

Silence is Love

Troy had only made one movie that he was really proud of, and it wasn't the one he was known for. For most of his life he had just made movies for a paycheck. He had worked for a small movie studio back in the mid-seventies up through the nineties, making straight to video movies with lots of violence and lots of girls. He wasn't ashamed of it. He had never considered himself an artist. He was a businessman. Nothing sells quite like sex and violence.

In the early nineties he was given the script to a period piece, one of those bullshit movies focusing on the "sexual awakening" of a young virginal woman, one of those films with false pretensions of feminism that are really just meant to be tasteful soft core. He knew what the studio wanted him to do with it. Ordinarily, he would have delivered. Something told him there was more to this story. Contrary to his normal modus operandi, he downplayed the sexiness of the piece and focused in on the character of the heroine, creating a character study of remarkable quality. He changed the name as well, from "Elana: A Maid's tale" to "A Brief Silence," which he thought was a little pretentious, but it worked well with the ending of the movie. The end result was the one film he was truly proud of; he even called it a film as opposed to a movie. It received rave reviews, and unlike the majority of his work, a theatrical release. It bombed, which he took as a sign that he needed to stick to guns and girls.

A few years later he was presented with a script for a sci-fi action comedy flick: "Alien Assassin." He loved it, it was a lot of "fun" as he told everyone. He pushed it hard to his producers, and they reluctantly complied. It was his second theatrical release, and it was a smash hit. It was what he would become known for. At the time he was proud of it. Years passed and he stopped caring about it. It made him more money than any of his other movies combined, so he was grateful for it. It was definitely one of his better efforts, but after a while he soured to it. He got tired of being asked about it in every interview he ever did. He got tired of being invited to Comic-Con panels to talk about it, though he still went whenever he was invited. It was easy money and he never got tired of taking pictures with fans. The truth was Comic-Cons were the only places he was ever recognized, and he liked the attention. Besides, even if he had grown tired of the movie, he didn't want to ruin anyone else's enjoyment of it. He was glad he had made something that people loved so much, but he could never love it as much as they did.

He made several more straight to DVD action flicks and then slowly began to realize that he was old, and very tired. Between the Comic-Con appearances and social security he made enough money to retire, especially if he down-sized which he had been meaning to do anyway. His house was too big and he had too much stuff.

He found a nice little home in a quiet and spacious condo right in the middle of town. He could walk to the grocery store, and more importantly his favorite restaurant. He made a bundle selling memorabilia from Alien Assassin and moved into his new condo.

He was briefly tempted by an offer to direct a slasher flick in the "Friday the 13th" vein, but decided against it. Retirement sounded better than one last paycheck.

Unlike the majority of men, he thrived in retirement. He finally had time for all of the hobbies he had neglected. He started reading. When he had been busy directing he had hardly watched any movies.

In retirement he re-discovered his love of the medium and spent as much time watching them as he could, without neglecting his other past-times. He was afraid of missing something, missing some gem that would give him that unique sense of fulfillment that only a good movie could give you. He kept as busy as he could not allowing the possibility of boredom to enter his life. There was so much good material to absorb, in film, in music, books, and in art. Boredom is an affliction of the incurious.

On the twentieth anniversary of Alien Assassin the principal cast and crew were invited to sit on a panel to answer questions and discuss the movie's influence. It was the first time they had all been together since shooting had wrapped back in '96. Troy was delighted to see everyone again, in particular Lew Goldman, the hero, and Patricia Veidt, the heroine, who he had always referred to with the more familiar "Trish."

During the question and answer segment one fan asked Troy if he had ever considered making a sequel. To which he replied "not until you asked me that," which got a good laugh. The question led to some good banter between the cast up on stage, but no one seemed to take the idea very seriously. It was a good panel. Seeing everyone again made Troy feel sentimental. He momentarily wished that he hadn't gotten out of the movie business. After the session was over, he stood up too fast, making him dizzy. Lew saw him waver and reached out to keep him from falling. Troy shook the dizziness from his head and immediately forgot about missing movie-making.

