's work. I  
hope you're not disappointed.

TELL  
90 For you. 90 For me.

LA LINDA  
The Backer's very happy. Two more  
tourneys and the big show.

CIRK  
Viva Las Vegas.

They settle unto three stools.

CIRK (CONT'D)  
(walking away)  
Excuse me a sec. I gotta hose it.

She orders a Manhattan. He takes the same.

LA LINDA  
What did you mean when you said  
that the other day?

TELL  
Said what?

LA LINDA  
That I "woke" you. What the hell  
did that mean?

TELL  
I don't know. It was just a  
comment. Something I said.

LA LINDA  
Hmm. It's an odd thing to say.

TELL  
I guess so.

LA LINDA  
What are your plans?

TELL  
I like how it's headed.

LA LINDA  
I mean tonight.

TELL  
I have to go back to my motel. Got  
some stuff to do.

LA LINDA  
(disappointed)  
You're not staying here?

TELL  
I don't like to stay at casinos.  
They know everything about you.  
Maids and staff and corridor  
cameras. Not for me.

He knocks back his drink, stands.

TELL (CONT'D)  
I'll see you down the road La  
Linda. Chicago, right?

He kisses her cheek, walks away. She just sits there, drink  
in hand, rejected.

Cirk walks over, notices Tell exiting. He makes a "what's  
up?" gesture. She shrugs and says:

LA LINDA  
Sit down, Kid.

FADE TO BLACK.

**GORDO FLASHBACK**

FADE IN.

42 INT. MOTEL ROOM #5 - NIGHT

42

William Tell enters, turns on the desk lamp. The room is  
wrapped in ghostly white. He pours himself a drink, sits  
down, opens his journal. Begins to write.

TELL V.O.  
His real name was John Rodgers.  
John Gordo came sometime later.  
(MORE)

TELL V.O. (CONT'D)

He was born in Georgia. He first came to the attention of the CIA during the Contra counter insurgency. He was trained in interrogation in Nicaragua. From there he entered the SERE program. "Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape." The program was devised to help captured US soldiers withstand hostile interrogation.

CUT TO:

43 INT. SERE TRAINING FACILITY - NIGHT

43

1986. Nightmarish dark space.

Stock footage intercut with live action. More real than the dream, but not quite real. Memory in a prism.

--Roving flashlight reveals several GIs, hands bound, hoods over their heads secured by gaffer's tape, are confronted by hostile military instructors in green camo. They YELL confusing, contradictory commands. Blue LIGHT flashes accompanied by electric STATIC as they buzz the GIs with hand held electric prods.

--Other GIs are chained in contorted "stress positions": bent over backwards, upside down, from the ceiling. Blasts of deafening METAL MUSIC.

--GIs forced to stand while attempting to sleep, forced into cold showers, YELLED at in English and Arabic.

TELL V.O.

They were put into stress conditions, sensory deprivation, confinement in close spaces, given bombardment with dangerous decibels of noise, starvation, sleep deprivation, sexual humiliation and enemas.

CUT TO:

44 INT. MOTEL ROOM #5 - NIGHT

44

Tell sips a drink, continues writing.

CUT TO:

45 EXT. GUANTANAMO DOC FOOTAGE - DAY

45

DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE FROM GUANTANAMO DETENTION CAMP. 2002. Head-shaven, handcuffed prisoners in orange jump suits kneeling in the harsh Cuban sun. Camo dressed GUARDS force one prisoner upright when he falls over.

Muslim prisoners pray in communal steel mesh enclosure.

TELL V.O.

After the foreign fighters at the Guantanamo Detention Camp were unresponsive to interrogation, a decision was made to reverse engineer the lessons learned in the SERE program. SERE Psych Op instructors were brought to Gitmo to devise enhanced interrogation techniques. One of the first to arrive was Consultant John Gordo, now a civilian.

CUT TO:

46 EXT. BLACK SITES - DAY

46

MONTAGE of "BLACK SITES" around the world, Secret prisons in Germany, Thailand, Romania, Egypt as well as 17 floating military prison ships.

TELL V.O.

Lessons learned at Gitmo were conveyed to interrogation Black Sites around the world.

CUT TO:

47 EXT. PARWAN DETENTION CAMP DOC FOOTAGE- DAY

47

Establishing shots of Parwan Detention Camp in Afghanistan and Abu Ghraib in Iraq.

TELL V.O.

In 2003 a decision was made at the highest levels to Gitmo-ize the civilian prisons at Bagram airfield and Abu Ghraib.

CUT TO:

48 INT. MOTEL #5 - NIGHT

48

BACK TO NORMAL PERSPECTIVE. William Tell writes in his journal:

TELL V.O.  
Civilian consultant John Gordo  
arrived in May.

CUT TO:

49 INT. ABU GHRAIB, MILITARY OFFICE - NIGHT

49

Two barely lit faces in a plywood cubicle. A plastic table, two plastic chairs. Opened boxes of the floor. Official paperwork on the table.

Prison sounds ECHO through the plywood, interrupted by a distant explosion.

STAFF SERGEANT HOSKINS, 31, looks up as PFC TILLICH (aka William Tell), 29, wears camo uniform, vest, an MP arm band and a "Tillich" name tag.

HOSKINS  
At ease, Private.  
(Tell hesitates)  
What's on your mind?

TELL  
Consultant Gordo contacted me. He  
gave me instructions, sir.

HOSKINS  
And?

