

Palmetto

Pilot Episode

By RJ Gray

TEASER

EXT. CHARLESTON, S.C. - HARBOR - LATE NIGHT/EARLY MORNING

A slice of sun tries to peek through the last vestige of night sky. A light breeze brushing against Palmetto trees, Cicadas chirping. Low country at peace.

EXT. PALMETTO GROVE NEIGHBORHOOD - LATE NIGHT/EARLY MORNING

A row of small houses backdrop the calm marsh at high tide.

EXT. PALMETTO GROVE HOUSE - PORCH - SAME

A low-top, ratty running shoe is double knotted, then again. A pair of VEINY, TATTOOED FOREARMS push up off the porch. THE MAN whom the shoes belong to begins to jog, quickly picks up the pace, almost as if someone is chasing him.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BLIND TIGER - LATE NIGHT

Hardly any street traffic at this hour. See THE BLIND TIGER TAVERN, a small but (during business hours) heavily trafficked bar. Sits on prime real estate, overlooking a rocky bluff. The big-lettered NEON SIGN is OFF.

CUT TO:

INT. THE BLIND TIGER - BACK ROOM - SAME

Old Charleston left mostly untouched. Exposed brick walls, dark wooden beams on the ceiling.

A hand shuffling poker chips. Shot cuffs from an expensive suit; a vintage Rolex; a large, shiny ring. From behind a curtain of cigar smoke, MILES HATHAWAY (50's), pushes three chips forward.

MILES

Three dimes.

We pan out to reveal the rest of the table. All the men are in suits and ties, smoking cigars, nursing bourbon. This is the Charleston gentry - drawls and boatloads of old money.

See PAUL GRANDERSON (mid 50's) - owner of the joint, game runner, a sturdy build and no-nonsense bearing - studying his cards.

PAUL

Little rich for my blood.

He throws his cards into the muck. Beside him, LIONEL DEVERAUX (late 50's), deliberates.

LIONEL
My daddy once told me if a squirrel
crawled up my pant leg, it'd starve
to death.

Greeted by a few laughs. Lionel finally throws in his cards.

LIONEL (CONT'D)
Son of a bitch always was right.

EXT. BROAD STREET - SAME

Rows of coffee shops, small businesses, and patio restaurants. Our JOGGER slows his pace as he slips through an alleyway between stores, reaches BEHIND A DUMPSTER and removes a BLACK BAG, circumspectly looks around before removing its contents, a black hoodie and jeans, and slipping them on. He removes something else that we can't see and we

CUT BACK TO:

INT. THE BLIND TIGER - BACK ROOM - SAME

Miles deals the last card.

MILES
King bets.

A portly, pleasant-looking gentleman, TRISTAN ENDICOTT (early 50's) peaks at his hole cards.

TRISTAN
A dime's the bet.

MILES
Playin' with that damn watch again.
I got half a mind to call you.

TRISTAN
S'pose that'd give you a quarter of
a mind then.

Greeted by some friendly ball-busting. Miles, acutely aware of Tristan's temper, opts to not measure dicks.

MILES
I'll call the dime.

CUT TO:

EXT. BOARDWALK - SAME

JOGGER walks up to a row of bikes, kneels down in front of a GREEN 10-SPEED. He expertly cracks the lock, hops on the bike.

EXT. BOARDWALK ALLEYWAY - SAME

A MAN IN A HAT watches Jogger from the dark, the flame from his cigarette like a firefly in the night. We'll see this man again.

CUT TO:

INT. THE BLIND TIGER - BACK ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

A substantial pot has been built. PAUL studies his hand, takes a pull from his cigar, glances back at his cards.

PAUL

When Newman said that nothin' was a
real cool hand? What a load of horse
shit.

A perfunctory laugh from the table.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Ended up dead anyhow. Take the money,
Ace. Get your damn hotel a decent
chef.

ACE CALDWELL (late 50's), a silver fox with a wry smile and drunken eyes, gladly obliges and scoops up the chips.

