

# SHADOWMAN

Screenplay  
by

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Based on a novel by Nikki Gemmell

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FADE IN. EXT. SOUTHERN UTAH. 1987. DESERT HIGHWAY - NIGHT

SOUNDS OF SCISSORS over ECU of tufts of hair, illuminated against the night sky, blowing through the air like thistles in the wind. The images are fragments, abstract and elusive.

A man's hand, rough, chipped nails imbedded with years of ingrained dirt, holds the scissors. He wears a watch with shattered glass.

A dusty black 1970 Barracuda is parked on the side of a thin strip of highway, running through the middle of nowhere.

A beaten up suitcase with an untidy collection of clothes sits open on the engine hood.

In the glow of the car's headlights, a YOUNG GIRL (7) has her long dark hair severely cut by her father, BUD FREEMAN (30).

BUD  
No more tangles, hey.

Bud has the hard wiry physique of a laborer. His handsome face is tired and drawn. His hair long, stuck in the 70's.

GIRL  
Nah.

The girl runs her hand over the rough stubble of her new crew cut. She grins at her reflection in the car window. He throws the suitcase onto the back seat.

BUD  
We have to go.

The Barracuda disappears into the night.

The stars of THE MILKY WAY press on an endless, empty desert landscape.

INT. CITY HOTEL HALLWAY. THE PRESENT - LATE NIGHT

The doors line up down the long hallway. Dirty room service trays sit outside a couple. The decor is upmarket chain.

PHILLIPA 'SNIP' FREEMAN, (32) long dark hair, in jeans, tee shirt, a well worn Armani jacket and heels walks down the hall. She checks room numbers. Attractive, confident, her beauty blunted a little by a tough demeanor.

She checks a room number, pauses, KNOCKS SOFTLY. The sleeve of her jacket slips back to reveal a faded blue, yellow and red Navajo design on a well-worn leather band wrapped around her wrist.

EXT./INT. BARRACUDA. DESERT HIGHWAY - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

(ALL FLASHBACKS ARE FRAGMENTS, REFLECTIONS, POV, AND JUMP CUT ACTION TO RECREATE THE SENSE OF RECOLLECTION)

The 'Cuda, the only vehicle on the highway, is tiny in the vast desert.

The girl, her hair freshly cut, leans out the window as she checks her reflection in the side mirror, oblivious to the cold desert night air.

BUD  
Phillipa get back in here before  
you get sick from the cold.

Bud pushes the heater lever to 'high'.

BUD (CONT'D)  
(to himself)  
Last thing I need.

A lot of STATIC as he tries to tune into an FM station.

Bud hands her a Lifesaver and takes one himself.

INT. CITY HOTEL ROOM - LATE NIGHT (PRESENT TIME)

Snip's clothes hang over the back of a chair. Behind is a partly obscured reflection in the mirror of her, engaged in noisy sex.

She can see her own reflection. She's detached. All pretend passion.

INT. CITY HOTEL ROOM - LATER

Snip pulls on her jeans, no underwear. A conservative BUSINESSMAN (50's), fit, not bad looking, towel wrapped around his waist, removes some bills from his wallet and tucks them under Snip's pocketbook. He watches her dress.

SNIP  
(indicating the money)  
You don't have to do that.

BUSINESSMAN  
Buy yourself something nice.

Snip accepts that, and the money.

BUSINESSMAN (CONT'D)  
I want to see you again.

She smiles pleasantly, waggles a new pre-paid cellphone.

SNIP  
Call me.

Snip allows a chaste kiss as he opens the door for her.

EXT. CITY DELI - LATER

Snip drives a beaten up pickup to an employee parking area behind the deli. She opens the deli's rear door and enters.

INT. DELI KITCHEN/RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

Friendly greetings with the kitchen staff as she walks through. The manager SAL, (40), plain looking but thinks he's Don Juan, calls across the kitchen.

SAL  
Snip, you're on tomorrow night OK.

SNIP  
Yeah, uh, not sure Sal.

SAL  
I can't hear you.

Snip disappears into the restaurant. Empty except for a couple of night owls.

She takes a seat at the counter, then slips off her heels with obvious relief. A waitress, RUTH (30's) still trying to hold onto her punk youth, pours coffee for her.

RUTH  
What's up?

SNIP  
Hey Ruth. How was it tonight?

RUTH

Quiet. Had to smile extra hard, my cheeks hurt for a lousy twenty bucks. Big spenders we get in here.

SNIP

I need a drink!

Snip retrieves an unopened envelope from her bag. MYMAN & SPEERS LAWYERS neatly printed in the corner. Addressed to 'Ms PHILLIPA FREEMAN', with multiple addresses crossed out. Ruth returns with a Jim Beam. Snip, preoccupied with opening the envelope, realizes Ruth is speaking to her.

SNIP (CONT'D)

Sorry babe?

RUTH

... I'm short this month.

