

"STANDBY"

by

Jerry Smith

Jdevilkb@aol.com

FADE IN:

The opening scene is just a silhouette of JOHN ROARK sitting in the glow of a computer screen TYPING a screenplay. After a brief moment the scene cuts to actually showing the scene Roark is writing. He is a new screenwriter trying to break into the business and will do just about anything to get his work read. While this scene is occurring, the EVER-SO-SLIGHT SOUND OF TYPING ON A KEYBOARD is heard.

As this opening scene winds down, the TYPING GETS LOUDER and cuts to Roark still typing out this scene on his computer.

EXT. NYC - DARKENED STREET HEADING TO AN ALLEY - NIGHT

The only light coming from anywhere is from a fire in a 55 gallon drum at the opening of an alleyway. A half dozen bums keep warm around the drum. The sidewalk is scattered with a few bums.

TOM, a gruff man wearing a dark, ragged suit, and a pork-pie hat, rounds the corner and heads toward the alley. Under his arm is a rolled up paper bag. His face is lighted by the fire as he stops momentarily to warm his hands at the drum.

TEDDY, an old black man bends just a bit to look under the brim of Tom's hat.

TEDDY

Hey there, music man. How's it going?

Tom remains stoic as he warms his hands. Then slowly starts.

TOM

You know what, Teddy?

Teddy starts to rub his hands together over the fire.

TEDDY

What's that, music man?

TOM

If you yelled for 8 years, 7 months
and 6 day, you'd have produced
enough sound energy to heat one cup
of coffee.

TEDDY

(matter-of-factly)

Hardly seems worth it.

TOM

You are more likely to be killed by
a champagne cork than by a
poisonous spider.

Teddy slowly shakes his head.

TEDDY

Not if you live in the streets.

Tom cocks his head for a moment, thinking. Then shrugs.

TOM

On average, people fear spiders
more than they do death.

TEDDY

Humph. You'd think they'd fear
those killer champagne corks.

Tom rubs his hands together and prepares to leave.

TOM

Yeah, you'd think so, wouldn't you?
G'night, Teddy.

TEDDY

Night, music man.

Tom walks into the very dark alley. As he heads to the fire
escape at the end of the alley, MOANING comes from behind the
trash bin.

Tom stops for a moment.

TOM

Reuben, is that you?

The MOAN GETS LOUDER.

TOM
 You take another beating, Reuben?
 Who was it this time? Cops again?

REUBEN(O.S.)
 (with effort)
 Naw, some somebitch didn't like me
 goin' through his trash.

Tom takes his hat off for a moment and swipes his brow with his forearm as though a way to quell his anger. He replaces the hat.

TOM
 (with disbelief)
 Man's worried about his goddamned
 trash? What the hell'd he toss it
 out if he's gonna worry about it? I
 never heard such a thing.

REUBEN(O.S.)
 Don't know, Tom. Knowed he was
 upset though. That much I knowed.

Tom rubs his hand across his face and holds his chin for a moment.

TOM
 (not really wanting to
 ask)
 You gonna be okay out here tonight?

REUBEN(O.S.)
 Oh, yeah. Don'tcha worry about me.
 That somebitch didn't get holda me
 til my second trip. Got me a nice
 down comforter out his trash.

Tom folds his arms and tilts his head as he listens.

TOM
 (pleasantly surprised)
 No kiddin'? A nice one, huh? Pretty
 warm, is it?

REUBEN
 (sincere, almost happy)
 Oh, Tom, it's nice.

Tom blows into his hands.

TOM
Well, Reuben, that's good. Real good. Wonder why he threw it out, you know, being nice and all?

REUBEN
(indifference)
Think his dog peed on it. It's a little ripe.

Tom stops rubbing his hands together.

TOM
Yeah, that would do it.

REUBEN
(almost excited)
I'm gonna get it cleaned tomorrow. Almost got enough.

Tom starts toward the fire escape again.

TOM
Tell you what, buddy. Stop by tomorrow and I'll make up the difference. We'll get her dry cleaned.

REUBEN
(excited)
Thanks, Tom.
(after a moment, calling out)
Good night, Tom.