TELL  
Is he my superior?

HOSKINS  
Do what Military Intelligence says.  
That's why they are here.

TELL  
I'm confused sir, I have no  
training for this. I'm a MP, not an  
Interrogator. I've never done  
interrogations. These are civilian  
prisoners, sir.

HOSKINS  
This is a command decision.

TELL  
Could I see a copy of the Rules of  
Engagement?

HOSKINS  
You haven't read it?

TELL  
No.

HOSKINS  
I'll get you one...

TELL V.O.  
Of course he never did.

HOSKINS  
...Every time you hear an  
explosion, there's a chance an  
American soldier has died. And you  
want to know on which side of the  
plate the knife and fork go?  
Dismissed, PFC. Tillich.

TELL  
Yes, Sir.  
(salutes)

HOSKINS  
And don't go up the chain of  
command again.

CUT TO:

50 INT. TIER 1A, ABU GHRAIB - NIGHT

50

BACK TO HALLUCINO DREAM VISION.

Tell and Consultant Gordo walk down the corridor. Gordo wears  
civilian khakis, an olive T shirt, vest, side arm, boots,  
every inch Don't Fuck With Me.

To their right and left, prisoners shrink as they pass.

GORDO  
You go to college, Tillich?

TELL  
Community College, two years.

GORDO  
They teach you creativity there?

TELL

No sir.

GORDO

Well, that's what it takes here.  
Everything's not black and white.  
You have to use your imagination.  
This is not about following some  
manual, this is about getting  
answers. Answers which will save  
American lives.

TELL

What if they don't know the  
answers?

GORDO

They all say that. That's their  
culture. Follow me.

Gordo leads him into a darkened plywood INTERROGATION ROOM. A  
bruised naked Iraqi PRISONER lies on the concrete floor  
soiled by his own feces. An MP and CIVILIAN TRANSLATER watch,  
waiting. Gordo turns to the MP:

GORDO (CONT'D)

Wake him up!  
(calls)  
Baufort, get in here!

ROGER BAUFORT (Cirk's father) enters as a MP throws a bucket  
of water on the Prisoner, yanks the Prisoner upright, cuffs  
his wrist to the grid. Gordo leans into the Prisoner:

GORDO (CONT'D)

Time to talk, little buddy.  
(to Baufort)  
Soften him up. I'll be right back.

Gordo escorts Tell out of the room, speaks to him man to man:

GORDO (CONT'D)

I like you, Tillich. I think you  
got what it takes. You got the  
Right Stuff. I'm going to put you  
in the night shift. That's where  
things happen.

CUT TO:

--Tell kicks a naked prisoner in the shins with his combat boot. And again.

TELL V.O.

Gordo was right. I had it in me.

--Tell places women's pink panties over the face of a crying middle aged prisoner.

--a naked comatose prisoner lies on the concrete floor. Tell, wearing blue nitrile gloves, SMASHES the prisoner's head against the floor. The prisoner's skull cracks on impact.

CUT TO:

52 INT. MOTEL ROOM #5 - NIGHT 52

Tell writes in journal.

TELL V.O.

The Kid was right. When those photos came out, Gordo vanished.

CUT TO:

53 INT. FORT LEAVENWORTH, JAIL CELL - NIGHT 53

2009. Tell lies on his bunk. His face empty.

TELL V.O.

The only ones prosecuted were in the pictures. Not their superiors. Not their superiors' superiors.

JUMP CUT. Tell practices card skills.

TELL V.O. (CONT'D)

Gordo moved on. Started his own consulting company. I heard he was working in Cairo.

CUT TO:

54 INT. U.S.D.B. COMMON AREA - DAY 54

The "AB" common area. Bolted table and chair units surrounded by two decks of cells.

A commotion. Without warning a bulked-up BLACK INMATE suddenly delivers Tell a glancing BLOW the head. Tell falls, pulls himself back up.

Tell steps up to the Black Inmate, stares him eye to eye, six inches away, hands at his side. Just daring him. The Black Inmate HITS him again, this time solidly.

Blood flows from Tell's mouth. He stands again, gets in the Inmate's face yet again. The other prisoners and guards watch, curious how this will turn out.

TELL V.O.

In the military, rank means everything. In U.S.D.B., it means nothing.

Okay, the Inmate thinks. He PUNCHES Tell again. In the forehead. Tell collapses backwards. Hits the floor. Woozy, struggles to his feet. An open cut on his forehead, blood in his eye. Steps forward. Dares the Black Inmate. Do it.

The Inmate just shakes his head, laughs, pushes Tell's chest and walks away. Tell staggers as GUARDS in Urban Gray camos enter.

55 INT. U.S.D.B. CELL - NIGHT

55

William Tell lies on his bunk, his face a battered mess. He breathes in. Breathes out.

TELL V.O.

The prisoner's name was Clay Williams. I don't know if he's alive or dead. If he were alive, I wonder if I could hire him to finish the job.

FADE TO BLACK.

U.S.D.B.

FADE IN.

56 INT. TELL'S CAR - DAY

56

Tell's Toyota drives past Midwest fields. Cirk, riding shotgun, listens to music on his phone. He removes his ear buds, looks around.

CIRK

This is not a bad life. I could get used to this.

TELL

It's a thin margin. It's 24/7. Only a few cats can cut it.

CIRK

I like La Linda. How'd you meet her?

TELL

She runs a stable.

