

THE FALCONER

by

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FADE IN

A FALCON glides across a crisp blue sky above an open field nestled in the North Carolina mountains.

Wings strong against the wind, picks up speed as it descends toward the rapidly approaching field.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Rapid eye movement searches for prey:

- ZOOM onto a field mouse as it scurries into a burrow.
- FLASH over to a rabbit diving behind trees at the edge.
- BACK OUT behind a figure of a MAN with arms outstretched.

CLOSE ON MAN

Eyes closed.

A peacefulness.

A wry smile behind a scraggly beard as his head tilts to the side, arms extended, right arm mostly covered in a thick leather glove.

This is TODD WALLACE (35, tall and lanky) a Christ-like pose at the center of the field, lost in his own world.

POV FALCON

The falcon, now more than half the distance closer than before. Todd's gloved hand in focus. Eyes fixed.

-ZOOM to that field mouse, as it pokes its head out of the burrow. Then disappears inside again.

BACK TO the extended arm. Straight ahead. Approaching fast.

ON ARM

The falcon extends its wings as razor sharp talons grip into the gloved arm, and comes to an instant halt.

Todd's eyes snap open, as he expertly drops a leather hood over the falcon's head with his other hand.

JUMP CUT TO:

INT. TODD'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Morning's first light glows through the window onto the nicely made bed.

Everything in its perfect place.

The sound of bacon sizzling in the--

KITCHEN

--as three pieces POP and fry on the stove, next to an egg sunny-side up.

Pepper sprinkles down onto the yolk.

As the skillet lifts off the stove and the contents slide with ease onto a plate with plain white toast.

INT. TODD'S HOUSE - LATER

Todd dips the half eaten toast into the egg yolk and eats. Wipes the residue from his beard and sips black coffee.

Sits alone at the walnut kitchen table. In silence. Except for his chewing.

Stares forward across the mustard yellow countertops and the dated linoleum flooring. Avocado green appliances.

A home living in the past.

Swipes up the last of the egg and yolk with the toast and finishes it. Swigs his coffee and takes the plate to the sink, washes it clean. Sets it in the strainer to dry.

Folds the dish towel and hangs it over the oven door handle.

EXT. TODD'S HOUSE - LATER

Todd checks on the roosts tucked back in the woods behind the modest 1970's ranch home surrounded by pines and oaks.

Opens the expansive barn-like shed, exposing several large, expansive cages to house his hunting birds. The mews.

INT. SHED - CONTINUOUS

A red-tailed HAWK in one of the mews, the FALCON from the open in another. Perched on a roost, looking down on Todd.

TODD
Morning, Freya.

Todd sweeps up the open perch and refreshes the large water basin on the floor.

Reaches into his jacket and pulls out a chunk of raw quail meat. Tosses it into a feeding tray, and exits the mew.

Turns to watch her.

Waits.

Freya looks at Todd, then eyes the meat and glides down from her perch to rip at it with her talons and beak.

Todd smiles then turns toward the hawk's mew, opens the cage and steps inside.

Ready to repeat the ritual, he begins to sweep out the corner of the cage, nodding to the hawk as he does.

TODD (cont'd)
And a good morning to you, too.

EXT. RURAL HALL MAIN STREET - LATER

A three-block downtown in this small mountain town north of Winston Salem, NC. A few bars, a diner, decent fast food. It's not much, but it's pretty much all you need.

Todd parks his loaded pick-up outside BLUE'S DINER, old-school food in this old-school town. Exits the car, slips on a leather tool belt like a Marshall clips on his holster.

Wrestles a tool box from the bed of the old but sturdy beat-up truck and heads inside.

INT. BLUE'S DINER - CONTINUOUS

A throwback to another time. Could be the 50's, could be The Sopranos. Either way, it feels good to be here. The food's not bad either.

RUTH (late 50's, big red hair, the real boss of this joint) points toward the back as Todd enters.

RUTH
Blue's in the back.

TODD
Thank you, Ma'am.

RUTH

And, I'll have a plate for you when you're done.

TODD

Pie too?

Ruth flashes him a smile as Todd heads toward the back.

RUTH

We'll see.

Todd chuckles and disappears through the kitchen.

EXT. HIGHWAY - LATER

A Greyhound bus barrels down the autumn morning highway through light traffic, most of the colorful leaves already fallen from the trees.

The reflection of the sun against the windows, highlighting the fog in the foothills as it passes a sign that reads:

RURAL HALL - 24 MI.
PILOT MOUNTAIN - 37 MI.

