

INTO THE SUNSET

By Newton Sweeney

Cast of Characters

- HENRY: Late 20s, THEA's partner. Once had friends in high places, now has some very powerful enemies.
- THEA: Late 20s, HENRY's girlfriend. Believes in happy endings, even when she knows this story can only end one way.
- VOICE: Never seen, only heard. Gruff. Not room service.

Place:

A cheap hotel.

Time:

Night, until it's not.

Act I
Scene 1

Setting: A small, low-rate hotel room somewhere outside of city limits. There are two twin beds, one made and one unmade, with the headboards against the SR wall, and two duffel bags on the made bed. There are a few personal items scattered about on top of the made bed and surrounding it that seem to have found their way out of the bags. Above the headboards is a window with the blinds drawn shut. In between the beds is a small table with two drawers, on top of which is a telephone, and on the outside of both beds is a small table. Against the US wall is a minifridge, DSL of which is a round table with two chairs. SL of the beds is a door leading to a small bathroom that faces the audience, though the door is closed, and perpendicular to this is another door leading to the hall of the hotel.

At Rise: The dim light grows just enough to make out the above details, then a moment or two of stillness passes. Then, the door to the outside flies opens. THEA enters and immediately starts throwing clothes into the bags. HENRY stumbles in a few steps behind, clutching their abdomen and hovering in the doorway uncertainly, but THEA hardly pays them any mind. Where THEA is rushed, almost frantic, HENRY is slower, more careful.

THEA

Close the door.

(HENRY does, without removing their hand from their midsection, then sits heavily in one of the chairs. THEA doesn't seem to notice.)

Did they follow us?

HENRY

Mandy didn't. Not sure about the others.

THEA

Well, we need to go, baby. Help me pack.

HENRY

I- I need a minute.

THEA

We don't have a minute. Come on, hurry-

(HENRY stands, but their legs give out under them, and they collapse. A cry escapes unbidden from their lips. THEA immediately drops the shirt she was throwing into a bag and kneels by them, concern clearly written on her face.)

THEA

Woah, Henry? Hey, hey, talk to me, what's...

(THEA's eyes go to HENRY's abdomen, where their hand has moved to reveal a patch of red spreading across their shirt.)

You said you were fine.

HENRY

(swaying slightly in their crouched position) I am... I'm-

THEA

You're not fine! That knife, you used her knife... That's where you got it. When you stabbed her. She stabbed you first.

HENRY

Bingo.

(HENRY's eyes flutter shut for a moment and they slump against the bed. THEA shakes them awake.)

THEA

Henry, hey, hey, stay with me. You idiot, why didn't you tell me you were hurt?

HENRY

Needed to run. They were gonna be coming any minute. No time to waste.

THEA

(With an edge in her voice) You- *(softer, "we can talk about this later")* Okay. Okay, let's get you back up so I can take a look. On the bed, let's get you comfortable.

(HENRY nods weakly. THEA tucks herself under HENRY's arm and, after a few moments of struggle, manages to maneuver them onto the DS, unmade bed, propped up by pillows. HENRY's hands are back on their abdomen, and THEA crouches on the bed in front of them.)

Let me see.

(HENRY nods, giving a pained groan. THEA gently pries HENRY's hands away and lifts their shirt, revealing a gushing wound in their midsection, mostly obscured by the blood. THEA looks away with a shaky breath.)

Oh, baby, what did she do to you?

HENRY

I was never gonna get away from my family, not... Not after what I did

THEA

Okay, okay, we just... We just gotta put pressure on it, yeah? Put your hands back on there, I'm gonna look for something to use to clean it. Just stay with me, honey, okay?

(THEA rushes to the bathroom, then reemerges with a white towel in hand. She crouches in front of HENRY, moving their hands just enough to get the towel under them. HENRY groans.)

Hold that there.

HENRY

(with a weak smile) Yes, ma'am.

(THEA runs her hand through their hair for just a moment before rushing to the minifridge and rifling around inside.)

HENRY

You gonna pour one out in my memory?

THEA

No, I need... This'll work.

(THEA stands, carrying a bottle of water, which she uncaps as she hurries back to HENRY's side.)

Gotta clean it up, and I don't want to risk moving you to the bathroom, so.

HENRY

Probably... probably for the best. Dunno how I held it together all the way here, I- *(A sharp exhale, as they lift the now blood-soaked towel)* C'mon. I don't got all day.