Tom waves without turning back. He turns a dark corner. A FIRE ESCAPE LADDER IS PULLED DOWN.(O.S.)

There's a LOUD KNOCK on the DOOR (O.S.) that halts the movie and the TYPING.

CUT TO:

INT. JOHN ROARK'S APARTMENT - MORNING

JOHN ROARK, 30ish, sits in a very small apartment at his computer TYPING. His silhouette reaches up and hits the light switch to illuminate the room.

ROARK is dressed in jeans and a T-shirt and has the look of someone who has been up all night. He hates to shave and only does it every three or four days.

The apartment is very small and very messy. A water cooler sits by the side of the computer desk. The place is very dreary with shutters on all the windows allowing no light in. A small kitchen is off to the side.

ROARK
(yelling)
It's unlocked!

The door slowly CREEKS OPEN and the silhouette of BOB FARSIDE, 30ish, stands in the doorway. Farside is extremely intelligent, very dry sense of humor. He's Roark's best friend and seems to have a way of always getting things done.

Roark finishes typing the scene, looks up in a pondering manner for a moment, then smiles.

ROARK
(almost to himself)
Could work.

Farside enters.

Roark's smile quickly disappears as he studies the script.

FAR SIDE
How's it coming?

Roark ignores him.

ROARK
But what happens now? Need a subplot.

Roark looks up, pondering, then starts looking through piles of papers of notes he has strewn about his apartment. Under a pile of papers he finds a small tape recorder.

Farside studies the situation.

ROARK
There you are.

Roark rewinds the tape a bit and pushes the play button.

TAPE RECORDING OF ROARK (V.O.)
Tom is having a talk with his
friend Teddy at the fire barrel...
Discussing weird facts, funny...
Tom walks off into the dark...
(frustrated)
Now where the hell do I go?

The tape runs but there is nothing left on the tape.

Roark looks at the recorder with a slight disdain.

ROARK

Well, I got Reuben into the show,
that's something.

FARSIDE

Is he the subplot?

Roark finally acknowledges Farside with a nod.

Roark tosses the recorder aside and leans back in his chair.
He looks up as though he's searching for something.

FARSIDE

Aren't you supposed to be in a
movie today?

Roark looks over to the window to see a small ray of sunlight
shine through the shutters.

Roark quickly looks at his watch.

ROARK

Goddammit! Missed another one!

Farside shrugs, and picks up a 9 by 11 envelope with
"PROPERTY OF LARRY DESILVA" written on it.

FARSIDE

I thought you hated to act?
(reading the envelope)
Who's Larry DeSilva?

ROARK

I do.
(beat)
He's the producer of the movie I
was supposed to be in today.

FARSIDE

Do you know him?

Roark shakes his head no.

FARSIDE

Then why do you have his script?

Roark grabs the script from Farside,

ROARK

It's my script. I wanted him to read it.

Farside, in deep thought for a moment, figures it out. Proud of his detective work, he starts with a pointing finger and a sly smile,

FAR SIDE

I know what you do.

Roark stares, waiting.

FAR SIDE (CONT'D)

You get on the set. You toss that script in a corner. You find it, and turn it in to someone who can 'get it back' to Larry DeSilva.

Roark shrugs, almost embarrassed.

Farside walks to the fridge and gets a bottle of juice.

FAR SIDE

No, that's not bad. It's one way of getting your stuff to a producer.

(beat)

And people call you an idiot.

Roark takes offence,

ROARK

Who calls me an idiot?

Farside opens the juice, but before he drinks, he gives Roark a look like he's an idiot. It lasts a couple of seconds then Farside chugs the juice. This 'idiot look' becomes a theme throughout the movie.

Farside wipes some spilled juice from his chin and walks to the computer screen.

FAR SIDE

This is the Tom Waits' thing? How's this one coming?

ROARK

Still have to find a way to introduce the girl.

(beat)

But I'm an idiot, it's tougher for us.

Farside ignores him.

FAR SIDE

Thought you were doing the junkie mother thing.

ROARK

Yeah, I got all that. But why wouldn't the little girl trust Tom now. He saved her!