CUT TO:

EXT. THE BLIND TIGER - NIGHT

JOGGER'S P.O.V. - Checks out the security, which consists of RAMON, a behemoth with a PISTOL sticking out of his jeans and a copy of *People en Espanol* in his lap.

The jogger slowly, cautiously negotiates the gravelly terrain leading to the porch.

END JOGGER'S P.O.V. and now see him expertly put Ramon in a STRANGLE HOLD. Ramon gives a struggle, scrambling for purchase, but it's only a matter of seconds before he's asleep.

INT. THE BLIND TIGER - BACK ROOM - SAME

NOISES from outside.

PAUL
Think Ramon has to use the head again?
(yelling)
Come on in, Ramon. Just use a match
this time, for Christ's sake.

The lock begins to turn on the door.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Goddamn it Ramon, what'd I say about
knocking?

Much to everyone's surprise, when the door opens, it's not Ramon. It's the JOGGER - donning a BLACK MASK, wearing a BLACK HOODIE and JEANS over his sneakers, holding a pistol at the table with a cool, steady hand.

The once boisterous table has turned tremulous.

THE FOLLOWING IS ONE LONG, CONTINUOUS SHOT:

Jogger speaks in a perfect South Carolina drawl.

JOGGER
One of y'all go ahead and tell the
cashier to slowly walk out with his
hands raised.

After some deliberation, Paul grunts over to LANCE, the bank, who is tossed a backpack and begins to fill it up.

JOGGER (CONT'D)
You can go ahead and cash me out.

Jogger appraises the table.

JOGGER (CONT'D)
You gentlemen all look like you have
plenty to live for, so I don't reckon
I'll have to deal with any heroes.
All the same, warrants mentioning, I
see any one of you reach for something
shiny, this is gonna go another way.

ACE - particularly fractious when he's drunk - appears vacant, disinterested with the hold-up, pissed that he can't chase the money he's lost. Not at all afraid.

ACE
Are you under the impression this is
gonna end up goin' your way?

Ace reaches for his snifter of bourbon, and Jogger calmly, expertly shoots the glass - a deafening BANG as the shards spatter across the table.

He now has Ace's full attention.

A tense beat, cigar smoke still lingering, as Ace regards Jogger.

JOGGER
(to Ace)
Next one's for you.

Lance finishes filling the backpack with the game's pot, tosses it back to Jogger, who catches it blindly.

JOGGER (CONT'D)
Feels a bit light. I think perhaps
we ought to open the safe back there.

A look of surprise marbled with SHEER TERROR comes across Paul's face. He stands up, holds his hands in the air. He's face to face with the working end of a pistol, but we get the feeling he's more concerned about the money.

PAUL
Listen here...I'm the only one with
the combination to that safe. And I
highly recommend you take what you
got already and be on your way.

JOGGER
Duly noted. G'on now.

Paul speech is slow, measured, designed to make his point hit as hard possible.

PAUL
Son, seeing as how I'm a man who
made good on a second chance, I'm
gonna give you the opportunity to
walk back out that door and save
yourself a whole lot more trouble
than that there money's worth.

JOGGER
Maybe trouble's what I'm after.

Paul appraises the masked thief in front of him.

PAUL
Well, then. If that's the case, have
at it.

The men at the table are too scared, too drunk, or both, to notice the rip in his pant leg from his brief struggle with Ramon. If they had, they'd have seen a small piece of a tattoo reading *Turned to Stone*.

Paul saunters over to the safe, opens it, pulls out what looks like somewhere just south of A MILLION in cash and puts it on the table. Jogger quickly fills up his backpack with the STACKS OF MONEY, removes a fifty dollar bill, sets it on the table.

JOGGER
For the snifter.

Jogger zips up the backpack and walks backward out the room.

JOGGER (CONT'D)
You gentlemen have yourselves a fine evening.