(THEA pours the water out over the wound, slowly. HENRY bites back a groan, breathing unsteadily before replacing the towel.)

THEA

Hold on, baby, let me get you a clean one.

(THEA stands and rushes back to the bathroom, and a few moments later returns, bringing two more towels and a now-refilled water bottle. She pulls away the soaked towel HENRY is still clutching and pours out the new bottle over the wound, which is still bleeding.)

This isn't working, I don't know- I don't know what I'm doing! You've gotta help me here, Henry. What do I do?

HENRY

(Their eyes fluttering shut again before jerking back awake, swaying dangerously where they sit.)
Mmm... Hey, you remember when we met?

THEA

Yes, of course I do.

HENRY

It was so much easier then, before the family and we could just talk all day in the library, remember?

THEA

Yeah, I remember. *(Beat, HENRY sways)* Hey, keep talking. Tell me more about it.

HENRY

You were so pretty. Are. *Are* so pretty, but hell, even then, when I barely knew you... You know how when you meet someone, and they're not, like, a Victoria's Secret model or anything, they're like a solid six out of ten? Maybe their nose is crooked, or their teeth are yellow, or they always smell like eggs, but then you get to know them, and all that just sort of, I dunno, fades away? And it's just all them, and you don't even know how you ever thought they were anything less than perfect?

THEA

(replacing the old towel with the new one, which almost immediately soaks through) Mm. And that was what it was like with me?

HENRY

No, you... When I saw you huddled in that little chair, y'know, sitting that way you do, I thought, "This is the way it's like in the movies." Kind-of girl sees girl, and it's, it's love at first sight. *(Laughs slightly, then winces)* 'Course, you didn't notice me for a week, even though you always came at the same time every day and, well, I practically lived there.

THEA

(Running her hand through their hair; using the other to help them apply pressure) I noticed you, baby. I talked to you first, remember?

HENRY

Heh, yeah. *(Winces again)* God, I— I was so stupid. Staying with you, it was the— the best weeks of my life, but I'd give it all up if it meant you didn't have to run from my family.

THEA

They're not your family. They're not. They only ever used you. And I don't care where it gets us, or got us, but you saved my life, Henry. They were gonna kill me, or worse, but you saved me. Do you regret that?

HENRY

No, no, 'course not, I just... If I'd never gotten caught up with them, if I'd just handed myself over after I killed Abel and Jeff 'stead of trying to run so I could– could be with you again, maybe have that happily ever after we talked about–

THEA

I'm calling an ambulance. Henry, you've gotta tell me what to do here. I don't–

HENRY

No, no, no. No ambulance. Please. They'll... You know they'll find us. And if the hospital finds out who I am... I can't go to jail. This freedom ain't much, but it's better than that place. But we can't– Mandy was on the phone with someone, she... She's dead, but others will be coming.

THEA

Then what do I do!

HENRY

You run.

THEA

No.

HENRY

It's my fault you're in this mess in the first place. Now, this... *(they look down at their abdomen)* this ain't something we can just patch up. I think you know that.

THEA

No. No, I'm not leaving you. *(A moment's staring match before THEA breaks it, returning to her bag)* Now, I've got dental floss and a sewing kit, so we're gonna patch you right up, you hear me?

(HENRY doesn't, their eyes closed, and shoulders slumped)

Henry?

(She turns to them, sees that they're unconscious, and immediately rushes back to their side.)

Henry. Don't you fucking *dare* leave me right now!

(She shakes them once, twice, then slaps them across the face, hard. The sound rings out. HENRY jerks back awake.)

Don't *do* that.

HENRY

Sorry, sorry... It's just so. So bright? And. Cold. I-

THEA

You're cold because you've lost so much blood. *(She puts her hands over theirs, applying more pressure on the towel)* Eyes on me, okay? Keep talking to me.

HENRY

What should I talk about?

THEA

(as she starts to thread a needle with dental floss) Anything you want. You never did tell me how you got caught up with those people.

HENRY

Mm, yeah. I mean, there weren't many choices for me, after you left. I was alone, nowhere to go, but – *(they wince as THEA starts to stitch them up)* but then, uh, Mandy found me, actually. Caught me tryin' to steal some food, saw how desperate I was, offered me a home.

THEA

Mandy did?

HENRY

Yeah, she was always one of the better ones. Of the ones I met, that is; the family's way bigger than I'd thought at first. They've got people in just about every state, soldiers like me, like Mandy and Jeff and Abel.