A flash of PINK HAIR in one of the bus windows as the bus changes lanes to get off the highway up ahead.

INT. BLUE'S DINER - LATER

Todd sits at the counter and takes a bite from his burger, careful to wipe the remnants from his beard.

Nods his appreciation to Ruth as he chews.

She gives him a wink between pours, as she refreshes coffee along the counter.

In the back corner booth, CAR PETERS (35, built, Captain of his old HS football team and thinks he still is), yucks it up with two scrawny greasers, REGGIE (35) and SLIM JIM (33).

CAR

Hey Ruthie, we could use some over here. Make it hot this time.

Ruth gives the table a death stare. Rolls her eyes.

Todd looks at her, then over toward the trouble.

Eyes meet Car, who gives Todd a 'fuck around and find out' look right back.

SHERIFF DYLAN WARD (55, black, kind, tough) enters and cuts the tension with his presence.

SHERIFF WARD

Morning, Ruth. Cup to go, please?

Ruth smiles and gets a large to-go cup ready. Pours it as she approaches the counter, looks over at the corner again.

Ward follows her glance to the table, as Car backs down.

Ruth puts the lid on the cup and hands it to him.

RUTH

Here you go. How's Janet doing?

Sheriff takes the cup and smiles weakly.

SHERIFF WARD

About the same, thanks. I'll tell her you asked about her.

RUTH

Please do.

Todd looks over and they make eye contact. Gives the Sheriff a nod of support. Sheriff reciprocates.

Sheriff Ward turns and heads out. Takes one more look over at Car and his crew, as Reggie and Slim Jim look down, before he disappears out the door.

Car watches the sheriff get in his cruiser and drive off. Then he turns back to Ruth.

CAR

About that coffee?

RUTH

Brewing a fresh pot. Nice and hot, just like you wanted.

She turns and rolls her eyes enough for Todd to see.

He chuckles as he takes another bite of his burger.

EXT. RURAL HALL MAIN STREET - LATER

The bus pulls away, leaving DYLLAN WARD (33, bi-racial, pink-tipped hair, skinny in leggings and a baggy top) standing at the intersection in town.

Backpack on, small duffel in hand, she turns and walks up the street with purpose, hot-pink sneakers match her hair.

Tiny in stature but looks like she packs a wallop.

INT. BLUE'S DINER - LATER

Car calls across the near empty diner.

CAR
How's the hunting, Mountain Man?

SLIM JIM
More like the Birdman.

REGGIE
Hehe. Birdman. That's funny.

SLIM JIM
Caah-Caaaww! Caah-Caaaww!

Todd picks up one of his fries and dips it in the ketchup. Eats it and chuckles, barely acknowledging them.

TODD
Here's a bird for ya.

Flips them the middle finger from behind without looking.

Car gets up and crosses the diner toward Todd.

Ruth leans across the counter.

RUTH
Cool it, Car.

TODD
It's fine, Ruth.

CAR
I'm just asking, is all.

Car slaps Todd on the back, a little harder than necessary.

Reggie and Slim Jim scoot out of the booth and huddle around Todd, menacing and annoying.

Todd ignores them, barely looks at Car while he continues to eat his fries.

CAR (cont'd)
I like bird hunting, too. Bag my limit every year. Just seein' how conditions are, you know?

TODD
Yeah, I'm sure.

Car leans in. Tough.

CAR
You gonna tell me, Birdman?

RUTH
That's it--

Just then, the door opens and Dyllan walks in.

Todd looks toward her, followed by the others as all eyes fall on Dyllan.

The door closes as she stands with a captive audience in front of her.

Dyllan sets the duffel on the table next to her.

Breaks into song.

DYLLAN
*Oh, there's no place like home for
the holidays...
For no matter how far away you
roam...*

Dyllan's voice is velvet perfection, her soft shoe dance routine equally so.

Everyone looks on in stunned silence.

Todd's impressed.

DYLLAN (cont'd)
*When you long for the sunshine of a
friendly gaze...*

Then rushes toward them for the big finale.

DYLLAN (cont'd)
*For the holidays you can't beat home,
sweet home!*

She takes a knee before them, arms raised. Barely out of breath. Holds that Broadway pose. Scans her audience.

Ruth is all smiles. She loves it.

Todd looks at her and smiles, likes the enthusiasm.

Car and the boys are in dumbfounded amazement.

CAR

The fuck?