A month later one of his old producers, Bryan Lockley, knocked on Troy's door. Troy led him into the living room and offered him a drink, which he declined.

"I'm going to get straight to the point Troy. We want to make a sequel to Alien Assassin and we want you to direct it. I came here to talk to you in person because I wasn't sure you'd come to the office."

"Oh I would've come. I like getting out. My answers the same in either location... I'll think about it."

"We need your decision by the end of the week. Frazer's pushing this hard. He was at that panel back in February, where that fan asked about it. He had some kid working on the script two days after the event. He wants you and the rest of the cast back for this. He's trying to capitalize on the nostalgia craze. Having you back in particular will be a big selling point for both funding and the fans. If you say yes we're going to start trying to get rumors circulating next week. We really don't want to go with anyone else."

"I'm going to make a drink. You sure you don't want one?"

"What are you making?"

"Just whiskey and soda, with a little lime."

"Like soda water?"

"Yes."

"I'll just have a whiskey"

Troy stood and walked into the kitchen. He already knew what his answer was but he wanted to keep his old friend in suspense.

“Who's writing the script? Anyone I've heard of?”

“No. Some kid named Jack Magness.”

“Jack Magness? That'd be a good name for a movie character. One of those tough, scoundrel types with the eternal five-o'clock shadow.”

Troy walked back into the living room with their respective drinks. He sat down in his chair exaggerating his old man sitting down grunts and groans. He leaned back in his recliner, took a sip of his drink and turned to his friend, feigning being deep in thought.

“So it will happen, with or without me?”

“Yes. We all want you on board though.”

“Well.... I'm going to have to say yes.”

His friend was pleased. They drank to the project, made a couple Old Fashioned's, and sat out on Troy's balcony. Troy pointed out his various plants and Bryan pretended to be interested. They shared memories of being on set for the first movie. Debated as to whether or not they could get everyone back, concluding that they could. Lew in particular had been very enthusiastic about the idea back at Comic-Con. Bryan wondered out loud who the fan was who had asked the question. It only seemed fair that he be credited in some way.

“You ever read the fan fiction?”

Bryan turned to Troy, “no, I haven't. Have you?”

“A little. Most of it's shit. Some of it's better than the movie. The pornographic ones are always good for a laugh.”

“I think I'll pass.”

“Fans are a funny thing. I'm glad to have them. But I don't think I've ever gotten so obsessed with anything like they do with that stupid movie. More power to them. Their passion pays my bills after all.”

Two weeks later Bryan sent him the script, which he hated. After he finished it he knew he would not be shooting that drivel. He had never considered himself to be a writer, but after reading and editing and improving on so many scripts he wondered if he had missed his calling. Jack Magness, despite his testosterone laced name had not made a good first impression. He planned to keep the young writer off the set as much as possible.

It was easy to get the original cast back; they were all old has-beens like he was. Their primary source of income was the host of nerds geeking out over them for their role in one fluke movie. They all had great affection for the fan-base, and yet none of them really understood their admirers. Troy in particular thought of this often. It was strange having a fan-base he couldn't relate to. He could never get as excited as they did about the source material, which was fine, he didn't have to. He just had to smile,

answer questions, make jokes, and take pictures, most of which he enjoyed doing. In that one small arena he was as adored as any star that ever walked the red carpet, and then some. When Troy thought about the kinds of people who enjoyed his work, or rather one of his works, he was relieved. Fans, generally speaking, are the worst; they're all waiting for the opportunity to cannibalize their idols. The truth is they want to be disappointed in their heroes, because beneath that veneer of idolization there's a sea of envy, and they want to find something to latch on to, to hold up as proof that in some way, by some vague moral yardstick, they are better than their idols. Not Troy's fans though. His fans were all nerds, and nerd fans will always be the biggest, most loving fans of any fans ever. They're less likely to turn on you for being awkward on a late night show, or for being too successful, or having too good of a year, or wearing a bad outfit; their love won't turn to hate in the same way as movie-star fans do, not as easily anyway. They're not as concerned about where you fall in a list of best or worst beach bodies, or if a plastic surgery went bad. They'll analyze every stupid little thing you've ever said in your life, and call attention to any time you contradict the canon of whatever little nerd creation you're a part of, but so long as you don't disrespect the material that they love with a passion bordering obsession, they won't treat you too badly.