(off Snip's look)

Bills. Wondering if you can help me out again?

SNIP

Um, sure. Hang on.

Snip goes back to her bag and pulls out the money she received earlier. A rough count, couple of hundred, and hands about half to Ruth.

RUTH

Thanks Snip, pay you back. You sure?

SNIP

(waves off the question)

I sold a painting.

RUTH

You're so lucky.

SNIP

Yeah.

RUTH

Thanks.

SNIP

Anytime.

Snip opens the letter. C/U of parts of the letter's text 'grandmother passed away'... 'your grandmother's instructions'... 'a bequest of \$15,000 with your mother for safe keeping'.

INT. BARRACUDA. DESERT HIGHWAY - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

The Barracuda continues on the highway. An 80's pop song plays from the car radio.

BUD  
Snip?... Snip. I like that. A good  
boy's name. That's your new name,  
what do you think?

The girl (7), now renamed SNIP, clutches a black and white soft toy dog, pulls a funny face and punches Bud in the arm.

BUD (CONT'D)  
You got some punch there little  
man.  
(he grins at her)  
It's just you and me, forever.

YOUNG SNIP sticks out her tongue. A thin but intact circle of a Lifesaver sits on the end.

BUD (CONT'D)  
Awww, mine broke.

Bud pretends to be disappointed. Young Snip is delighted.

INT. CITY APARTMENT HOTEL ROOM - MORNING. (PRESENT TIME)

The contents of the sparse room have been pushed aside to make an attempt at an artist's studio. Snip works on a drawing in a journal.

C/U of parts of the drawing - a girl who looks like Snip, long dark hair falls over her face, the curve of her breast.

LATER

Snip drinks a Jim Beam straight, absently plays with the lawyer's letter in front of her. C/U '\$15,000'.

She dials a number on a paint-splattered cellphone.

SNIP  
It's Snip.

The words on the other end are not clear, but the annoyed tone is.

SNIP (CONT'D)  
I've been busy mom.

Snip already regrets the call.

INT. HOTEL FRONT DESK - LATER THAT DAY

A couple of BOARDERS sit in the worn-out chairs spread around the lobby of the apartment hotel.

Snip doesn't have enough cash. The DESK CLERK gets agitated, until she hands over a debit card.

She gives her pre-paid phone to an appreciative GIRL (20's) who sits idly nearby.

EXT. CITY APARTMENT HOTEL - DAY

Snip loads all her stuff into the bed of her battered pickup.

EXT. SMALL DESERT TOWN TRAILER PARK - DAY (FLASHBACK)

The trailer homes look temporary, on the edge of town, dwarfed by the desert. A relentless sun beats down.

Bud removes a 'FOR RENT' sign that hangs on the door handle of one trailer.

Young Snip, her black and white toy dog under her arm, is curious and excited as she enters. It is all a big adventure.

INT. TRAILER HOME - NIGHT (FLASHBACK)

Bud wears swimming goggles as he cuts up onions. Young Snip in a barbershop neat crew cut and boys pajamas at the table, laughs as she does a painting of it. Bud enjoys his daughter's laugh. He takes a long drink from a large glass of whiskey.

INT. SCHOOL TOILET - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Young Snip with crew cut, in boy's clothes, fights furiously with three BOYS her age. The ringleader KEITH rips down Snips shorts and underpants. Keith and the boys are bug-eyed at what is revealed.

KEITH  
Shit!

She runs out sobbing, past a male TEACHER as he walks in.

INT. TRAILER HOME - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

Young Snip and Bud hide under the window next to the door as the KNOCKING echoes through the trailer. Then quiet. SCUFFING NOISES moving away. A car DOOR closes.

INT./EXT. TRAILER HOME - CONTINUOUS (FLASHBACK)

They sneak a peek as the teacher drives off.

INT./EXT. BARRACUDA/DESERT ROAD - DUSK (FLASHBACK)

The Barracuda drives ahead of a plume of dust. Young Snip flies her hand on the wind. Bud gives her a lifesaver and has one himself.

YOUNG SNIP

Why do I have to be a boy anyway?

BUD

I told you, they'll take you away  
from me.

(forced smile)

My little man.

EXT. ELEVATED CITY FREEWAY - NIGHT (PRESENT TIME)

The freeway passes over dark buildings and empty streets. A tired Snip drives in a river of red lights.

EXT./INT HIGHWAY GAS STATION - DAWN

The pickup sits by a pump.

Snip inside pays for the gas and a bunch of flowers, a few candy bars and a can of Red Bull.

EXT. ROAD INTO COASTAL FISHING VILLAGE - AFTERNOON

Snip drives over a small bridge that leads to the village. Fishing boats bob at anchor behind a stone breakwater.

EXT. CEMETERY - AFTERNOON

Some of the headstones are blackened from age, a few tilt at odd angles. Snip searches until she finds a new headstone with her grandmother's name FRANCIS 'NAN' BEAUFORT. She disapproves of the plastic flowers that sit in front.