(off his look)

That's what they call gamblers who are backed by investors. The gamblers are called horses. The stable puts up the money. Splits the winnings with the horses. Losses are applied to future winnings.

CIRK

Why don't they use their own money?

TELL

OPM. Other People's Money. The casinos, the TV, websites want big prize pools. It's entertainment.

CIRK

Where we going? St. Louis is back that way..

TELL

A detour. I thought I'd take a little trip down memory lane.

CUT TO:

57 EXT. U.S.D.B. - DAY

57

Tell slows to a stop before a low brick wall which reads "US Disciplinary Barracks, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas" next to a sword insignia with the inscription "Our Mission Your Future." Behind is a three story red brick structure emblazoned "U.S.D.B." surrounded by single story grey concrete wings.

TELL

This was my home for eight and a half years. Since we were near I thought I might drop by.

Cirk doesn't respond. Tell gestures:

TELL (CONT'D)

Up there. Second floor. 202 B Pod.  
Had my own room after the first  
year. Then another place on the  
other side. You know that fella I  
was talking to you about, the one I  
wanted you to meet?

(Cirk nods)

He's here. I thought I'd visit.  
I've arranged it. Want to join?

CIRK

Go into a military prison? No  
thanks.

TELL

It's pretty good as prisons go.  
Built in 2002. Relatively quiet.  
Things still work, like toilets.

CIRK

Shit, man. Those doors close behind  
you, that's fucking it.

TELL

I'm going in. Think of it as a  
field trip. A teachable moment.

CIRK

I'll wait in the car.

TELL

(stern)

I'm inviting you.

CIRK

I ain't going.

TELL

That's that?

CIRK

That's that.

Beat.

TELL

You wait in the car.

Tell puts the car in gear, drives toward the security kiosks.

CUT TO:

**TWISTING BY THE POOL**

58 EXT. MOTEL #6 - AFTERNOON 58

"The Hoosier Inn" or some such Midwestern appellation.

CUT TO:

59 EXT. MOTEL #6 POOL - AFTERNOON 59

Cirk rests on a faded vinyl strap chaise lounge at the edge of an enclosed pool. He cradles a beer bottle, watching a mixed group of teens laughing and goofing off to Dire Straits at the other side of the pool.

William Tell exits a room, spots Cirk and walks over. He enters the pool enclosure, sits beside Cirk. After a moment:

CIRK  
You ever been to Google Earth?

TELL  
Where's that?

CIRK  
That's where I was when I was waiting for you. It's amazing. You can enter any place on the planet and it zooms right in.

No response. Cirk holds out his phone. Tell looks away.

CIRK (CONT'D)  
Look here. 290 Great Falls Road,  
Rockville Virginia. The house, the  
surroundings, latitude, longitude.  
That's John Gordo's house. Front  
entrance...  
(advances image)  
...back entrance.

TELL  
You still got him on the brain?

CIRK  
Yes, sir.

TELL  
I don't think that's such a great  
idea.

Realizing Tell is not going to look at the phone, Cirk pulls it back, sets it down.

CIRK  
How'd it go? At Leavenworth?

TELL  
Okay.

CIRK  
You weren't there very long.

No response.

CIRK (CONT'D)  
How was he?

TELL  
Prison does things to a person.

CIRK  
I thought you were going to see a friend.

TELL  
Friend? Did I use that word?

CIRK  
I...thought so.

TELL  
He's got a lot of hate in him. A matter of time before he catches a longer stretch. He'll never come out.

CIRK  
You still P.O.--ed at me?

Pause.

CIRK (CONT'D)  
Wasn't La Linda going to meet us here?

TELL  
She'll meet us tomorrow. St. Louis, that goes well, do a Deepstacks in Biloxi, Tunica, on to Panama City.

CIRK  
You like her.

It takes him a minute to realize the conversation has gone back to La Linda.

TELL

Yeah.

CIRK

Me too.

(beat)

You ever been married?

TELL

(shakes head)

When I was in the service I was a bit of a lady's man. Thought I was. But then the other stuff happened. The narrative was broken.

Beat.

CIRK

How long since you got laid?

Tell looks at The Kid. He's crossing some sort of line here. But that's the point isn't it? That's why he invited him along. To get over the line. He takes his time, stares Cirk in the eye:

TELL

How long since you've seen your mother?

CIRK

I wouldn't know how to find her.

TELL

Bullshit.

CIRK

What business is it of yours?

TELL

You remember her?

CIRK

Sure.

TELL

She reach out to you?

(no response)

She tried to contact you?

Still no response. Cirk's Expression doesn't change.

TELL (CONT'D)

It's a terrible thing when a man loses his mother.

(MORE)

TELL (CONT'D)

It's even worse when he loses her  
when he didn't need to. Because he  
was stubborn.

CIRK

I'm sorry for your loss.

TELL

I'll make you a deal, kid. You  
visit your mother and I'll fucking  
get laid.

That's a conversation stopper. They watch the teens across  
the pool picking up their towels and heading out. A boy snaps  
a towel. A girl squeals.

CIRK

I don't like prisons. Even seeing  
them on the highway. You're looking  
at something and you realize  
"that's a prison."

(shudders, looks away)

My mom would cry after she read my  
father's letters.

TELL

I thought he didn't talk about it?

CIRK

He didn't.

Tell decides to open up. A little.

TELL

There's something quite similar in  
poker. You know the phrase "tilt"?

CIRK

It means when a player gets too  
caught up with winning. And he  
plays outside his zone. He tilts.