Trish was the last to agree. So he paid her a visit, hoping he could convince her to come back for it. Otherwise, he'd have to commit the unforgivable cinematic act of killing a major character between movies. She welcomed him into her very lovely home, paid for by her very wealthy but mostly absentee producer husband.

He never knew what the hell people were talking about when they described face shapes, oval or otherwise. Something about Trish's face made him think of Ingrid Bergman. They were the same shape, though he had no idea how one would describe it. Her hair, dyed, was still vibrant and healthy. Her cool green eyes could dress a man down in a single look. A single look was all she needed to take control of a scene. She had always played hard, strong women, largely because in life she had always felt weak, and vulnerable. Ever since he had first met her he knew she was stronger than she thought she was. He couldn't tell her that in such a way that she would believe him; that is to say, he never tried. Instead, he chose to coax it out of her in her performance. Ironically, in fiction she would command the strength he saw in her all along, the strength she overlooked, or rather neglected; strength of will is a muscle, and like any other muscle it has to be exercised.

Trish led him to the back porch with a lovely view of a sprawling yard of bright green grass and told him the script was shit, to which he agreed. He told her they weren't going to make that movie, they were going to make *his* movie, which apparently was the right thing to say because she was immediately intrigued. He told her a few of his ideas, explaining that he hadn't completely fleshed it all out, there was room to grow, and he was receptive to feedback. They enjoyed a very nice lunch together, talking shop, exchanging ideas, watching her children play in the yard. All of the business talk, all of the conversations about where old friends were, what tribulations they faced in growing older, were interspersed with recollections of when they were on set, when they had worked together to create something that people really loved. The more they talked about their movie, the more he was sure that she would say yes. Being proud, she didn't want to concede right away, so she told him she'd think about it. Late afternoon he drove back home, expecting a call. Early evening it came. The whole cast was back. Now it was time for the re-write.

The original script focused entirely too much on new characters, presumably because the old farts from the first picture couldn't be expected to carry the story. New blood and fresh faces were needed to breathe new life into what the producers were no doubt hoping would become a franchise. It had been almost twenty years after all, the younger folks wouldn't be able to relate to crows-feet and arthritis. The first thing he did was re-work the story so that the focus was once again on the original leads, as it should be. He even went so far as to completely remove two new characters, one who was the ostensible comedic relief and the kid character, further proof that Jack Magness was a damn fool. Children had no place in his movies for two reasons. Firstly, he didn't particularly like children, though he recognized their integral role in the continuation of the species. Secondly, he refused to direct children under any circumstance.

After he finished re-writing the over-all script and plot, he honed in on the dialogue. It was riddled with unfunny jokes and thinly veiled references to current events. Jack was trying to be relevant. Having your work called "timely" was a sure-fire way to ensure it was both a piece of shit and would be forgotten within the decade. So many Oscar winning movies are flushed down and out of collective memory, destined to become nothing more than trivia night question and answers. Winning gold didn't mean you would be remembered. Winning fans, rabid, devoted, nerdy fans would make your name live forever.

After a particularly jarring break from the narrative to relate an important social message to the audience, Troy tossed the script on to the table and got up to make a drink.

"If you're trying to make a point, write a blog, ya schmuck."

He often talked out loud when he was editing. Thinking his frustrations was never as fulfilling as speaking them. He resolved that if he ever made another movie he'd never work with Jack Magness again.

