Ansom walked into the office of Conway Construction and asked to speak to Bert.

Debbi Conway smiled, said her brother was on the phone but would be available in just a moment. Why didn’t he take a seat.

Ansom sat down then immediately rose to his feet. He was too excited to sit.

“You sure are wound up today,” Debbi marveled, watching Ansom pacing back and forth across the narrow floor of the office trailer.

Ansom hesitated, wondering if he should tell her the news.

Before he could decide, her office phone pinged.

She nodded and motioned Ansom to the door behind her.

Bert was behind his desk. He grinned at Ansom. “Good to see you, buddy. I just got a call from Newman over at the Mall, they want to put up a new roof on the east section.” Bert leaned back. “And you’ll never guess who they want to do it.” He smiled triumphantly. “We start next Monday.” He slapped the desk, laughed delightedly. “We’re going to make an absolute fort…”

“I quit,” interrupted Ansom.

Bert froze, took a moment, shook himself off like a dog coming out of water, and said, “What’re you talking about? You can’t quit.”

“I quit,” Ansom repeated, and couldn’t stop the smile that broke across his face.

“Ansom, let’s think about this,” Bert said reasonably. He rose, moved around the desk, sat on the edge. “We’ve been working together for fifteen years now, you can’t just walk in and quit. We got too much history between us.”

“I’m done,” Ansom said determinedly.

“What’s Anne got to say about this?” asked Bert.

“Anne’s gone. She ran off last week.”

“Oh, man, I’m so sorry.” Bert rose, gripped his friend’s shoulder. “Why didn’t you say something?”

“Nothing to say.” He shrugged. “She ran off with Bobby Dunphry from across the street.”

“Jesus! That’s brutal,” Bert commiserated.

“It’s okay. I think it’s for the best. She always liked Bobby’s car. He’s got one of those new Mustangs.”

“They’re nice cars,” Bert grudgingly allowed.

Ansom agreed they were nice cars.

Bert took a moment to examine his friend before he said, “Maybe you should take some time to think things through before you make any major changes. Losing your wife’s kind of a big deal. It can throw a man off.” Bert crossed his arms thoughtfully. “When Deidre took off on me, it took me a while to get my bearings back. Maybe you just need to let things settle for a little while before you do anything rash.”

“Thanks, Bert.” Ansom nodded appreciatively. He turned and started for the door.

“So, why don’t you go over and check out that east section of the mall. And later on, we’ll go out and have a few drinks and talk things over.”

Ansom opened the office door, glanced over his shoulder. “Thanks, Bert, but I’m planning on getting out of town this afternoon.”

“What do you mean ‘getting out of town’?”

“I quit,” Ansom shrugged. “I’m hoping to get into L.A. late tomorrow night.”

“L. A.!” Bert exploded.

“Yeah, I’ve decided I want to be an actor,” Ansom replied, and gently closed the door behind him. He nodded to Debbi and walked out to his truck.

Two hours later, he carried his suitcase to the truck and glanced across the street at the empty driveway. It looked lonely without the Mustang. Ansom threw his case into the trunk and climbed behind the steering wheel.

Twenty minutes later he was on the Interstate heading west.

Ansom practiced his acting as he drove through Arizona. He would look in the rear view mirror and work on his emotional expressions.

By the time he got to Phoenix, he had sad down pretty good, but decided his happy and angry still needed some work.

He came into L.A. at two o clock in the morning. He booked a room, carried his suitcase inside, and flopped on the bed. He was too excited to sleep. He went back out to his truck and drove down to Hollywood Boulevard. He couldn’t believe all the lights and people on the sidewalks. He pulled over, parked, and just sat back to try to take it all in.

A woman walked over and knocked on his side window.

She was wearing a very short black leather skirt and a white bustier. Ansom thought she was very attractive.

“You’re not from around here, are you?” she greeted him, as he opened the window.

“Nope, just go into town,” replied Ansom. “I’m going to be an actor,” he confided.

“I can tell you’re going to be a good one.” She grinned, licked her lips, shifted her hips, said, “You want to party?”

Ansom was tempted, but he knew he had to get up early tomorrow morning to start his acting career.

He thanked her for the invitation and told her maybe some other time.

“You know where to find me.” She winked then sauntered down the sidewalk.

Ansom watched her walk away and decided he was going to like L A. People seemed much friendlier here than at home.

The next morning Ansom looked up the address for MGM Studios. He figured that would be a good place to start. They seemed to make a lot of movies. and he was sure they would always be in need of actors.

The studio was on Beverly Drive in Beverly Hills. Ansom threaded his way through the traffic, excited at the prospect of actually seeing Beverly Hills. All the really great actors lived there.

Ansom pulled up and parked in front of the MGM building. It was much larger than he had expected. The entranceway was gated with a guard house to the side.