TELL

Just like in pinball.

(beat)

(MORE)

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

TELL (CONT'D)

There's something similar in interrogations. It's called "force drift." It happens when the interrogator applies more and more force to the prisoner with less and less results. The interrogator becomes intoxicated by frustration and power. He applies more and more force, without reason. Without result. Any man can tilt. I can tilt, your father can tilt. You can tilt.

CIRK

(beat)

You know I already had a father.

TELL

I said "ride with me." You did. You came along. What do you think we're up to, the two of us?

Cirk looks at his empty bottle. Right. That's the question.

CIRK

I need a refresher. You okay?

Tell watches. Cirk walks off.

CUT TO:

**UNWRAPPING**

60 INT. MOTEL ROOM # 6 - MORNING

60

Anywhere, USA..

--Tell's laptop is open to the Vocat website. "STABL Secures \$80 Million Task Order for Information Services for U.S. Army's Personnel and Force Management System."

--William Tell repeats the wrapping routine, this time in reverse. Loosening the twine knots, folding the linen sheets neatly, setting them in the open suitcase.

--The laptop displays the Vocat "About us" webpage: "Good character defines who we are, how we act, and what we believe is the right way to do business." The Board of Directors. Major (ret.) John Gordo smiles in a jacket and tie.

--The suitcase closed, he stops at the desk to look at the open laptop, the open journal.

He reads something, then closes the laptop, closes the journal, picks up the laptop and journal, places them in his duffel.

--He sits on the edge of the bed, watching the seconds tick on his wrist watch. 10 am. Time to get going.

CUT TO:

**SOUTHERN STATES TOURNAMENT**

61 EXT. PANAMA CITY CASINO - DAY 61

An electric sign advertises "WSOP Circuit Southern State Swing Championship."

CUT TO:

62 INT. PANAMA CITY CASINO - DAY 62

Tell and Cirk enter the new casino. La Linda, waving, steps in their path.

Cirk greets her, rocking his hips, mimicking "La Bomba":

CIRK

La Linda, Para bailar La Linda se  
necessita una poca de gracia...

She laughs, responds with a shimmy shake. They are engulfed by players queueing to enter. A sign indicates "WSOP Circuit Southern State Swing Championship" and "Registration."

A commotion. They look over. Mr. USA and his two man entourage enter: "USA! USA!" One of the Lackeys holds up a "Mr. USA" American flag T-shirt with the large pinned price tag: \$30.

LA LINDA

I pre-registered you with a buy in.  
You are getting some name  
recognition value.

CUT TO:

63 INT. PANAMA CITY TOURNAMENT - DAY

63

The room is crowded with mingling gamblers sharing small talk, renewing acquaintances. Each player has his/her own look. Some have sponsorship logos. A palpable buzz.

La Linda and Cirk sit in the viewing area as Tell, seat assignment in hand, seeks out his table.

They exit as the camera pushes forward across the room, table after table...

The tournament has begun. Five hundred players.

William Tell reenters from off screen, takes a seat at one of the tables, nods to a few familiar faces.

LL and Cirk watch from the refreshment area across the room. Overhead camera feature elite tables on flat screens.

A PA announcement officially begins play: "Dealers, let's get some cards in the air."

He checks his hole cards. Pair of sevens. The Big Blind bets. Tell surveys the table, player by player.

TELL V.O.

First it's the odds. The math. Then it's the history. The study of major players. Hand by hand. Their tactics, their tendencies. There are no real "tells." Not at this level.

Charlie (22), seated at the table, chatters as part of his game.

CHARLIE

Sara, you know better than that. You're my number one girl.

SARA

Nobody's my number one anything, especially you.

CHARLIE

Oh that hurts.

SARA

Good.

SECOND PLAYER

Clock?

SARA

Times up.

TELL V.O.

There's the mood of the audience. The room temperature rises and falls. But mostly its the players themselves. A great player can see right into your soul. You can wear earplugs, a hoodie, a baseball cap, mirrored glasses, a ski mask, but he'll see right into your soul.

Tell reveals his hole cards, collects the pot.

TIME DISSOLVE: The tournament is breaking for the day. The hour is late and the players tired. WSOP officials collect the players table chips in sealed bags.

Tell stands, stretches, walks away. He spots La Linda near the entrance. Next to Mr. USA's lackeys.

CUT TO:

64 INT. PANAMA CITY CASINO BAR AREA - NIGHT

64

Tell and La Linda enter.

TELL

Where's Cirk?

LA LINDA

He crashed. I promised I'd call him and wake him up. I forgot. I'll call him.

TELL

Don't bother. I need a drink. You notice anything about him lately?

LA LINDA

Like what?

TELL

Moody.

LA LINDA

I think I can get a sponsorship offer from "Rock Poker. "\$10,000.

TELL

That's the one with the pony logo  
on the titty?

LA LINDA

A rocking horse with the word  
"poker."

Tell hears a sound and realizes that Sara, the dealer, is at  
the bar. She is crying profusely. He steps over:

TELL

Is there something wrong?

SARA

No, there is nothing fucking wrong.

Tell returns to La Linda.

TELL

What I got to do?

LA LINDA

You got to wear their shirt to the  
tournaments.

Mimics a rocking horse. Tell gives her the look. She shrugs:

LA LINDA (CONT'D)

I had to ask. It was an offer.

TELL

I wish the Kid had been here  
tonight.

LA LINDA

Let's call him.