It took him about a week to get the script into working order. When he finished it he sent it in to the producers, who replied the next day with a few vague edits such as "more comedy" and "give it a better ending." He told them he'd work on it, having no intention to actually do so.

Filming started two months later. When they had filmed the first movie the entirety of the cast and crew had been high most of the time. None of them thought they could get away with that on the second go around, so they decided to smoke a few joints together the night before filming started.

He still smoked regularly. However, it was clear that Trish had not smoked weed in quite some time. She became very affectionate and wistful, verbally regretting that she had not worked with him on more movies. He replied that she wouldn't like his normal fare, especially since she had a no nudity policy, a statement she thought was hilarious for one reason or another. He tried not to wish that he had filmed her naked.

She confessed that she hadn't been happy with the trajectory of her career since they had worked together. She had enjoyed a brief rise in popularity after being nominated for an award in the late nineties. Unfortunately for her, it didn't last long, and she became another in a long list of critically acclaimed actresses who couldn't find work regardless of their credentials. Growing older didn't help matters either. She was still a looker, but movies were an old man and a young woman's game.

“There will come a time,” she mused, “and it's a lot closer than I'd like it to be. Where I won't be able to act anymore. When that time comes I want to know that I'll be remembered for something I'm proud of.”

He smiled hearing her say that, and reflected on his own movies.

“I've only made one thing that I've ever really been proud of.”

“Alien Assassin?”

Scoffing, “No, I like that movie. I think it's good, we all did a good job on that. It's not that I'm not proud of it, but the one picture I did that really meant something to me was “A Brief Silence”.”

“I don't believe I've ever seen it.”

“Have you seen any of my other movies?”

“I'm sorry to say that I have not.”

“That's not something I would be sorry for.”

They laughed and passed the joint back and forth for a few puffs.

Blowing out the smoke he continued:

“I thought I had made something pretty remarkable honestly, so I was confused, and I still am, that nobody liked it as much as I did. I made Alien Assassin which again I liked, I thought it was good, I loved it right after, but I don't love it now. Everyone else does. The fans though... At the Comic-Cons, they go ape-shit for me, don't get me wrong, it's very gratifying, and I love the hell out of each and every one of them. But I just don't get it. I don't think I've ever loved anything the way they love that movie. So it's an odd thing: I can make something that people love, that I don't appreciate, but I can't make something that I love, be appreciated. I don't understand why people didn't like it. I thought it was fantastic... That's the one I want to be remembered for.”

Trish was touched by the unusual candor of her old friend.

“We should watch it together sometime.”

“I'd like that very much.”

With that they turned away from each other and watched their friends and co-workers playing some strange impromptu game, where one of them stood in the middle of a circle of friends, spun around until they were dizzy, and then tried to act out a scene from a movie without saying anything while the others guessed what it was. The game was too complex to be born out of alcohol. Marijuana is much more conducive to creativity running the gamut from malarkey to art. They laughed at the antics of the others, enjoying the game without having to participate.

Having been candid with his friend, and noticing a certain tenderness in her eyes, he discovered a subconscious hope that was slowly asserting itself into his conscious mind, a hope that they might possibly hook up. He didn't want to say get laid, that was vulgar, he wanted to be with her, she was special and it was a special night, and making love would be the perfect end to a particularly good

evening. Turning towards her, the drooping lids and nodding head he found told him that now was not the time. The guest room was ready, and he was going to suggest it, breakfast is always romantic even if nothing had happened the night before.

She stirred and said she needed to head out. After a short back and forth as to her driving capabilities she agreed to call an uber. She could swing by for her car in the morning. They stood out front, sharing a cigarette and a few stories, waiting for the car to arrive. She leaned on his shoulder for a moment and he almost told her to forget the uber and stay with him for the night. Almost; in the end he said nothing. The car arrived, they hugged, and said goodnight. He walked back into his condo to check on his guests who were starting to pass out on whatever comfortable surface they could find. As he did a superficial cleanup of the party carnage, he reflected that it was better nothing had happened, it was only the weed, the whiskey, a warm spring night, and the rose colored glasses of selective memory, often called nostalgia, that had made hooking up seem like a good idea. Hooking up wasn't a good idea, fortunately circumstances had saved him from a mistake that had seemed very appealing in the moment, a moment that would have been perfect in any milieu except real life.