FAR SIDE

Don't make me give you the 'look' again.

Farside gives him the 'idiot look' for just a split second.

Roark quickly pulls back, looking confused. Still not seeing what Farside thinks is obvious.

FAR SIDE

Why would she, you dumb ass?

Roark sits at the computer and stares at the screen hoping to see the obvious.

FAR SIDE

Sure, he saved her. Then takes her to one of those government programs where they stick her right back in the nightmare he saved her from!

Roark squints, almost seeing the point.

FAR SIDE

She's a little girl, scared? Yes! Confused? You're damn right she's confused! The man saves her and puts her back into hell!

ROARK

(somewhat confused)

But he didn't know they were going to give her back to the junkie mother.

Farside SMACKS him in the back of the head.

FAR SIDE

You think that little girl knows
what's going on, how the system
works?

The smack in the head is like a light bulb going off in
Roark's head. He gets it,

ROARK

So she stays just close enough in
case she needs him again, but won't
approach him for fear he'll just
take her back to family services.

Farside APPLAUDS SLOW AND SARCASTIC.

FAR SIDE

(sarcastic)

And people call you an idiot.

Roark starts TYPING FRANTICALLY.

FAR SIDE

Waits has no intention of taking
her back to St. Christopher's.

ROARK

But she doesn't know that!

Farside walks over to the sofa and lies down. He picks up the
remote and turns on the stereo.

Roark TYPES.

FAR SIDE

Let's set the mood.

INT. ROARK'S APARTMENT - STEREO SYSTEM

It's a multiple disc player automatically loading a disc. A
TOM WAITS' CD starts PLAYING, "ANNIE'S BACK IN TOWN".

INT. ROARK'S APARTMENT

Farside gets comfortable and closes his eyes.

Roark TYPES AT A FRANTIC PACE.

INT. ROARK'S APARTMENT - COMPUTER SCREEN

The cursor is being followed by words of the screenplay. At the bottom of the screen is "Pg 37 Ln 1.18" Pos 5.3".

INT. ROARK'S APARTMENT - HANDS ON THE KEYBOARD

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. ROARK'S APARTMENT - HANDS ON THE KEYBOARD - HOURS LATER

INT. ROARK'S APARTMENT - COMPUTER SCREEN

The cursor is being followed by words of the screenplay. At the bottom of the screen is "Pg 53 Ln 3.69" Pos 4.3".

INT. ROARK'S APARTMENT - SOFA

Farside stares at the ceiling. The last song on the 5th CD STOPS. We have silence except for Roark's TYPING.

FARSIDE
How's it going?

Farside crawls off the sofa and heads toward Roark. He peeks over his shoulder to read.

INT. ROARK'S APARTMENT - COMPUTER SCREEN

reads "Pg 54 Ln 1.23" Pos 6.1".

FARSIDE (O.S.)
Damn, page 54. Productive day!

INT. ROARK'S APARTMENT

Roark stops typing and stares at the computer.

ROARK
I still have to get him to act in this thing.

Farside nods slowly, staring at the screen.

FAR SIDE

Wouldn't really be acting though.
He'd just show up and be himself.
That's more character than anyone
could ask for.

Farside walks to the fridge and searches for food.

ROARK

Either way, you think he'd do it?
How would you go about getting in
touch with Tom Waits?

FAR SIDE

Probably be easier getting an
audience with the Pope.

Roark's gaze drifts from the screen to Farside in the fridge.

Farside SLAMS the fridge shut.

FAR SIDE

You never have anything to eat
here.

(beat)

When's the last time he toured?

The question catches Roark's interest and he TYPES to get on
line.

ROARK

Let's see what Pollstar has to say.

Roark reads the screen. Farside goes through the cabinets.

ROARK

Nothing!

(beat)

He tours about as much as the pope.

Farside gives up his search for food and walks to the
computer.

FAR SIDE

Get out of the way.

Roark moves and Farside takes his seat and TYPES. A minute
later,

FAR SIDE

He's doing a 3 day thing in Paris
at the Rex.

Roark quickly looks over Farside's shoulder.