TELL

No.

LA LINDA

You made today's cut. This is your  
moment.

TELL

I think you have the wrong idea  
about me.

(she waits)

Yeah, I want to win this money. I  
want to go to the World Series. But  
then it's over.

(explains)

This boy, Cirk, needs someone.

(MORE)

TELL (CONT'D)

I understand him. He has financial debts. If I can bankroll him, he has a chance to start over. Resume his education. Start a life.

LA LINDA

And you would do this?

TELL

Well. Yeah.

LA LINDA

You are the strangest poker player I've ever met.

TELL

You don't know the half of it.

LA LINDA

What are you doing tomorrow? You're off.

TELL

No plans.

LA LINDA

There's someplace I want to take you.

FADE TO BLACK.

**WONDERLAND**

FADE IN:

65 INT. MOTEL #7 - NIGHT

65

Tell writes at the desk:

TELL V.O.

She said to me, "Did you ever see a city all lit up at night?" I said, "Yeah I've seen a whole city on fire." "Not like that," she said.

CUT TO:

66 PANAMA CITY CASINO BAR AREA - NIGHT

66

Same as scene 64.

TELL  
Where's that?

LA LINDA  
Trust me on this.

CUT TO:

67 BOTANICAL GARDENS - NIGHT

67

Camera follows Tell and La Linda as they walk through a dense grove of theatrically lit labeled orchids and exotic plants. They are silhouetted by an illuminated globe at the end of the grove. Electronic music insinuates its way into the soundtrack.

LA LINDA O.S.  
It's a, well, it's sort of a  
botanical garden but they light it  
up for the holidays. My mom took me  
when I was a kid. Like this,  
better.

TELL  
Where was that?

LA LINDA  
St. Louis.

They enter the red and white globe--inside the illuminated planet.

TELL  
East or west?

LA LINDA  
East.

TELL  
That's hard ground.

LA LINDA  
I don't know much about you.

TELL  
There's not much to know.

LA LINDA  
But can't I be curious?

They enter a tunnel of multicolored mutating lights. They are enveloped in visual morphing enchantment.

She reaches out her hand, touches his. He holds her hand.

The camera, which has followed them silhouetted from behind, elevates as they exit the colonnade.

It reaches above them for a blinking luminescent sky, the rotates 90 degrees to reveal them in their botanical environment.

Two specs in a technicolor fantasia.

CUT TO:

68 INT. PANAMA CASINO TOURNAMENT - DAY

68

The tournament is down to eight tables. Mr. USA at one table, William Tell at another, familiar faces scattered in-between.

Additional seats have been added for viewers. Cirk sits with La Linda.

One of the players at Tell's table busts out. Down to six. Dealer re-deals.

At one table, RONAN, a young male player, upset at losing, stands and begins to remove his clothes. The "floor" is called.

RONAN

Jesus and Mary, what are you doing  
to me! What have I ever done to  
you!

He continues in this vein until security ushers him out.

Some players notice, most are too busy concentrating on their games.

On Tell's table: Check, bet, bet, raise, call, call, call.  
Four players in.

Cirk says something to La Linda, gets up and exits. She looks puzzled.

Tell pulls in a pot.

TELL IN THE MEN'S ROOM. He splashes water on his face, washes his hands.

TIMECUT: Four active tables, Tell's opponent goes all in. He calls and wins.

CUT TO:

69 INT. PANAMA CASINO BAR - NIGHT

69

Tell enters, takes a seat beside Cirk.

TELL  
Where have you been?

CIRK  
I've been around.

TELL  
I haven't seen you.

CIRK  
Where's La Linda?

TELL  
In her room.

Pause.

TELL (CONT'D)  
How do you like it?

CIRK  
What?

TELL  
This life we have. You and me.

CIRK  
It's cool. That's for sure, but...

COUNT DOWN  
But what?

CIRK  
It's a little all the same. You  
know, repetitive. It doesn't feel  
like it's going anywhere.

TELL  
(gestures with finger)  
We're going around in circles until  
you work things out.  
(beat)  
How's that going?

Cirk shrugs.

TELL (CONT'D)  
Given it any more thought?

CIRK  
No.  
(beat)  
Are you going to the World Series  
of Poker?

TELL  
Already registered.

CIRK  
That'll be cool.

TELL  
That will be it for me.

CIRK  
La Linda said that.

TELL  
What?

CIRK  
You were quitting.

TELL  
I've done my time.

CIRK  
Me too.

TELL  
Not coming to Vegas?

Cirk shrugs as if to say "we'll see." Tell reads this and makes a decision:

TELL (CONT'D)  
It's late, but you got a second?

CIRK  
Sure.

TELL  
I want to show you something. You  
got a moment? I have a proposal.  
(Cirk nods)  
Follow me. To my place.

CUT TO:

**THE PROPOSAL**

70 EXT. MOTEL #7 - NIGHT

70

"Bayou Motel." A single story motel off the beaten track. Three parked cars. Tell pulls the Toyota into the lot, cuts the motor and lights. He gets out, says to Cirk:

TELL  
Follow me.

Cirk, a little confused, follows William to a motel room, waits as Tell opens the door. They step inside.

CUT TO:

71 INT. MOTEL #7 - NIGHT

71

The room is pitch black. Tell flips the switch.

Cirk looks around. The spectral scene is wrapped in white. The walls bare, the furniture wrapped in white linen.

CIRK  
You live like this?