He had not waited for her to come to his house in the morning to pick up his car. He had never been late to work. It was a record he had no intention of breaking. She could share-ride to his house and pick up her car. She was friends with his housekeeper, who would likely be there when she arrived. They could have breakfast together, commiserate, do whatever it was that they wanted, while he worked on establishing the first shot.

He was hung over and he knew that several members of the cast and crew were as well. They all acknowledged it with secret glances which made the suffering a little more tolerable. Once it becomes a secret shared among a select few, clandestine hang-overs can almost become something cool, especially when they were the result of the same party, and especially when you don't give it away to those who weren't there. Everything sucks right now but that's only because we had such a good time together last night, right?

Shooting was going well. The new young hero, Jethro, was in a predicament, and there didn't seem to be any way out of it, but thanks to the magic of movies the protagonist from the first film, Riker, appeared out of nowhere and saved the day. The sequence, once it was all put together, would be the intro to the movie. He imagined playing the movie at festivals and hearing the crowd cheer when the opening credits rolled to the theme.

The actors playing Jethro and Riker played well off each other. Their comedic timing was perfect. He couldn't be more pleased with the casting decision. He was a little worried what the new eye candy would do once she got in front of the camera. Her audition tape was good, the audition itself was acceptable. He could tell it was nerves that knocked a good reading on tape down to a mediocre one in person. It was her first real gig. She'd done a few local commercials, which were atrocious as virtually all local commercials are. He and everyone else knew she was really there for one thing, though he didn't want to let on. He wanted her to think that she was there for her talent, not for her perfect figure and gorgeous face. Actresses had gotten a lot more sensitive about things like that. He needed to get the best performance out of her that he could, and so he had to make sure she felt valued for more than her body, otherwise nerves and disappointment would ruin her acting. Nonetheless, the head of wardrobe had been charged to come up with something sexy for the young actress to wear prior to the obligatory love scene. They wanted something that would become iconic that all the cosplayers would latch on to.

He had seen plenty of young women dressed up like the heroine from the first film, in their own recreations of the completely impractical and over-sexualized space suit from the movie's climax. In a few years time, he hoped to see imitations of whatever the costume designer cooked up for the new heroine. The character's name had originally been Sandra Leventhal, which was a fine name, but a little bland for him. He changed it to Margot Cochise. He was looking for a memorable name, one that could become an icon in and of itself, one that could become synonymous with bad-ass independent babe. Margot Cochise was what he ended up with. He liked the sound of the name and no one had argued with him over it, so it stuck.

The first day of shooting passed without incident. They were off to a good start. There was an energy in the air. Everyone was excited to be working on the movie. Everyone was happy to be a part of it. As they wrapped for the day, Troy spoke a silent prayer asking for the momentum to continue, assuming that it would not be answered.

Kathryn Haggard aka eye candy aka Margot Cochise was on set the second day. Everyone turned to her as she stepped on to the sound stage delighting in the set pieces, which were deliberately just a little kitschy. She was so engrossed in studying the set that she was completely oblivious to the admiration of everyone in the room, which only added to her charm. He observed this with great satisfaction. If she commanded the attention of everyone on set how much more so would she capture the attention of theater-goers. If she could act halfway decent so much the better, but either way she was movie gold. She would inspire admiration and jealousy in equal measure, both of which would boost the prestige of the movie.

