

U.S. v. HOWARD MECHANIC

Act I

IN THE DARK, WE HEAR SOUND OF DISTANT HELICOPTER. Early morning, Phoenix. February 8, 2000. POOL OF LIGHT UP on HOWARD, 51, and JANET, 42, who kneel, fully clothed, on an air mattress and hold each other for dear life.

HOWARD

So this is how it ends.

JANET

Shhh...

HOWARD

... I just wanted a few more days. A couple nights' sleep. ...What time did he say?

JANET

Ten-fifteen.

HOWARD

That's nearly four hours.

JANET

He's doing us a favor, squeezing us in. We can do the bank before. Fill the tank. God. You're drenched.

HOWARD

Look. When they come...

JANET

I won't cry. ...Gary?

(V.O., SOUND OF HELICOPTER HOVERING)

Go on. Take your shower. It's gonna be okay. ...See? Dry-eyed.

(HOWARD doesn't move. JANET turns on a TV set, as CHOPPER DRONES ON. SECOND SPOT UP on DEPUTY U.S. MARSHAL DONALD PALMER, 55, who is at a cluttered desk flanked by American flags. HE is on a phone.)

PALMER

One helluva of a party, yeah, the length of Market Street. (...) We're sayin' eighty-ninety thousand, but does anybody ever *underestimate* the size of a crowd? But you didn't call to talk football, all the way from Arizona...Whatcha got?

VOICE ON T.V., with SOUND OF CHOPPER

“And in the East Valley, if you’re heading North on the 101, look for a major tie-up between Baseline, just south of 60 to the 202. Also, the right lane is blocked Northbound on the Hohokam Expressway causing mega-delays on the airport ramp. So slow down, Phoenix. Trust me. There’s nowhere to go.”

(JANET turns down the volume and suddenly hears SILENCE.)

JANET

Gary? Listen! ...It was a *traffic* helicopter!!! ...You’re still free!

(JANET begins to laugh/cry, uncontrollably. Next to them, a CELL PHONE RINGS, TWICE. JANET starts to answer.)

HOWARD

No. Don’t answer.

(HOWARD EXITS. PHONE RINGS AGAIN. JANET freezes. THIRD SPOT UP ON PENNY, 30ish. She holds a newspaper in one hand; a cell phone in the other. SHE waits for the beep.)

PENNY

Yes. Mr. Tredway? It’s Penny, from the *Tribune*. We ran with the story this morning. You have no idea how I [struggled]..., you know you put me in an impossible situation. ...Anyway, if you’d care to comment... Like your *real* name...

(PENNY falls silent, still holding the phone.)

PALMER

(Into the receiver) What kind of “early Valentine?” (...) Howard Mechanic! You gotta be/ (...) When? (...) Well, sooner or later, they all come home to roost. (...) Yeah, we remember. Matter of fact, his file’s right here.

(PALMER reaches for a huge black notebook, paper, and a pen.)

We’ll need your fax.

(LIGHTS DOWN on JANET, PENNY, and PALMER. ALL EXIT. MUSIC. LIGHTS UP on an office in downtown Phoenix, two days later. A MAN stands in the shadows. O.S., CAMERA FLASHES, twice. After a beat, ARIZONA DEPUTY ENTERS, carrying a canvas backpack.)

DEPUTY

(Off) This way!

(HOWARD ENTERS, much subdued. HE wears casual clothing, a watch, Birkenstock sandals, and a bum bag.)

DEPUTY, CONT’D

Have a seat. ...See whatcha brought along.

(DEPUTY rifles through the backpack and puts sundries in plastic bag.)

Travelin’ light. Good. ...We’ll be needin’ the watch.

(HOWARD removes his watch.)

HOWARD

How will I know the time?

(DEPUTY puts the watch in an envelope and returns to the backpack.)

DEPUTY

It's either the eye mask *or* the earplugs. Not both.

HOWARD

Earplugs, I guess.

DEPUTY

See your wallet?

(DEPUTY signals for Howard's bum bag. HE removes the wallet.)

DEPUTY, CONT'D

Driver's license. ...Social. How many felonies you suppose we're lookin' at here?

(DEPUTY has touched a nerve.)

Never mind. I'll just stick with the easy questions.

(DEPUTY pulls out some forms.)

Name? ...The one on your birth certificate.

(A moment)

HOWARD

Howard. ...Mechanic.

DEPUTY

Middle? ...Your middle name.

HOWARD

Lawrence...

DEPUTY

With a "u" or a "w?"

HOWARD

(Stumped) This is gonna sound crazy... I don't...

DEPUTY

(Writes) "Not sure" ...Birth date?