Ansom watched as a bright red Corvette pulled up and parked in front of the gate. He leaned forward as the window rolled down.

Ansom gasped in surprise as he identified William Shatner, Captain James T Kirk, in the flesh, only twenty feet away.

The guard smiled and waved Mr. Shatner into the lot.

Ansom shook his head in amazement. Two days ago he was lugging shingles up a roof, and now, here he was, kind of hanging out with Captain James T. Kirk.

He couldn’t wait to get inside and start his new career.

The guard didn’t seem particularly friendly when Ansom pulled up to the gate.

“You can’t par…” the guard started to say, then stopped as his glance dropped to the side of Ansom’s truck.

“Just a minute.” He held up his hand and reached for his phone. He punched in a number, looked at Ansom, and asked, “You know what Lot?”

Ansom wasn’t sure what the guard mean by the question. He was about to tell him he was there for an acting job, when the guard turned back to the phone.

“Got someone from Conway Construction here. You know where he’s supposed to be?”

The guard nodded, disconnected and turned to Ansom. He seemed much friendlier now.

“Lot 23. They’re shooting a western over there.” He stepped out of the guard house. “Just drive down the Boulevard and take a left. Block down will be 23. Talk to Sam Shilling, he’s the set coordinator. He’ll set you right up.”

Ansom thanked him, pulled through the gate, and followed the guard’s directions to Lot 23.

As he came up to the Lot, he pulled over, parked, and stared out the window in amazement.

The Lot was a flurry of activity. People with cameras, with lights, with microphones, were walking up and down a wide, dusty dirt road. Four horses were tethered in front of a two story building in the center of the street. Two swinging doors marked the entrance of the building.

Ansom climbed out of his truck and stood for a moment taking in the scene. He took a deep breath, tried to calm his rising excitement, and step onto the Lot.

A harried looking man, clutching a clipboard to his chest, hurried over to him. His glance darted over Ansom’s shoulder to the truck then returned to his face.

“You’re the guy from Conway?”

Ansom nodded, said, “I was bu…”

The man turned away before Ansom could finish his sentence.

“I’m Sam Shilling, we’ve got a problem over here at the Saloon.” He pointed to the two story building with the swinging doors. He glanced over his shoulder. “C’mon, I’ll show you what’s going on.”

Ansom followed him over to the building. As they approached the front of the saloon, the sound of angry voices could be heard from the second story.

Shilling shook his head in disgust, looked back at Ansom. “That’s that Tik Tok guy. Wants to be an actor,” Shilling said disparagingly. “Thinks he’s knows everything about everything.” He leaned back, whispered. “He’s a total idiot. Bennings, the director, is about ready to shoot him,” he confided and giggled. “I hope he does.”

The voices grew in volume. Ansom glanced up and saw a couple standing at the edge of the upstairs railing. He didn’t know the man, but he immediately identified the woman.

“Is that Maddie Parker?”

“In the flesh.” Shillings smiled warmly. “She’s an absolute dream to work with. If everyone was like her, I’d be a much happier man. Now, the problem is…”

Before he could finish, the voice above grew even more frenzied.

“I can’t take this crap anymore!” the man shouted. His exclamation was followed by a sharp cracking sound.

Ansom glance up to see the wooden railing breaking away. Close behind it was a woman’s body. Her fall was accompanied by a terrified scream.

Ansom moved without thinking. He stepped to the side and held out his arms.

The woman plummeted into his embrace. She threw her arms around his neck and held on tightly.

“Oh, my god, Maddie, are you okay?” Shilling gasped.

A short heavy set, bearded man rushed over. “What the hell’s going on!” His glanced trailed from Ansom to Maddie, before fixing on Shillling.

“That maniac,” Shilling responded, gesturing to the saloon. “Almost killed her.”

The man from upstairs suddenly stormed out of the building. What ever he was about to say was curtailed by the bearded man’s response to his appearance.

“I want you off my set. NOW!”

“You can’t do that. I have a contract.”

“Screw your contract. Get the hell out of here.”

“You’ll hear from my lawyer,” the man threatened.

“If I do, they’d better be criminal lawyers, because I think attempted murder of your co-star pretty much negates your contract.”

The man glared murderously at the bearded man and whirled away.

As Ansom made a motion to release Maddie, her arms tightened around his neck and refused to let go.

The bearded man turned to Ansom. “I’m Bennings, the director of this nightmare. And you are?”

Before Ansom could reply, Shilling interjected worriedly. “What’re we going to do now, David. We just lost our star.”

Bennings shook his head in frustration.

Another man walked over to join the group. “What do you want me to do with the footage?”

“This is my A.D, Phillips,” Bennings introduced the newcomer, and asked, “What footage?”

“I was running when all that happened.”

“You got it on tape?”