Jogger shuts the door. Paul turns to Ace.

PAUL
Go see what he's driving.

Ace and Tristan walk to the windows where they stare out at the parking lot.

OUR LONG CONTINUOUS SHOT CONTINUES AS WE TRACK JOGGER OUT THE DOOR -

EXT. THE BLIND TIGER/BROAD STREET - CONTINUOUS

- AND ONTO THE 10 SPEED BIKE AS HE DRIVES OFF, RED TAIL LIGHT FADING INTO THE DISTANCE.

OUR CONTINUOUS SHOT ENDS AS WE

CUT BACK TO:

INT. THE BLIND TIGER - CONTINUOUS

PAUL
Get Wallace on the horn.

EXT. BROAD STREET - CONTINUOUS

JOGGER zips past a row of parked cars. He barely slows down as he tosses the backpack through the open window of an '04 TOYOTA 4-RUNNER. A well-manicured FEMALE HAND reaches up and closes the window after he goes by.

He rides back INTO THE ALLEYWAY where he first changed.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. THE BLIND TIGER - CONTINUOUS

PAUL is on the phone with WALLACE, his muscle, his fixer.

PAUL
Walk over to the balcony, tell me
what you can put eyes on.

WALLACE (O.S.)
Whole lotta nothin', boss. Just a
few delivery trucks.

PAUL
Get dressed. Be here in twenty.

WALLACE (O.S.)
You got it. Don't mind my askin',
what's this all about?

Paul hangs up. He stares out the window, still stunned.

CUT TO:

INT. WALLACE'S APARTMENT - SAME

Find WALLACE (50), intimidating in a low-rent way, the kind
of brute strength that doesn't come from P-90X.

Rubs sleep from his eyes as he throws on a wife beater. Not
much of a female touch in his pad, but there is a half-naked
one in his bed.

CUT TO:

INT. THE BLIND TIGER - BACK ROOM - 30 MINUTES LATER

The place has cleared out; chips scattered across the table,
unfinished drinks, half-smoked cigars leaning on ashtrays.
PAUL, still processing the events of the evening, sips on a
glass of scotch, stares at the broken snifter on the ground.
He takes a pack of cigarettes from his sport coat pocket,
stabs one into his mouth, lights it.

Wallace walks in.

Wallace's POV: Takes in the room, then closes in on the EMPTY
SAFE.

Wallace takes a seat next to Paul. He knows they have a
long day ahead of them.

WALLACE
Any leads?

Paul exhales a cloud of smoke, shakes his head.

PAUL
You gon' earn your keep today.
(MORE)

PAUL (CONT'D)
That thievin' son of a bitch best
put a shadow on my front door by
nightfall.

Wallace is up for the challenge; his eyes, too large for his face, bulge with a predatory instinct.

WALLACE
Copy that.

His reverence toward Paul goes beyond boss and employee; he respects Paul, admires him, and is scared of him.

PAUL
Best get moving 'fore the sun breaks.
Don't think he's long for this town.

WALLACE
How come?

PAUL
Ain't nobody live here stupid enough
to rob me blind...or smart enough to
get away with it.

WALLACE
I wouldn't be so sure the rubber's
gonna meet the road just yet, boss.

PAUL
What makes you say that?

WALLACE
In my experience, once a man has a
death wish, that genie don't go back
in the bottle.

CUT TO:

EXT. PALMETTO GROVE HOUSE - LATER

JOGGER walks up the driveway as if simply returning from a jog. His mask off, but we don't see his face just yet. He takes a key from his pocket and opens the garage door. The 4-RUNNER from before is parked inside. He brushes past a 'FOR RENT' sign and opens the door to --

INT. PALMETTO GROVE HOUSE - KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Find SARAH FARRELL (late 20's), our Jogger's wife. Sleep still in her eyes, a small-town charm marbled with big-city looks, oozing sexuality, even in sweats, sans makeup. She gives the jogger a brief nod - all is going to plan.