

Sanctum

By Rob Weafer

EXT. Early morning winter, dawn breaking in front of a day shelter in a big city about 7:30 am. Homeless men and women are lined up waiting for the doors to open for hot coffee and toast. There's a lot of grumbling and shuffling for the front of the line (about 40+ people jostling and standing about). The opening is about 8 min. late and people are getting impatient in the cold. The steam off their breaths creates a permanent cloud over the gathering. The assembly all carry their lives, sleeping bags, clothes, in plastic bags, big knapsacks and various other bags. There is a big fellow, shelter staff, with a walkie talkie keeping order at the door, getting updates on the delays on his radio.

HOMELESS GUY #1

Damn it ... what's the goddamn hold up?!! Motherfuckers!

BILL (door guy)

Waiting for staff... people to get in place and some guys are late. Relax... any minute now.

HOMELESS GUY #1

Bullshit! I spent all night hanging on for dear life and you guys are fucking late?!!

BILL

Easy friend...

HOMELESS GUY #1

What...you gonna ban me again?

BILL

We don't ban people for complaining.

HOMELESS GUY #1

Ya.. right.

HOMELESS GUY #2

Jesus... I gotta score... ya know?

BILL

Any minute now... hang in
fellas.

A guy steps through the crowd holding a staff ID
badge ahead of him and makes it to the door. He
shows Bill the ID.

NEW STAFF GUY

Peer support worker... first
shift. I used to be an
addict.

BILL

Congratulations. You're late.
These people are literally
freezing to death, got it? Be
on time from now on.

HOMELESS GUY #1

I used to be peer worker.
Good luck.

NEW STAFF GUY

Won't happen again. Promise.

BILL

Piss in one hand. And steer
clear of Helena... she likes
new meat..she has hiring
authority. She'll have you
spun and relapsing in a week.

BILL opens the door quickly with a fob and lets
the new guy in.

HOMELESS WOMAN #1 (*black
eye*)

We are human beings out here!
No respect! My ex got out
this morning!! LET ME IN!!

The crowd is getting more vocal and unruly.

Chants "No respect!" here and there. Lots of "Assholes!" and "Motherfuckers!" from the crowd.

BILL is now worried about the unrest, squawks his radio.

BILL

Guys? Getting hairy out here. What's the hold up?

RADIO

We're short. A couple of burned out interns from the college called in sick. We're arranging new assignments and posts.

BILL

Copy. Can you send up Fred.

RADIO

Hang in. Almost there.5 minutes.

BILL

Copy.

The crowd makes a small rush at the door... BILL pushes back the first few successfully and they all back off. One of the crowd, with severe mental illness, starts into a shadow boxing routine in the middle of everything, great form, taking swipes at the air to clear the crush around him. He is a former pro boxer with brain trauma, well known to everyone and the crowd makes a big space for him. His name is Damien.

BILL

Cool it, people! Almost there. Damien! Cool it!!

HOMELESS GUY # 3

You ever had frostbite friend?!!

BILL IS BACK on the radio.

BILL

Guys? It's getting clinical up here. Damien's withdrawing and acting up. Either I open or you call the cops. Your call, Mary.

MARY responds.

MARY (radio)

Alright... open. We're close enough. People will have to wait a bit for coffee.

BILL

You're telling me that people are freezing cuz someone started the coffee late?

MARY

I prefer an outdoor riot to one inside.

BILL

Wonderful.. Jesus. Thanks.

(then to crowd)

OK folks! Single file!!

BILL pulls out his FOB and opens the main door. Cheers and insults from the group. ("About fuckin' time!" "You're SUPPOSED to care!!" "Here we go again!!" " I need the nurse!! Is the nurse in?!") DAMIEN calms down instantly, picks up in bag and gets in line.