(THE MAN who has been observing turns to speak.

He is DEPUTY PALMER, armed with the black notebook.)

PALMER

With a “W.” ...It’s “L-A-W.”

(To HOWARD) We finally meet.

DEPUTY

Deputy Palmer wanted to be here for your booking. Come all the way from St. Louis.

PALMER

You okay?

HOWARD

It’s been kind of a long day.

PALMER

*You* picked the hour.

HOWARD

The attorney just said three.

(PALMER studies a scar over HOWARD’s left eye.)

PALMER

Tell us about that scar.

HOWARD

I was eight. ...One of the kids swung a bat.../

PALMER

(To DEPUTY) May we?

(PALMER takes the forms and pen.)

(To HOWARD) Birth date?

HOWARD

February 21, 1948.

PALMER

Birthplace?

HOWARD

Shaker Heights. Actually, Cleveland, Ohio. ...You need the hospital?

PALMER

Not important. Social Security number?

HOWARD

I ...don't remember.

PALMER

Don't suppose you would.

(Takes I.D. from Howard's wallet and fills in several blanks.)

This all current?

HOWARD

For Gary, yeah.

PALMER

Did the attorney mention, "Gary," that each of these documents carries a five-year sentence?

HOWARD

We didn't...I mean, there wasn't a lot of time.

PALMER

Be that as it may, we'll be conducting an identity hearing tomorrow.

HOWARD

I don't know what that is.

PALMER

To establish you're who you say you are.

HOWARD

Why would I lie about *that*?

(PALMER picks up a newspaper and reads the headline)

PALMER

"City Council Candidate Says Life Was A Lie."

DEPUTY

"Scottsdale's Watch Dog!" You sure had *us* hoodwinked!

PALMER

(To the DEPUTY) We get his prints?

DEPUTY

Right away, Sir.

(DEPUTY will take HOWARD'S prints, as PALMER observes.)

PALMER

So, we finally got you to break a sweat.  
(HOWARD is baffled.)

PALMER, CONT'D

...on the run, we're told.

HOWARD

Only since Monday.

PALMER

Then at least you caught the Super Bowl.

HOWARD

Actually, the whole last week... I had to get my affairs in order...

PALMER

You missed it! ...Rams won. ...Helluva game.

HOWARD

I imagine.

PALMER

No. No you can't. A year ago, we were 3 and 13. Kurt Warner is God, in pads. ...Course, we nearly blew it on the last play... (To DEPUTY) How ya comin' there?

Still doin' your yoga?

HOWARD

Yeah.

PALMER

...And eating your vegetables?

Won't even touch an egg, I'll bet.

(HOWARD shakes his head. Long pause.)

PALMER, CONT'D

(To DEPUTY) Well?

DEPUTY

That's ten.

PALMER

What gives with you, Mechanic?

Howard  
Sir?

Palmer  
Anything you care to say?

Howard  
Like...

Palmer  
Like, was it *worth* it?

Never mind. We're through here. (To DEPUTY) Go on! Get him on the bus!  
(DEPUTY picks up a set of shackles and ESCORTS HOWARD OFF.  
PALMER crosses to a press conference suggested by BRIGHT LIGHTS;  
and SOUND OF MOTORIZED CAMERAS. REPORTERS may or may  
not be seen.)

PALMER, CONT'D  
Deputy U.S. Marshal Donald Palmer, Eastern Missouri Region.

REPORTER #1, V.O.  
We understand he's in federal custody.

Palmer  
Since three p.m., local time.

REPORTER #2, V.O.  
Are you taking him back to St. Louis?

Palmer  
(Hiding his displeasure) Not at this time, no.

REPORTER #3, V.O.  
Had you any clue about his whereabouts all these years? (...) Sir. Had you any clue about his whereabouts?

Palmer  
Look. The man was convicted for throwing an incendiary device at police, during a riot.

REPORTER #2, V.O.  
Couple years back, Mr. Tredway ran into a burning apartment to save a tenant's life!  
Folks were calling him a "hero."

Palmer  
Anyone ever determine the fire's origin?

REPORTER #3, V.O.

(After a beat) I understand he offered to come forward ages ago. Put this all behind him.

PALMER

We do not negotiate with fugitives.

REPORTER #2, V.O.

And by “we,” you mean...

PALMER

Your government. Thank you.

(PALMER starts to exit.)

REPORTER #2, V.O.

You’ve been on his case how long?

PALMER

Unofficially, since his FTA. ...”Failure to Appear.” ...May of ’72. FBI turned him over to us in ’79.

REPORTER #3, V.O.

What did you think he was *doing* for 28 years?