

DROP BACK TEN

July 9, 1999

©1999 Stacy Cochran

DROP BACK TEN

①
EXT. THE CITY. SUMMER. DAY.

A very quick sequence of everyday violence which is part of the fabric of things:

A garbage can gets thrown on its side by an angry pedestrian.

Two dogs bark at each other.

Two men shove each other, seconds away from a fight.

A girl slaps her boyfriend, and he slaps her back.

The phone rings.

CUT TO:

②
INT. PETE'S APARTMENT IN THE CITY. 4:30 PM.

PETER BARNES, a staff reporter for a daily paper, has been typing at a table in his apartment. He answers the phone. He keeps on typing.

PETE

(into the phone)

Hello. Hey, Vic, yeah, it's on its way. By 5, I promise.

PETE stops typing.

PETE (CONT'D)

What do you mean by that?

PETE looks out his window and listens.

PETE (CONT'D)

No. What happened? I didn't, I was on 73rd Street— shit. Was anybody hurt? Okay, well, I'm sorry, but I was—

(he is interrupted)

No, I'm not. I'm saying I'm sorry, Vic. I thought this was a hostage, too, that's why I spent the cabfare. I was—

He is interrupted.

PETE (CONT'D)

Wait a second— Wait, that was completely unrelated—

He is interrupted again.

PETE (CONT'D)

No, I do understand, but I told you that I was sick all week and—
Thank you. Okay, I appreciate that, but it doesn't— No, Vic, listen
to me. If you just— I know. Okay, alright, fine, but it doesn't change
your position, does it. *I know it's not your personal position, Victor.*
YOU SAID THAT, but—

He is interrupted again. He's being fired, over the phone. He looks at his coffee.

PETE (CONT'D)

No. I know. I understand. That's fine.

He hangs up the phone. He picks up the receiver again and slams it this time, several
times, slamming it hard against the phone body until the brittle plastic cracks, and the
phone is in several pieces.

PEGGY, 31, in underwear and a zipper sweatshirt, comes into his doorway.

PEGGY

What the hell was that.

PETE

Sorry. I just— hung up the phone.

PEGGY

What happened.

PETE

That was Victor.

PEGGY

He fired you.

PETE

Right.

PEGGY

How come. For writing something he didn't like?

PETE

No. It isn't that.

PEGGY

For not writing something he didn't like.

PETE

For not doing anything last week at all. I skipped some—

PEGGY

Why don't you just do more work?

PETE

I'm working right now, Peggy. I was working. I don't know. I couldn't— Last week it was so damn hot—

He stops. He looks at her. PEGGY says nothing.

PETE (CONT'D)

What? It's a job! It's only a job. It's good to lose your job sometimes. Alright? It's good for me. It helps me focus.

PEGGY

On what.

PETE

I think I'll go back and see Tom.

PEGGY

Tom White?

PETE

Is that a mistake?

PEGGY

Well. He fired you, too.

PETE

But I'd just be looking for something short-term, some writing, not the same thing. Tom always said I could write something for them, whenever I needed— what are you doing? Where are you going?

PEGGY has taken the sweatshirt off, and she's putting on a blouse. She stops.

PEGGY

I don't think this is good for me, Pete. I've got— *Oh, shit!*

PETE

What's wrong?

PEGGY runs from the room. PETE waits a moment, for some reply.

PETE (CONT'D)

(calling)

Peggy?

PEGGY'S VOICE (OS)

(calling back, from the kitchen)

Just a second! Shit. I was making you grilled cheese—

PETE hears the sound of her knocking the lid off a frying pan, grabbing the hot iron pan with a towel and throwing it into the sink. PETE calls back to her.

PETE

It's fine if it's dark—

She reappears with the blackened remains of a grilled cheese sandwich on a plate.

PEGGY

It's overdone.

PETE

It's fine.

PEGGY

I can scrape it.

PETE

Peggy.

PEGGY

But then I should really get going, you know, it's almost 5 now, and Steve is gonna be home around 7. There's nothing in the house for dinner—

PETE

Alright.

PEGGY

He's my husband, Pete.

PETE

I know. It's alright. You're right.

CUT TO:

③

INT. OFFICE RECEPTION OF A MONTHLY MAGAZINE. DAY.

PETE is slumped on a leather sofa in the reception area.

People are busy around him, back and forth from the elevators, walking by the young receptionist at his round mahogany station; men and women headed for meetings, girls gliding by with stacks of chromolyns. PETE can hardly stand to watch.

He takes a look at the empty notepad he's holding in his lap.

JEANNE SIEZAC, an art director in low-heeled pumps, appears with a ladies room key in her hand. She's very tall and glad to see PETE.

JEANNE

Hi Pete!

PETE looks up.

PETE

Jeanne.

JEANNE

Long time no see!

PETE

(standing to greet her)

I know it.

JEANNE

Whatcha been doing?

PETE

I don't know. You know.

JEANNE

I heard you write for the Post!

PETE

Well, I did.

JEANNE

What brings you back up here?

PETE

Oh well. You know. Baby needs new shoes—

JEANNE

Pete! You had a baby!? That's fabulous!

PETE

No, it's just an expression, Jeanne. I mean I need the money.