TELL  
(gestures to the bed)  
Sit down.

He does. William pulls up the desk chair and sits across from him.

TELL (CONT'D)  
You need anything? Water?

CIRK  
I'm fine.

Tell, standing, places desk lamp on the floor, resets.

TELL  
How about a sandbag to put over  
your head? You can buy them on  
eBay.

Cirk's cool turns to fear.

TELL (CONT'D)  
When civilian contractor John Gordo  
first approached me in Abu Ghraib,  
he said I needed to be more  
creative. He said I had talent but  
lacked imagination. Would you agree  
with that?

CIRK  
Bill, what the fuck is going on  
here?

TELL  
Real life is going on. The World  
Series of Torture.

CIRK  
I'm gonna split.

TELL  
Stay seated!  
(Cirk does)  
Sure you don't want any water? You  
may wish you had accepted it later.

Cirk pales. His eyes imagine routes of attack or escape.

TELL (CONT'D)  
Do I have your attention now, Cirk?  
(no response)  
Do I?

CIRK  
Yeah.

TELL  
Good. Are the little nerves at the  
end of your fingers and toes and  
the tip of your dick starting to  
tingle with fear?

Cirk reluctantly nods.

TELL (CONT'D)  
Good. Let me enhance this a bit.

Tell gets up, walks over to the desk, retrieves his duffel bag, brings it over. He places the duffel beside his chair.

Tell unzips the duffel. Inside are pliers, a baton, a flashlight, a ball-peen hammer, and seafoam gloves. He withdraws

Cirk moves in an attempt to stand. Tell SMACKS him in the breastbone with the heel of his palm. Cirk, falling back on the bed, GASPS. Tell sits facing him. Cirk ain't going anywhere.

Tell unzips the duffel, reaches inside, withdraws a pair of blue heavy duty nitrile gloves. Just like the ones he wore in Abu Ghraib. He puts them on as he speaks:

TELL (CONT'D)  
I've done some investigating about  
you Cirk. With a "C." About your  
father--I did meet him in Abu  
Ghraib, I lied about that--about  
your mother, your time in college,  
your scrapes with the law. It's all  
on the internet of course.  
(beat)  
I'm going to make you a proposal.  
(MORE)

TELL (CONT'D)

You have approximately \$20,000 in  
college loan debt.

Tell reaches into the duffel, removes two banded stacks of one hundred dollar bills, throws them to the floor with a snap of the wrist. One, two, hitting like rifle cracks. Cirk winces.

TELL (CONT'D)  
Twenty thousand. To go back to college--tuition, expenses, condoms and so forth--it adds up, so let's say another eighty thousand.

Eight \$10G stacks high the floor. Bang, bang, bang...

TELL (CONT'D)  
On top of which you've got five thousand in credit card debt. Your momma, bless her, she's got her problems, she's about thirty five under water, so let's say forty thousand.

Tell reaches into the duffel, removes four more stacks of cash, snaps them on the carpet.

TELL (CONT'D)  
And for the heck of it let's throw in ten grand pocket money.  
(another stack hits the carpet)  
That's one hundred and fifty grand. Tax free. All this money is yours on one condition.

CIRK  
What's that?

TELL  
Go see your mother. She lives in Rockport, Oregon. I have the address. I spoke with her. Didn't say who I was, of course. You go visit her. Make yourself right with her. Clear up her debt. Explain your college plans. Then put her on the phone. With me. I want to hear her voice. I want to hear her say these things.

CIRK  
And what if I don't?

TELL  
This is not a proposal you can afford to reject.

(MORE)

TELL (CONT'D)

(beat)

And if you cheat me, I'll find you.  
You don't want that to happen.

Cirk looks at the money.

TELL (CONT'D)

I don't like celebrity gambling. I  
like anonymous gambling. I did this  
for you. Do you hear what I'm  
saying?

CIRK

Yeah.

TELL

Do we have a deal?

CIRK

(smiles)

We got a deal.

Tell takes out a cell phone.

TELL

Okay, let's give her a call.

CUT TO:

**FORGIVENESS**

72 EXT. PANAMA CITY CASINO - NIGHT

72

Modern Casino, splashy lighting.

CUT TO:

73 INT. PANAMA CITY CASINO HALLWAY - NIGHT

73

He checks room numbers (he's on the 15th floor) stops outside  
a hotel door, hesitates, knocks. La Linda's voice replies  
from within:

LA LINDA O.S.

Who's there?

TELL

Bill Tell.

LL, wearing jeans and a WSOP T shirt, opens the door.

LA LINDA  
What's up? We were going to meet in  
the pit.  
(worried)  
You cool?

TELL  
Yeah.

He steps inside.

CUT TO:

74 INT. LA LINDA'S ROOM - NIGHT

74

LA LINDA  
So what's up?  
  
TELL  
I wanted to talk to you.

LA LINDA  
Final table tomorrow.

TELL  
2:30. "Dealers, lets...  
(she joins in)  
...get some cards in the air."

He closes the door.

LA LINDA  
Where's the sidekick?

TELL  
Cirk. He had to go home. His  
mother's not feeling well.

LA LINDA  
He has a mother?

TELL  
Believe it or not.

LA LINDA  
So what's on your mind?

Tell moves close to her. He's definitely in her space. She  
can feel his body against hers, his breath on her face.

TELL

I made a promise to Cirk before he left. You know he talks about you. He fancies you.

LA LINDA

He fancies himself a matchmaker.