Kathryn faltered at first, struggling to find her footing, as he called it. He coaxed her through the first few takes, despairing for a moment. Once they started the fourth take something switched in her and she lit up, commanding the scene, taking control. She killed it. Troy knew before he yelled cut that that was the take. It was going to be in the movie and it was going to be in the trailer. Not only would it be in the trailer but her little quip would be the signature trailer line, the one spoken right before the cut to the title set to the theme. The fans were going to eat it up. They were going to love her. Kathryn was going to be a hit. The second day of shooting was just as successful as the first.

The third day was eaten up by filler scenes and a practical effect shot that kept failing. When they finally got it everyone had had enough and Troy decided to call it a day. Everyone had questions and concerns. He sat in his chair, refusing to get up. He was the director, and he was old, they could come to him. Having answered all of the questions, having verbally prepped the crew for the next day of shooting, he stood and started walking to his car. This was the first time he noticed something was wrong. It was subtle, but eerily prescient. He couldn't quite place where the issue was, but somehow, walking had become a problem, just for a moment, just long enough to send him into a quiet panic, to bend and twist reality into background noise around this one issue; walking, which he had been practicing for 65 plus years, had somehow become difficult. He felt surreal just for a moment, and then the world bent back into shape. His legs worked fine. No one else had noticed, so he ignored it. He walked to his car and headed home.

The next day he woke up with a horrendous migraine. It was bad enough that he had to do the unthinkable. He had to call in. The second unit director had plenty to do. They'd keep the project moving. Troy felt embarrassed. It was only the fourth day of shooting. But it wouldn't happen again. He

kept all of the blinds closed and took several pain-killers, enough that he was a little concerned for his liver. He slept well that night, dreaming about scenes yet to be shot.

The fifth day was Trish and Lew's big reunion scene. At the end of the first one, contrary to what everyone had expected, they had not hooked up, which many fans saw as a genius move and many saw as a travesty. Troy wanted to pull a "Casablanca" and not tell anyone on set if Riker and Maisie Lem, Trish's character, would finally make it happen until they were shooting the scene. He had left the scene out when they did the read-through, and everyone noticed. Trish in particular wanted to know and in the months leading up to shooting she finally wore him down. She was very pleased with her secret knowledge. Troy could see the knowledge sparkling in her eyes as he went over the reunion scene with Trish and Lew. In that moment he regretted telling her, believing she would eventually give it away. It wouldn't be the end of the world, but he enjoyed keeping secrets. Regardless, Trish and Lew played the scene perfectly, adding several little touches in terms of quips and gestures that he couldn't believe he hadn't thought of.

Towards the end of the day his headache came back. Not nearly as severe as it was before. It was just an annoyance. Somehow he knew something was wrong though, just as he knew he wouldn't go to the doctor. He ignored it as he ignored all other aches and pains, despite knowing that it wasn't part of the normal afflictions of aging. Whenever the last illness hit, he wanted it to be final, terminal, he didn't want to linger. There was no point to it. In his mind it was rational ignorance to deliberately ignore the signs up until they refused to be ignored any longer, until he was well beyond any "treatment." He would not be tended to by any quack doctors peddling so called medicine. In the end he only wanted drugs to make the process a little easier.

The sixth day passed without issue, then the seventh, and so on. Nothing went wrong. Throughout shooting Troy kept expecting the bottom to fall out. He had never been involved in a project where an actor didn't have a meltdown, or a producer didn't meddle too much, or a storm didn't delay shooting, or someone didn't show up when they were supposed to. The worst thing that had happened was the practical effect on the second day crapped out repeatedly. Every day he woke up assuming that that would be the day when the inevitable disaster would strike. There was at least one disaster in every production, and yet it never came. Except for his consistent headaches, he had never been involved in a project that ran so smoothly straight through to final wrap.

Benny and Lew stole the show. Trish had never acted better, adding extra dimensions to the character that he had not found in it. Kathryn was charming and surprisingly funny. She had a good comedic sensibility without resorting to any of the "funny actress" cliches. He couldn't necessarily define what "funny actress" cliches were but it always seemed to him that when trying to be funny women always acted in the same way. He never publicly voiced his opinion on the matter, but he was one of those men who didn't think women were funny. He was happy to be proven wrong.