Ruth breaks into applause.

RUTH

Wonderful! You like pie?

DYLLAN

How about a coffee? To go.

RUTH

You got it. It's on me!

Dyllan looks up at Todd, rises from her pose, grabs a fry and eats it.

DYLLAN

How ya' doing? I'm Dyl.

CAR

Like the pickle?

Dyllan turns to him, unfazed.

DYLLAN

Car, I wonder...were you named for where you were conceived or where you were born?

Ruth hands Dyllan her coffee and bursts out laughing. As does Todd.

Car isn't the sharpest tool in the shed.

CAR

Wait, what??

Dyllan takes the coffee from Ruth and smiles at her.

DYLLAN

Thank you.

RUTH

No, thank you!

Dyllan takes another fry from Todd's plate.

DYLLAN
See you 'round, Todd.

Pops it in her mouth as she walks back to the door, lifts her bag off the table and leaves.

Todd looks over at Ruth. Confused.

RUTH
I like her.

CAR
Who was that?

Todd looks back at the door then down at the french fries. Then back at the door. Smitten.

TODD
Beats the hell outta me.

EXT. RURAL HALL MAIN STREET - LATER

Dyllan sips her coffee as she walks down the first side-street away from town.

She pulls out her phone. Tests for a signal.

DYLLAN
Fucking sticks only has 1.5 G.

Puts it away as she walks down the sidewalk.

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - LATER

Dyllan continues past several modest well-kept colonial homes toward the one on the corner.

The one with the police car in the driveway.

She smiles as she sees it and turns up the walkway.

EXT. SHERIFF WARD'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Reaches the front door and RINGS the doorbell.

Waits a moment, looks back toward the street. Sips the rest of her coffee.

Steps from the front porch a moment.

Until the front door opens. It's Sheriff Ward.
With a puzzled smile on his face.

SHERIFF WARD
Dyllan?

Dyllan smiles back.

DYLLAN
Hey, Dad. Good to see you.

EXT. TODD'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Todd crosses the back yard to the large shed and unlocks it.

INT. SHED - CONTINUOUS

He enters the dimly lit area, the hawk SCREECHES with the disturbance, flaps its wings once in a show of defiance.

Todd closes the door behind him and dims the light even more. Picks up a broom.

TODD
Shhh, it's fine.

Looks over at Freya who peers down from her perch.

TODD (cont'd)
Isn't it, Freya?

Freya blinks. Watches Todd sweep across the small room beneath her.

He gathers the small debris into a pile, then scoops it up with a shovel and puts it in the nearby trash bin.

Puts the broom and shovel away then sits in a wooden chair across from the mews.

Silent. Save for the wind blowing outside.

Todd looks forward in an empty but peaceful stare.

Rocks slowly. Meditative.

Safe in his cocoon.

Freya looks toward the open A-frame at the moon peeking out through the trees.

INT. SHERIFF WARD'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Dyllan eats a sandwich at an old dining room table, looks around at the walls where pictures used to hang.

Selectively missing.

She takes another bite and chews as Sheriff Ward crosses the room from the hallway.

DYLLAN

Hope you don't mind. I was starving.

SHERIFF WARD

Help yourself to anything.

Sheriff pours two cups of coffee and brings them to the table and sits down. Slides one across to her.

DYLLAN

Thanks.

SHERIFF WARD

I'm glad you came. It means a lot.

DYLLAN

How's Mom?

Sheriff Ward cools the coffee as he sips because it's still too hot to drink, *slurrrping* it up.

SHERIFF WARD

More bad days than good. Medication helps with the pain but sometimes--

Starts to get emotional so he checks himself with another jolt of hot coffee. *Slurrrp*.

DYLLAN

I'm sorry, Dad.

Sheriff reaches over and pats her hand.

SHERIFF WARD

I hope the two of you can finally make your peace.

Dyllan moves her hand away. Takes a small bite and chews.

He *slurrrps* his coffee.

DYLLAN

You mind if I crash in my old room?

SHERIFF WARD

Of course. This is your home.

Dyllan smiles and nods. Takes another bite of her sandwich.

Looks across at the blank spaces on the wall where old pictures used to hang.

INT. DYLLAN'S ROOM - LATER

Dyllan enters and turns at the door. Waves and whispers.

DYLLAN

Goodnight, Dad. Thanks again.

Closes it behind her and flips on the light.

Dyllan pans across the room slowly, a wave of memories hitting her all at once.