THEA

And they all were desperate like you? Trying to survive?

HENRY

Not all, some just like that it makes them feel important, powerful. But... enough of us, yeah.

(HENRY's head droops and THEA catches them, hoisting them back up and shaking them back awake. She bites back a sob.)

Sorry, sorry, sorry–

THEA

We're almost done, almost done, just– just keep talking. Stay awake.

HENRY

It's just so *bright*, I... Hurts. To look.

THEA

Bright?

HENRY

Y'know, I kinda wish she'd shot me. Wanna get the bullet out, have a– a memento, if I make it. Or if I don't, you could keep it with you. Like how soldiers carry around their wives' pictures in a locket.

THEA

(clinging to that stoic façade) You don't have to take the bullet out. Pretty sure that's just a thing they made up for the movies. Like. Like how you're not supposed to take out a knife if you–

(THEA breaks, looking away from her work to blink away tears. HENRY brings up a bloody hand to wipe her face. THEA doesn't seem to mind the blood, as she holds her hand over theirs.)

It wasn't supposed to be like this. We were supposed to–

HENRY

Ride off into the sunset? Live happily ever after?

THEA

Yes.

HENRY

(softly) Sweetheart, you can still have that.

THEA

No, no, I can't. You're...

HENRY

Even if I pull through, here, they'll catch up eventually. You know that. I'm – heh, I'm dead weight. Literally.

THEA

That's not funny.

(THEA returns to stitching up HENRY's wound, not looking at their face)

HENRY

You know I'm right.

THEA

... Keep talking. Tell me about our happy ending.

HENRY

Thea–

THEA

Pretend we'll be okay. Just— please. For me.

HENRY

Okay. Okay, well. I always wanted to open a restaurant, I could— I'll learn to cook, it could be a place for people with nowhere else to eat, like a food bank but actually, y'know, good? And— and we could get married, somewhere warm... a beach? It's so. It's so cold here. I'm so cold.

THEA

(ties off the stitches, shaking her head) I don't know what to do, Henry.

HENRY

Wanna hold the bullet up to the light. See it, see it reflected. Shine. Hold the bullet up to the light.

THEA

There's no bullet, baby, please don't leave me. I only just got you back, please.

HENRY

(drooping forward) The light, the light, the... When'd it get so dark?

THEA

It's night. *(glances at her watch)* Oh. It's midnight.

HENRY

(a delirious attempt at humor) Guess the, guess the fairy godmother's gonna turn my carriage back into a pumpkin. Find me, Prince Charming?

(THEA's crying too hard to answer, now, and just holds HENRY)

Y'know, I'm glad I killed Jeff and Abel for you. Even if it did get me killed. I just wish—

THEA

(shaking her head, pulling back from the embrace) No. No, no goodbyes, Henry. None. *(she cradles their face in her hands)* We're gonna ride off into the sunset, just like we talked about. I'll get in your big fancy car and we'll drive until we feel like stopping, open a restaurant, fairytale ending. You told me we'd find each other again. We did. We don't end here.

HENRY

Mm. Sorry, baby. Find me again, 'kay?

(THEA starts to answer, but a knock is heard at the door, sharp. She looks at HENRY with recognition in her eyes)

Run. Leave. Please, I— I can't watch you die. It's so bright.

VOICE

Room service.

THEA

Where would I go? I'm staying with you.

HENRY

Thea, please... The light, the...

(HENRY's head falls to their chest, and this time they don't wake when THEA shakes them. The person outside knocks again. THEA chokes down a sob as she brushes HENRY's hair out of their face, pressing a kiss to their forehead.)

VOICE

Anyone home?

THEA

I'll find you again.

(THEA carefully lays HENRY's head down on the pillows, pulling the covers up over them before climbing off the bed. She starts towards the table and chairs, picks one up and takes a few steps towards the door before thinking better of it. Instead, she replaces the chair and turns to one of the bags. She digs around inside and pulls out a pocketknife, which she opens before taking a stance between the door and HENRY's body. Something bangs on the door once, twice, then it flies open with a BANG! We can't make out who opened it, though, because a bright light obscures everything beyond the doorway, flowing into the room and bathing the bodies in warmth. For the first time, the entire room is visible: the patchy paint on the walls, the crimson of the blood on the bed and the towels and THEA and the body of HENRY. We see this picture for a beat, then two, then – Blackout.)