“Yeah, it looks pretty good,” Phillips nodded judiciously.

“Let’s take a look.”

Ansom tried again to dislodge Maddie from his arms, but her grip only tightened.

He followed the three men over to camera screen, marveling at how little Maddie weighed. Not much more than a bundle of shingles.

They all gathered around the screen as Phillips played back the footage.

From the furious argument upstairs, to the breaking away of the railing and Maddie’s fall into Ansom’s arms.

“Damn!” Bennnings exclaimed. “It does looks good. It plays really well.” He glanced at Shilling.

Shilling nodded his agreement.

He turned to Phillips.

“It could work,” the A D said thoughtfully.

“He looks the part. He’s kind of got that Harrison Ford vibe,” Shilling said, his glance fixing on Ansom, traveling over his body. “We wouldn’t even need wardrobe. The jeans, shirt and boots work fine.”

Bennings turned to Ansom. He examined him closely before he asked, “You ever do any acting?”

Before Ansom could reply, Maddie leaned into him and whispered. ”Please, say yes.”

“Did some in Arizona.”

“There’s some good theaters there,” Phillips commented.

After a thoughtful moment, Bennings shrugged, said, “Aw, what the hell, let’s run it for the day, see how it looks.” He glanced at Ansom. “You okay with that?”

Before Ansom could reply, Maddie squealed excitedly, wriggled out of his arms and planted a huge kiss on his cheek.

Ansom blushed furiously, and said he thought it sounded just fine.

The movie was called Gunsmoke and Sagebrush. Variety heralded the film as a welcomed resurgence of the Western. They went on to say, that newcomer Ansom Clark out Eastwoods’ Eastwood.

Rolling Stone love the chemistry between the two co-stars, Parker and Clark, and added, ‘Finally. Sergio Leone’s ‘man with no name’ has a name. And that name is Ansom Clark.’

Ansom didn’t pay too much attention to the reviews. By the time the movie was released, he was deep into the filming of the sequel. He and Bennings, along with Maddie Parker went on to make four more films together, each more successful than the previous one.

In the fall of that first year of his acting career, Ansom and Maddie bought a house in Hollywood Hills.

A year later, Ansom missed out on an Oscar, but did win a Golden Globe award. He thanked Maddie and Bennings for their support and guidance, and went on to talk about all the hard work he had done to learn his craft as he drove through Arizona.

His acceptance speech earned him the starring role in a new comedy series on Netflix.

Maddie woke early one morning to an empty bed. She rose and searched the house without success, and finally, passing the living room window, saw Ansom standing outside at the edge of the pool.

“What’re you doing, darling?” she asked, as she stepped outside.

Ansom was standing, staring thoughtfully up at the roof.

“Couple of tiles are loose up there. Maybe tomorrow I’ll get up there and tack them down.”

Maddie laughed and threw her arms around his shoulders.

Ansom smiled, held her tight, but couldn’t stop his glance from trailing back up to the roof.

A week later, Maddie woke to see Ansom standing at the edge of the bed. He had a suitcase beside him. He moved to her side, threw his arms around her, and kissed her.

Maddie tasted his departure on his lips. “Where are you going?”

“Think I just need some time to think,” Ansom replied honestly.

“Think about what?”

Ansom straightened. “I’m not sure if acting is working for me anymore. I might want to try something different.”

“But what about your series?”

“We’re not going to be shooting until next spring,” Ansom answered.

And before Maddie could ask another question, he gave her a kiss, and said, he thought he’d just take a drive to try to think things through.

“You’ll come back?” she asked timidly.

Ansom grinned, and told her he’d be back before she even knew he was gone.

As she heard the door close, Maddie ran downstairs and got to the front door just as Ansom climbed into his truck.

Ansom never heard her ‘I love you’. He was bent over the steering wheel, trying to see what might lie ahead of him.

Two months later Maddie was sprawled on the couch, scrolling through TV channels. She was feeling good. Ansom had called that afternoon, said he had one more little thing he had to do, and then he’d be home tomorrow.

She was excited at the prospect of seeing him and had difficulty concentrating on the TV.

She paused for a moment on the upcoming moon shot, saw the astronauts parading before the cameras, and flipped the channel.

She stopped at a newscaster talking about the Democratic National Convention and quickly clicked away.

She caught the weather, and was pleased to see it would be nice tomorrow for Ansom’s homecoming.

She grinned excitedly at the thought of seeing him.

The weatherman segued to a report on the National Convention.

Defeated by her inability to find anything worth viewing, Maddie reached for her drink.

“And now,” the man behind the podium announced. “I’d like to bring up the future Governor of the great state of Texas.”

And to the sound of thunderous applause, a man stepped up behind the lectern.

“Oh, my god!” Maddie gasped, spilling her drink down the front of her dress.

“…Ansom?”