End of SCENE

THE SCENE - INT. FRONT DESK/RECEPTION of SHELTER.
We have a veteran at the desk, security badge,
WILLY, 30's, knows a lot of the guys by name, .
He familiar with the whole scene, looks at home.
He's handing out towels to a couple of guys who
have stopped while others pour into the cafeteria
to grab breakfast/coffee. The first batch looks
like a sea of humanity pouring past. There's a
woman with a badge, standing at the entrance to
the cafeteria, ANDREA, a recent SW graduate .
Both are wearing collared blue Tshirts with the
center's name on it.

DAMIEN steps up and puts his hand out to WILLY.
WILLY seamlessly produces 2 generic smokes from
his breast pocket and puts them in Damien's hand.
Damien barely acknowledges, quickly signs a
clipboard and zips out of shot to get some
coffee. ANDREA pipes up.

ANDREA

That's against the rules.
Don't let Mary see you.

WILLY

Ya... Rules. Like these guys
need rules right now. Keeps
him calm for an hour or so.

ANDREA

Then what?

WILLY

I give him a couple more.
He's crank. What's a couple
of smokes. If I don't, he
starts taking swings at
staff.

ANDREA

Didn't he use to fight
professionally?

WILLY

Exactly... what's a couple of

smokes.

ANDREA

So I should throw out my textbooks and just buy a bag of contraband cigarettes.

WILLY

Pretty much. I'm the only guy he talks to. I've seen him cry. He's got a daughter he can never see.

ANDREA

That's amazing progress.

WILLY

Progress? He takes crank because of the brain damage he got fighting. He's never getting better. Some of these guys are broken, kid.

ANDREA

I refuse to believe that... there's hope for everyone.

WILLY

I used to think that. Contraband smokes are only 5\$ for a hundred and I sleep better.

An obviously disturbed woman steps up to reception and stares at WILLY. She's carrying bundles of loose clothes and underwear, her hair is scattered in odd pigtails and her makeup is nightmarish. She takes 2 steps back and drops her pants, no underwear, looking straight at WILLY. She is in a manic, schizoid episode, WILLY understands this.

WILLY

Hey Molly... nice to see you too. There's something different about you today... Have you lost weight? Is it your hair?

WILLY puts a couple of smokes on the counter,
MOLLY grabs them, pulls up her pants. She hisses
at ANDREA and takes off.

ANDREA (blanches, averts
her eyes)
Oh my God! What is wrong with
her? What did I do?

WILLY
You're a sexual rival,
competition for goods and
services.. out there. What's
wrong with her? Everything.
Schizophrenia.. compounded by
a head injury, car accident.
She thinks she's bartering
for the smokes, like on the
street. I just give them to
her. Broken.

ANDREA
Jesus Christ!

WILLY
You won't see her in a
textbook either, kiddo.

Folks are signing up for laundry on a clipboard.
There's a new guy, fresh on the street, OMAR,
brown and pretty clean looking, young. He asks a
question after signing up.

OMAR
Do you guys have fabric
softener?

WILLY
Uh... no. You're new.

OMAR
Does it show? Shit. Lost my
job 2 months ago and got
tossed from my apartment last
week. I'm fucking homeless!
I'M fucking homeless!!

WILLY

What's your name?

OMAR

Omar.

WILLY

You like to drink, Omar?

OMAR

I'm not an alcoholic. I'm a partier. No one believes me.

WILLY

Well..there's about 80 long term transition rooms available right now in the city if you don't drink...sober houses, 3 squares, nice places. Andrea over here can set you up today if you can keep a lid on the alcohol, not get too drunk, for a few months. They'll even send you to rehab if you ask... free.

OMAR

You sound like my wife. Look bud, I can quit any time I want (!)

WILLY

Course you can. We don't have any fabric softener, friend. Here's a Tide pack for laundry. Coffee's hot, help yourself.

OMAR gets a chastened look, grabs the Tide pack and walks off.

ANDREA

He looks so young.

WILLY

It's his first week. That won't last if he can't get indoors.

ANDREA

Maybe he just needs a friend, someone to open up to.. poor guy.