SNIP

Had this for a while for you Nan.  
I'm sorry I missed your birthday.

She unwraps a framed picture of Spencer Tracy. Arranges her flowers to cover the plastic bunch and leans Spencer against the headstone.

EXT. COAST ROAD - LATE AFTERNOON

Snip stops on a rise to stare at a large bungalow up ahead.

INT. BUNGALOW - LATE AFTERNOON

Snip's POV: She travels through the empty house, through the living room, a glimpse of Nan's room filled with her old movie posters, a TV sits at the end of the bed.

Snip stands on the back porch at the closed screen door that leads to the back yard.

HELEN (O.S.)

Snip.

The clothes line is filled with sheets and bedspreads. HELEN (52) tall, attractive but wears a hard life on her face, walks to the back door with a full basket of clothes. They hug awkwardly.

SNIP

Mom.

HELEN

I was expecting you earlier.

Snip follows her into

INT. DINING ROOM

Helen busily sorts the clothes on the dining room table. Snip buries her face in one of Nan's old dresses.

SNIP

You going to keep these mom?

HELEN

No.

Snip holds the dress, a piece of Nan, and wanders into

## THE LIVING ROOM

She inspects a photograph of herself aged 18, in a mortar board and gown, her long dark hair tied back neatly in a pony tail. Helen and NAN stand on either side of her.

There's a studio portrait photo of her mother, beautiful at age 18. She wears a 'HOMECOMING QUEEN' sash, her name HELEN BEAUFORT neatly and professionally printed across the bottom.

She picks up an envelope addressed to her from the lawyer. Behind is a plain one with 'Snip' written in a frail hand. It leans against a photo of a smiling Bud and a toddler Snip at the stern of a fishing boat named LADY HELEN. Next to it are a few photos of the three of them at the beach, as a family. These are happy times, warm family photos.

## NAN'S BEDROOM

Snip leans on the door jam as she opens the lawyer's envelope. Helen busily cleans out drawers.

HELEN

I haven't had a chance to do this  
since the funeral.

SNIP

I'm so sorry I missed it.

Snip removes a check for \$15,000. She stares at it and silently thanks Nan.

Helen packs piles of VHS tapes and DVD's into a box.

HELEN

You can have these, if you want.

SNIP

You could've made more effort to  
find me.

HELEN

God knows I tried but no one had a  
clue where you were. Where were you  
anyway?

SNIP

Around.

The non-answer always annoys Helen. Snip opens the other envelope to find a note, in the same frail hand as her name on the front, with just three words - HUNT HIM DOWN.

HELEN

Nan left you enough to support  
yourself for a while.

SNIP

I'm going to buy a new truck.

HELEN

For once--

SNIP

Yes be practical.

HELEN

I don't know why you don't get  
yourself a real job.

SNIP

I have one.

Snip tunes out as she continues to study the note.

HELEN

You could always do the painting on  
the side.

A cold wind blows through the open window. Helen turns to close it. Snip walks away.

HELEN

(calls out)

I'm making dinner soon.

INT. BUNGALOW KITCHEN - EVENING

Helen studies the note. The remains of dinner, a wine bottle and glasses crowd the table.

SNIP

It's kinda odd, don't you think?

CLOSE on 'HUNT HIM DOWN'.

SNIP (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I know where he is. Where he's  
always been. Why'd Nan think I'd go  
anywhere near him?--

Helen puts down the note. She pours the last of the wine.

HELEN

I think she confused life and the movies.

SNIP

You discussed this, right?

HELEN

No, no we didn't. There's nothing to discuss.

SNIP

That's not the message I get.

HELEN

Don't read too much into it.

SNIP

I don't recall Nan saying anything about Bud.

HELEN

Nothing to say.

SNIP

Until now?

Snip checks out the note again.

SNIP (CONT'D)

Harsh words for Nan.

HELEN

He did kidnap you.

SNIP

Well, maybe--

HELEN

There's no maybe about it.

SNIP

Maybe I wanted to go.

HELEN

You were seven years old, for Christ's sake... I had no idea if you were alive or dead. Can you--

SNIP

You didn't try very hard to find me.

HELEN

Why do you say this stuff? After five terrible years, he called me. He called me.

SNIP

You should've called the police.

HELEN

He said I'd never see you again?

SNIP

I don't believe it.

HELEN

I had no influence over your father when he was here. So I'm going to after he's run off with you? He took you to hurt me.

SNIP

He loved me.

HELEN

He doesn't know how to love. You are still a silly little girl when it comes to Bud.

SNIP

Fuck you.

Snip grabs the dirty plates from the table, goes to the sink and drops them in with a CRASH.

HELEN

Stay away from him.

Snip heads toward the back door.

HELEN (CONT'D)

You're not going to waste that money on a new truck.

(as Snip exits)

I'm telling you now.