Kathryn's sexy outfit went over well. The costume was both unique and sensuous without being trashy, an iconic cosplay costume in the making. She knew how to work it too. The scene was going to be a memorable one. Throughout the shooting all of his fears about her acting chops had gone out the window. She'd never win an Oscar, but she could sell a role for sure.

Throughout filming, Troy had continued to ignore his growing lack of coordination or the frequent lapses in memory. The cast noticed that he was not as clear when telling them how we wanted

them to run a scene. His notes were less eloquent and occasionally incoherent. They assumed it was just stress. It was his first project in nineteen years after all. Trish knew something else was wrong when at the wrap party Troy stood up to give his obligatory speech, suffered a dizzy spell, and had to sit back down. He delivered his remarks from his chair, slurring the first two lines before his speech cleared and he was finally able to enunciate properly. She debated as to whether she should speak to him about it, but she knew how he felt about health, illness, and doctors. She chose to say nothing, a decision which she came to regret, despite knowing full well that she would have never brought it up to him. She didn't know if being a good friend was letting him choose ignorance or forcing him to acknowledge his illness. If it was as bad as she feared, and she made him face it, made him get treatment, she knew he would resent her, which she couldn't bear the thought of. In the end she assumed it was selfishness on her part, or her desire to keep their good relationship intact that made her say nothing. Nonetheless, she did wonder whether it would've been right to pressure him into suffering through treatments for the sake of her own conscience, only for him to die anyway. Either way, to confront him would be just as selfish as to let him enjoy his ignorance.

Editing the movie went just as smoothly as filming it. He couldn't believe his luck. The early reviews were very positive. The general consensus was that they had managed to capture the magic of the original and add new elements that made the film relevant to modern audiences. He hated the use of the word relevant, but he appreciated the sentiment all the same.

When it was finally released he was unable to attend the premiere due to another migraine. Bryan called him the next day and told him it was a huge success. The reviews in the local papers confirmed this.

The very next day his agent called him with a list of all the comic-con's he had been invited to, Dallas, San-Diego, all of them. He told his agent to accept every invite, so long as the schedule allowed.

That night he dreamed he was back on the set of "A Brief Silence." He was young, or rather young-ish again. Elana, the lead, figured prominently. He danced with her, which he decided must mean something, what he wasn't sure. He was a strong believer in dreams. He assumed the role of the young suitor in the film, who won out against the boorish rake who pursued her as just another conquest. She was a young peasant, pure and chaste, with a sharp mind that she was not afraid to use. He walked to her to the shady river-bank in the pivotal love scene and made love to her, which hadn't happened in the movie, and which he had never done in real life. Despite the smut, his own word for it, that he had produced, Troy always tried to be respectful of his actresses.

The dream blurred, and all at once he found that he and Elana were sitting side by side in movie theater chairs in the middle of the field watching the picnic scene that she herself was in. It was a very sweet scene. Elana seemed pleased with it, and she gave his hand a gentle squeeze. All at once the fabric of the sky, the ground, everything, was torn to pieces and he found himself inside the world of "Alien Assassin." Elana stayed with him, but she was clearly dismayed. The world of "Alien Assassin" crumbled as well and he found himself watching a particularly raunchy scene from "Kung Fu Goddess," one of his earlier movies. Elana, who was in full character throughout the dream, was appalled. He felt ashamed when he woke up. He tried to tell himself it was stupid, but he carried that feeling of shame with him throughout the day. He had always believed in the significance of dreams, and the meaning of this dream was painfully clear to him.

He searched his movie library, found his DVD of "A Brief Silence," and picked up his cell phone. The phone rang so long that he began to mentally prepare for what he would say to the answering machine, or voice mail rather. But in the end she picked up.

"Hey Trish, are you free tonight? Great! I was wondering if you wanted to watch a movie."