WILLY

You gonna save him? Don't go all Florence Nightingale on me kid and try to fuck him back to health. A couple of trainees try that every year and lose their certifications. Stay away from the clients, got it?

ANDREA

I wasn't thinking that at all...even though he is cute and everything. I know the rules.

WILLY

Good.

WILLY picks up the laundry clipboard and reads it.

WILLY

Damien's first up on laundry. Take this.
(he pulls out another smoke and holds it out to Andrea)

Think you can handle getting him over here?

ANDREA

Look... I'm not totally naive. I know not everything's in the textbooks. Willing to learn.

Lead the way, Obiwan.

ANDREA stares intently at the smoke, caves and grabs it, heads out to get Damien.

WILLY
There's my girl.

INT. OF THE SHELTER - CAFETERIA.

Line up at the steam tables, guys are a bit calmer now that they are warm and inside. There's staff posted on each side to keep the peace... they look like bouncers. We see MOLLY off to the side, having issues getting coffee at the machine, amidst all her auditory hallucinations. She freaks out and drops the carton of cream all over the floor. Guy next to her flips out.

CLIENT #1
You crazy bitch!! Now what the fuck am I gonna put in my coffee?! Somebody clock this bitch !!

A seasoned staff member moves over and takes MOLLY by the arm, grabs her half done coffee and moves her gingerly off toward the tables. One of the big staff guys on the line, FREDDO, pipes up

FREDDO
Cool it, Normy. Everything's cool... we got milk. Keep moving, buddy ... now!

NORMY
Fuckin' city gestapo.. I'm just talkin' friend! Look where you are... who you're with. It's the street, friend... it don't mean nothing.

FREDDO
You wanna get banned again..?
Keep moving.

NORMY

So I die in the cold for
talkin' shit... now that's
fraternity for all, brother.

NORMY cools it instantly and just uses the milk,
stirs his coffee.

INT. Manager's office, windowed, facing into the
cafeteria. A large, matronly woman is sitting at
the desk, going over paperwork for the day. She's
a brilliant, compassionate professional and about
38 years old and the smartest person in the
building. She's keep the whole mad circus going
and everyone depends on her. Her name is Cassie.
A staff member pokes his head in.

STAFF #1

Molly's having a bad day...
off her meds.

CASSIE

OK. The nurse practitioner's
coming in today..we'll get a
pill count. Oh... just got an
email...the mayor's popping
by with some major donors and
a few photographer's later so
everyone on their best... OK?

STAFF #1

So I should just tell
everyone to stop being crazy
or drunk while he's here?

CASSIE

I was talking about the
staff... p's and q's. But it
would be nice if he didn't
get assaulted or barfed on.
It's fiscal year end and he's

looking to cut the fat. You
want your contract renewed?
My contract's on the line,
too, trust me.

STAFF #1
Just tell me what to say and
who's ass to kiss.

CASSIE
You can start with mine. Grab
me a tea. No sugar. Is Molly
with you?

STAFF #1
She's right here.

CASSIE
Send her in.

STAFF #1 waves to someone off shot next to the
door and MOLLY appears, sheepishly, like she's in
trouble, some tears.

CASSIE turns in her chair and opens her big arms.

CASSIE
What's the matter, sweetie?
Everything'S OK...
everything's ok.

MOLLY (sobs)
The voices are so mean
today... so mean...

She trundles over to CASSIE who takes her up in a
big warm hug.

CASSIE
I know baby, I know...
there's my girl. We're gonna
make it better, don't you
worry.... everything's OK.

MOLLY opens up and there's big sobs and shaking.

MOLLY

So mean...

The Nurse Practitioner, ROB, arrives with a medical kit at the door...looks in. CASSIE sort of waves him off and says...

CASSIE

Gonna need a minute, Rob.
Grab a coffee..thanks.

MOLLY lets out a big sob and CASSIE hugs her just that much more.

CASSIE

I know baby, I know...
there's my girl.

THE END.