JEANNE

Oh. I'm sorry. I thought you meant you found someone—

PETE

No problem. I'm here to see Tom.

JEANNE

Oh, great.

CUT TO:

(4)

INT. TOM WHITE'S OFFICE AT THE MAGAZINE. DAY.

TOM has a nice-looking office. TOM is a good-looking guy.

PETE

Hey Tom.

They shake hands across TOM's desk.

TOM

Pete. Thanks for coming over.

PETE

Hey. Thanks for having me.

TOM

Yeah, sit down. I found something for you.

PETE

(taking a seat)

Did you? That's great. Hit me.

TOM

Rebirth.

PETE

(after a moment)

What?

TOM

People who've been reincarnated.

PETE says nothing. He just looks at TOM.

TOM (CONT'D)

Who they used to be, how they know, what they do with the knowledge.

PETE

(after a moment)

Hunh.

TOM

The idea is to find a good group of people—

PETE

Who share this belief—

TOM

Right, that they've been here before, as somebody else.

PETE feels like he better write something down. He opens his notepad.

PETE

Look, I don't know, Tom. Reincarnation. Can't I do something a little more rational—

TOM

How do you mean?

PETE

I mean something real! Pestocide expose. I don't know.

They look at each other.

TOM

We're looking at trends in this issue.

PETE

I'm sorry. You're right. It's fine. This is good.

PETE writes down *trends*, just as BOB TEEG, the managing editor of the magazine, sticks his head in the door of TOM's office. BOB looks worried. TOM looks up.

BOB

I need a word, Tom.

TOM

What's up, Bob?

BOB, who is older and senior to TOM, glances at PETE, decides he is no one, and comes on into the office. He looks at TOM with his lips pulled in and a finger on his tie. There's clearly trouble at higher levels.

TOM (CONT'D)

What is it.

BOB

They nixed Lorraine.

TOM

Jesus!

BOB

Well.

TOM

So now what.

BOB

I don't know. I am out of ideas. Who the fuck do they think they are. Who is this?

TOM

Oh. This is Pete Barnes. Pete, Bob Teeg, our managing editor.

PETE looks up to see if he's in for a handshake, but BOB isn't looking his way.

BOB

Who is he? A writer?

TOM

Yeah, Pete used to work here.

PETE

I was here with McCorry, when he was the—

BOB

Right.

PETE closes his notepad and puts it away.

TOM

Pete wrote the book on the NFL. *Drop Back Ten*. Terrific work.

BOB

When was that?

TOM

(he looks at Pete)

Well, a couple years back.

BOB

How many?

TOM

(frowning)

How long has it been, Pete?

PETE

Four years.

TOM

Wow. Is it that long? I guess it might be.

BOB

Just the one book?

PETE

Yeah.

BOB

How come? What's wrong? Where have you been since then?

PETE

I've been here.

TOM

Well, he's here, but not here. Kind of reclusive, lately. Right, Pete?

BOB

Do you only write about sports?

PETE

No. In fact, I normally don't. That started, you know, as a cover assignment. Somehow it turned itself into a book.

After a moment, BOB turns to TOM.

BOB

Run him by Larry.

TOM

For Spanks?

BOB

Why not? You got a better idea?

PETE

Who is Spanks?

BOB

Everyone else has been axed, Tom. They've got to approve him.

PETE

Approve me for what?

They both look at PETE now.

BOB

Pete, this is the deal, alright? We've got an interview, big goddamn deal, with some little piece of shit, and his handlers won't approve a writer.

TOM

It may have been a mistake, okay, to get into this in the first place,
but once you start with these people—

BOB

(to Pete)

Goddamn it if I can't invent some value.

PETE looks at BOB. He says nothing.

TOM

Well, maybe Pete is your answer, Bob. He'll meet the guy, put him
at ease, spin something up for us here.

They're all in the market for a solution.

BOB

I don't see what choice we have. You write in English, Pete?

PETE

Yeah, I do.

BOB

Okay. So make the call, Tom.

TOM

Should I, Pete?

PETE

Well, it's alright with me.

BOB

Good man.

BOB leaves the room. TOM turns to PETE.

PETE slips his pen behind his ear and waits for further instruction.

CUT TO:

6

13

EXT. CITY STREET. DAY.

PETE and PEGGY have bumped into each other on the sidewalk, outside The Food Emporium. PEGGY has a couple of grocery bags, which she is resting on top of a newspaper vending machine between them, to avoid setting them down on the ground. PETE is empty-handed.

PEGGY

Yeah? How do you get to Wilmington?

PETE

I'll take a train down, Peggy. Why don't you think I should go?

PEGGY

I don't think you shouldn't go. It sounds like a great idea. You can write a book about the guy, for all I care.

PETE

That was mean.

PEGGY

I'm sorry.

The doors to the supermarket keep opening and shutting, as other customers enter and exit. PETE looks down at PEGGY's long arms. Her shoulders are bare.

PEGGY (CONT'D)

His name is "Spanks"?

PETE

He's supposed to be pretty good.

PEGGY

When are you leaving?

PETE

Sunday morning.

PEGGY says nothing. She picks up her grocery bags, ready to go.