- Posters of Janet Jackson, Lenny Kravitz and Destiny's Child plaster the walls of this teen time capsule.
- Bed perfectly made, untouched for years.
- Trophies and team pictures on a shelf: football, swimming, baseball. Rows of BOYS in their prime.
- Accordion closet partially opened. A box on the ground.

Dyllan crosses the room to the closet, placing her bag and backpack on the bed as she does.

Looks down at the opened box. Framed pictures neatly tucked away. She picks one up. Looks at it.

Her high school graduation picture. It's Dyllan when he was a boy. Holding a diploma. Her name spelled DYLAN WARD.

Her mom by her side. So proud.

Additional pictures in the box of Dylan and her mom. All framed. All put away.

Dyllan puts the picture back in the box, then crosses the room to the old trophy stand. Pulls down the swimming one.

Trophy reads "DYLAN WARD, JR. - 100m MENS BUTTERFLY. 2002".

She puts it back then sits on the edge of the bed.

DYLLAN (cont'd)

Lord, drown me now.

INT. TODD'S HOUSE - MORNING

Same routine as before.

Up before dawn.

Bed straightened.

Eggs with pepper and toast.

Clean and straighten the kitchen.

Dish towel perfectly folded over the oven door handle.

Buttons his coat, heads outside closing the door behind him.

Always the same routine.

INT. SHED - LATER

Todd fills Freya's water trough, and tosses a morsel of quail breast into the food tray.

TODD

Hunting in six hours, Freya. Rest up.

Freya peers down at Todd, watches him leave his cage.

Todd locks the mew behind him and meets its gaze.

Smiles.

Freya half flaps its wings and crosses the cage to the feeding tray, its talons piercing the quail breast flesh.

Todd opens the hawk's cage and starts again.

INT. SHERIFF WARD'S HOUSE - MORNING

Dyllan exits her room in an oversized t-shirt and crosses the hallway toward the bathroom and stops mid-step.

Looks down toward the opened door at the end of the hallway.

Into her parent's room.

Sees the back end of a hospital bed, frail legs beneath multiple blankets.

Feet perfectly still.

She walks toward the bedroom slowly.

Quietly.

Sneaks up on the door, to look inside.

As we peek around the open portion of the door, we see the outline of a WOMAN under the sheets.

Body weak, arms sagging a bit. But resting.

Dyllan approaches the doorway, her shadow falling into the room from behind.

FANAU, (late 30's, Tongan, home-health assistant) sits bedside, and looks over at Dyllan. Smiles and puts her finger to her lips, then motions toward the sleeping woman. Then gets back to her magazine.

Dyllan looks over at her mom, then to Fanau. Smiles and backs away from the doorway.

She sighs, turns, then disappears into the bathroom.

INT. BLUE'S DINER - LATER

Todd exits the kitchen, toolbox in hand. Some grease marks on his face.

TODD
That should do it.

RUTH
That's what Blue said last time.

TODD
Yeah, well...I don't know much about that but I'll go clean myself up.

RUTH
Blue said that last time, too.

Todd catches Ruth's look and chuckles. They both do.

RUTH (cont'd)
I'll warm up some pie.

Todd walks toward the bathroom and calls back.

TODD
Did Blue say that, too?

Enters the bathroom with a chuckle.

Ruth stands agog. One-up'd by her own words. For a moment.

RUTH
In his wildest dreams!

INT. BLUE'S DINER - LATER

Todd smiles as he savors every bite of the world's best marionberry pie. Heaven doesn't taste this good.

Ruth sips a coffee as she flips through the Weekly World News at the end of the counter, scanning the headlines.

Door opens.

Dyllan enters and sees Ruth and Todd at the counter.

Ruth looks across the paper and breaks into a smile.

RUTH
Coffee's on me, Shakespeare. To go?

Dyllan crosses toward Todd and sits one seat over.

DYLLAN
That's sweet, thanks. And not yet.
How about some grits?

Ruth sits up, peers over her cat-eye reading glasses. Dead serious.

RUTH
Corn? Buttered? Shrimp and Cheese?

DYLLAN
Shrimp and grits is perfect.

Ruth puts her glasses on the paper and pours Dyllan a mug of piping hot black coffee. Slides it to her.

Looks over at Todd.

RUTH
I really like this girl.
(to Dyllan)
Coming right up.

Ruth disappears into the kitchen.

Dyllan turns and faces Todd, who turns back to his pie and takes a bite.

DYLLAN
What kind of pie is that?