TELL

I promised him I would act on these feelings I have. These feelings toward you.

Beat.

TELL (CONT'D)

I think you may have them too.

He leans toward her. She cups his head, presses his lips against hers.

LA LINDA

You do?

TELL

Yes. I do.

She breaks free of the kiss, smiles:

LA LINDA

Wow, baby, wow.

They kiss again.

A75

TIMECUT:

A75

Tell and La Linda make love on a king size bed. The lights of Vegas glimmers out the window.

They twist and turn, embrace and clutch. These are two people who have waited a long time for this. He strokes his crotch.

TELL

It's been a while.

LA LINDA

Just stop talking.

TELL

Okay. Okay...

He enters her. She exhales.

TELL V.O.  
The feeling of being forgiven by  
another and forgiving oneself are  
so much alike there's no point in  
trying to keep them distinct.

CUT TO:

**FACE TIME**

B75 TIMECUT

B75

Tell buttons his shirt as La Linda steps out of the bathroom,  
blow drying her hair.

LA LINDA  
How much time we got?

TELL  
Here. Look at this.

He takes out his phone, fiddles with it.

TELL (CONT'D)  
Face time.

Tell plays a split screen of Cirk and JUDY, 40, his mother.

TELL (CONT'D)  
He recorded this. It's part of our  
deal. That's Cirk's mother.

JUDY ON SCREEN  
Cirk, my God. Where are you?

CIRK ON SCREEN  
Kansas City.

JUDY ON SCREEN  
What's happening? It's been so  
long.

CIRK ON SCREEN  
I've been thinking I haven't been  
fair to you and I want to come and  
see you.

JUDY ON SCREEN  
Are you all right?

CIRK ON SCREEN  
I'm fine.

Cirk's eyes check someone off screen. Slight smile.

JUDY ON SCREEN  
I can't believe this. I always  
think about you.

CIRK ON SCREEN  
I'm sorry.

JUDY ON SCREEN  
No, I'm sorry.  
(wipes her cheek)  
Excuse me. I'm crying.

Tell turns off the phone. The screen is black. She looks at him.

TELL  
It goes on like that for a while.  
Got a little maudlin. She's near  
Portland. He'll be there in a day  
or two. They'll call me together.

LA LINDA  
She reminds me. Of my momma.

TELL  
Alive?

LA LINDA  
Cleveland. No more East St. Louis.

TELL  
Would I like her?

LA LINDA  
I think so.

Pause.

LA LINDA (CONT'D)  
How did you get him to do that?  
Cirk?

TELL  
He wanted to. He just needed an  
excuse. I may even visit them. I  
never played the Northwest.

CUT TO:

**FINAL TABLE**

75 INT. PANANMA CITY CASINO TOURNAMENT - DAY

75

A single table sits on a platform in the cavernous room. Poker family and fans sit on semi-circular raised seating. Two video cameras record the action.

The final ten players enter with their friends and staff. Tell with La Linda, Mr. USA with his lackeys.

Tell hands La Linda his phone.

TELL

Keep tabs on this. I'm expecting a call.

He kisses her on the cheek, joins the final table. Chips are allotted. Flat screens show images of the players. La Linda finds a seat.

PA ANNOUNCER

Welcome to the final table of the WSOP Circuit Southern State Swing 2020 tournament. Dealers, shuffle and play.

And it begins. Mr. USA starts with the Big Blind.

TIMECUT: a rap style player is the first to bust out.

TIMECUT: Down to five players, Tell, Mr. USA, and three others. Mr. USA collects a pot.

PA ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

That will make our dinner break. Play will resume at 8:30.

Players stand. A floor man photographs their chip stacks

CUT TO:

76 INT. LA LINDA'S ROOM - EVENING

76

Tell combs his hair in the mirror. His hair is wet from the shower.

LA LINDA

You're phone was buzzing.

He steps out. She hands it to him. He activates it.

TELL  
It's from Cirk. It says, "Wish you  
were here."

They sit. He opens Cirk's message:

It then shows a ground view of a white clapboard house in Rockville, Virginia. This is John Gordo's home. The house Cirk located on Google Earth. The first view is from the front. The second, more clandestine, is from the rear.

LA LINDA  
Where is that?

Tell dials a number from memory. No answer. It goes to a mailbox.

She checks her watch.

LA LINDA (CONT'D)  
Ten minutes.

CUT TO:

77 INT. PANAMA CITY TOURNAMENT - NIGHT

77

The final four take their seats. ("USA! USA!")

Mr. USA sits across from Tell. Eye to Eye.

PA ANNOUNCER  
Shuffle and play.

Play resumes. Hole cards are dealt. Tell gets pocket Fours. USA gets Ace, Jack. USA bets the Small Blind, Tell calls. One other player calls. The game is on.

The Flop: Ace, Jack, Four. Tell and USA bet, raise, and calls. The Third player folds. Now it is just Tell and USA. Several Thousand dollars worth of chips are on the table.

Dealer plays The Turn: Ten of Diamonds. Both Tell and USA bet, raise, and call. The dealer prepares to turn the River. William Tell holds up his hand:

TELL  
Just a moment.

He stands, collects himself and walks away. His hole cards and chips are untouched.

The others players look at each other confused. He vanishes from view. Mr. USA acts as if it's some sort of trick. The dealer suggests:

DEALER

Five minutes.

La Linda gets up but Tell's already lost in the crowd.