She arrived two hours later with dinner. She had picked up Chinese for them. He made Trish a drink and they started the movie.

It had been nearly fifteen years since he had last watched "A Brief Silence." He had eaten several gummies and spent most of the viewing writing notes for a new movie script, all of which he later threw away. For this viewing he wanted to be completely sober. As he watched it, a thousand memories of shooting the movie re-surfaced, all of which he was delighted to re-discover. He remembered conversations with the actors. He remembered Silvia, who played Elana, having a break-down on set. He remembered calming her down with a sensitivity he hadn't been aware that he possessed. He remembered her hugging him afterward and accidentally smearing makeup on his shirt. He remembered the way she smelled. Silvia made a few more movies after "A Brief Silence," and then retired from acting to focus on her family. He hadn't spoken with her since.

The romantic interest, Gene, had died just a few years after filming, a car accident. Had he lived he would have been big, bigger than Troy for sure. Gene was brilliant, but humble. By far one of the best actors Troy had ever worked with.

Neither Troy nor Trish said a single word throughout the movie. They never paused it, never took a break. He was captivated by his own work, but not out of narcissism. It was genuinely good and he knew it. He knew he was right to love that film. He wished he had made more like it. He took in every detail, remembering his motivation for each decision he had made, deciding that he had been right in all of them. From the lighting to makeup to blocking to pacing, all of it was just as it should be. He couldn't understand why he hadn't made more pictures like this one. He couldn't understand why other people couldn't see that it was a masterpiece. He wasn't arrogant, or at least he didn't think he was. He would never call himself an artist, in truth he called himself a hack, and yet despite that he had somehow made a work of art.

As the end of the movie approached he found himself getting excited. His favorite moment was coming, the moment when he delivered the final gut-punch that really made the movie. Happy movies are all well and good, but sad movies are always the truly great ones.

After finally having got married, after finally finding happiness, Elana's new husband is called off to war. On the morning he is to leave, they say goodbye. They kiss tenderly. They stare into each others eyes and don't know what to say. So they stand in silence. Cut to black. A film by Troy Alderman fades in. The credits role, set to the theme by the very under-appreciated composer.

Half the credits had already rolled before anyone said anything.

"You're a very bad man."

Troy turned to Trish and found tears in her eyes.

"You made me cry."

She said this jokingly, though they both knew that her tears were the greatest compliment she could ever give him.

He smiled in response. Then he began telling stories about production, he told her what an angel Silvia was, and what a great loss to Cinema Gene's death had been. He talked about how the composer had captured the essence of the movie, and about how much people with musical talent impressed him. He talked about the changes he had made to the original script. He talked about how a set piece had collapsed, nearly crushing one of the grips who had wandered too far from the camera. He talked about the premiere and how proud he felt when the credits rolled and the audience applauded. He was still proud of it, and he reflected on what a blessing it is to still enjoy something you had made 27 years ago.

Trish listened, enjoying the enthusiasm of her old friend. It was a good movie to be sure, though it was not nearly as remarkable as he thought it was, but that didn't matter. A little white lie was the greatest gesture of love she could give him.

Troy ran out of stories to tell. The credits had finished rolling and the DVD reverted back to the disc menu. The theme played on repeat. Trish took his hand and squeezed it gently. Something in that simple gesture told him that she knew something was wrong, and that she knew he wouldn't seek help, that she accepted it, and that she cared about him. He was very grateful for all of his friends, but he was especially grateful for her. They sat in silence until the DVD player automatically shut off. He reflected that it was ironically humorous that they should be so quiet after having watched a movie titled "A Brief Silence." He almost made a joke about it, but stopped short realizing that it would ruin the moment. It was a moment he would cherish for the rest of his days, however short they might be. He knew she loved it, appreciated the piece just as much as he. He wasn't wrong. The movie was magic. He knew it and she knew it, and that was all that mattered. She leaned against his shoulder, and together they stared into the television screen.