ROARK
Where'd you find that?

FAR SIDE
For I am a Raindog, too!

Roark, dejected, shrugs and walks away. Farside watches.

FAR SIDE
What!? What's the problem? I'm
telling you, the only chance to
talk to the guy is to go to one of
his shows.

Roark looks at him like he's a nut.

ROARK
Do you have any idea what it cost
for a flight to Paris?

Farside crumples up a sheet of newspaper, stands, pretends to
dribble it like a basketball,

FAR SIDE
Dribble, dribble, SHOOT!

Farside bounces the newspaper off Roark's forehead.

FAR SIDE
Yeah, that's right, just keep
coming up with excuses why you
can't get this movie made.

Farside sits at the computer and TYPES.

FAR SIDE
Go get me something to eat.

Roark throws Farside a dirty look, then bows subserviently as
he backs toward the door and leaves.

MATCH CUT TO:

THE DOOR OPENS

and Roark enters carrying a pizza. Farside lies on the sofa.

ROARK
Come up with anything?

FAR SIDE
What did you get?

ROARK
Pizza. Find me anything.

Farside rolls off the sofa and snatches the pizza from Roark.

FAR SIDE
Round trip to Paris, \$211.

Roark, shocked, starts to LAUGH.

ROARK
How the hell do you do it?

FAR SIDE
Stand by.

ROARK
For what?

Farside stops the slice in mid-air and turns to Roark like he's an idiot.

FAR SIDE
It's a kind of ticket.

Roark nods for a second, then, almost embarrassed...

ROARK
I'd ask what that means, but I
don't want you to give me the
'look'.

Roark does the 'idiot look' quickly before Farside can do it.

Farside cocks a brow.

FAR SIDE
Okay,... but you do make it tough,
buddy.

CUT TO:

INT. JFK AIRPORT TERMINAL - WAITING AREA - DAY

It's a typical busy day at JFK. Roark, with a midsize carry-on makes his way to the ticket counter.

A BURLY WOMAN sits behind the desk TALKING ON THE PHONE. She looks up at Roark, Roark gives a quick smile and holds up his ticket. A moment passes and she finishes her conversation.

BURLY WOMAN
How may I help you?

Roark slides the ticket toward her.

ROARK
I've got a ticket for Flight 307.

She grabs the ticket, studies it, and pulls back.

BURLY WOMAN
This is a 'standby' ticket.

Roark nods agreeably. The burly woman realizes he doesn't have a clue.

BURLY WOMAN
The flight is over booked.

Roark continues to nod. A moment passes. The nodding stops,

ROARK
Meaning what?

She gives him a 'Farside' look like he's an idiot.

BURLY WOMAN
Chances are, you're not getting on
that plane.
(beat)
Not today.

Roark holds up the ticket.

ROARK
But I have a ticket!

DANI (O.S.)
You have a 'stand by' ticket.

Roark turns to the voice.

INT. JFK AIRPORT - WAITING AREA

Roark sees, seated among the crowd, DANIELLE BRANCACCIO, a street wise, sultry brunette from Brooklyn, mid 20s. She's holding up her ticket. She has her carry-on bag in the seat next to her.

DANI
Just like mine.

INT. JFK AIRPORT - WAITING AREA

Roark looks back to the burly woman, who is back on the phone, then back to Danielle. He smiles briefly as he approaches.

ROARK
So, exactly what does this mean?

Danielle takes her bag from the seat and hikes her head toward it. Roark nods a 'thank you' and sits.

Once Roark sits down, a man, dressed conservatively in vest and slacks, carrying a 4 foot tube gets up and walks away.

DANI
It means we could be here til the
next flight, which leaves in about
2 hours,

Roark shrugs a "that's not so bad' look.

DANI
Or we could be here for days.

Roark's eyes burst open.

ROARK
Days?!!!

Roark leans forward, looks down, lost. After a moment,

ROARK
You done this before?

DANI
It's the only way to fly.

Roark, without leaning back, turns to Danielle.

ROARK
So, you do actually fly somewhere,
. . . eventually.

DANI
Somewhere. Eventually.

Roark sits back.