CUT TO:

### HOME INVASION

78 INT. MOTEL ROOM #7 - NIGHT

78

Tell, seated in his spectral room, researches via laptop. He Locates WVTR, the local station which covers the Richmond and Rockville areas. He takes a drink.

He finds what he's looking for. A webpage "breaking news." Home invasion suspect shot and killed at the home of Major (ret.) John Gordo. Tell follows the link:

Gordo's Suburban Home.

A LOCAL NEWSMAN speaks to the camera as police lights reflect against a white clapboard suburban home. Unidentified suspect armed with a pellet pistol. Security sensors were activated and Major Gordo, confronted the suspect. The suspect fired and missed. Gordo returned fire, killing the suspect. Investigation underway.

Cut to earlier interview with Gordo.

GORDO

You purchase security thinking  
something like this might happen,  
but you don't think it ever will...

Tell closes the laptop. He closes the journal. He places it in the waste container and exits with his duffel. Room, receding from view, sits silent, wrapped in white.

CUT TO:

79 INT. PANAMA CASINO TOURNAMENT - NIGHT

79

Play has resumed with three players. The Dealer places bets from Tell's stack. It's getting smaller.

Mr. USA nods his head.

CUT TO:

80 EXT. MOTEL #7 NIGHT 80

Tell, silhouetted, enters his car and drives. The frame holds on the darkened motel.

FADE TO BLACK.

**ROCKVILLE, VIRGINIA**

FADE IN.

81 EXT. GORDO'S SUBURBAN HOME - NIGHT 81

No residue of the police activity several days before. Except for a scrap of yellow perimeter tape on the lawn.

A Range Rover pulls into the drive. John Gordo gets out, goes to the front door, deactivates the security system.

CUT TO:

82 INT. GORDO'S SUBURBAN HOME - NIGHT 82

Gordo enters the darkened house, flips on the light switch. It doesn't work. A voice from the darkness:

TELL  
It's turned off.

Gordo's eyes adjust to the light. William Tell sits on the sofa, his duffel beside, a high powered pistol aimed at John Gordo's chest.

The sofa, coffee table and chair are wrapped in white linen.

TELL (CONT'D)  
John. Sit down. Don't be stupid.

Gordo cautiously sits.

TELL (CONT'D)  
Do you remember me?

GORDO  
Should I?

TELL  
Tier 1A. Abu Ghraib.

GORDO  
Bill Tillich. You look pretty good  
all things considered. How long  
were you at Leavenworth?

TELL  
Eight and a half years.

GORDO  
That's a bitch.

TELL  
The boy you shot. He was trying to  
kill you.

GORDO  
I assumed that.

TELL  
You trained his father. His name  
was Roger Baufort. Just like you  
trained me.

GORDO  
What happen to him?

TELL  
He shot himself.

GORDO  
So I'm to blame? That's a pussified  
defense, PFC Tillich. And you know  
it. We are each responsible for our  
own actions.

TELL  
I believe that.  
(beat)  
We are going to step into the next  
room, you and I, and we are going  
to have a dramatic reenactment. We  
are going to make things right.

Tell stands.

TELL (CONT'D)  
Either that, John Rodgers, or I'm  
going to blow a bullet straight  
through your eyeball.

Gordo thinks, acquiesces:

GORDO  
Lead the way.

TELL  
After you.

They step OFF CAMERA into an adjoining room. Tell carries his gun and duffel. The footsteps, slow, stop.

GORDO O.S.  
Who goes first?

The camera incrementally retreats. Muted sounds are heard periodically off screen. GRUNTS, THUDS, YELPS.

NIGHT TURNS TO DAY. The camera comes to a stop. Waits.

Tell emerges from the unseen room. His shirt is soaked with blood. There are bloody knife slashes on his left thigh. His shoes leave bloody footprints. A green sandbag hood hangs from his right hand.

His arms, his face are covered with bleeding gashes. The fingers on his left hand are twisted and broken. The sandbag falls to the carpet.

He steps over to a table, struggles to pick up a land line receiver with his left hand. Dials 911 with the right.

911  
911. Where is your emergency?

TELL  
Emergency services?

911  
Yes?

TELL  
I'd like to report a homicide.

FADE TO BLACK.

U.S.D.B.

FADE IN.

83 EXT. MILITARY DISCIPLINARY BARRACKS, LEAVENWORTH - DAY 83  
An idyllic Midwestern landscape.

CUT TO:

84 INT. LEAVENWORTH PRISON - DAY 84

William Tell, in prison browns, walks in line from AB common area to the individual cells. All is ordered. All is defined.

CUT TO:

85 INT. LEAVENWORTH PRISON, TELL'S CELL - DAY 85

Tell, in his cell, writes in his notebook:

TELL V.O.

I had never imagined myself as  
someone suited to a life of  
incarceration.

A GUARD calls his name:

GUARD (O.S.)

Inmate Tillich. This is your lucky  
day. You have a visitor.

CUT TO:

86 INT. LEAVENWORTH PRISON, HALLWAY - DAY 86

TIMECUT. Tell is led down a corridor to the visitation area.

CUT TO:

87 INT. LEAVENWORTH PRISON, VISITATION - CONTINUOUS 87

The Guard ushers him into a cubicle.

And there stands La Linda. Dressed in red.

She smiles. She reaches out her hand.

Seen from a side view, her finger touches the glass just  
before his finger joins hers.

Just like the Sistine ceiling.

THE END