

THE MARK

An at-risk teen may learn the value of hard work and friendship  
from his aging mentor - if he doesn't kill him first.

Written by

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EXT - CITY STREET - DAY

A bleak urban landscape. Chain link, barbed wire, graffiti. A street lined with refuse, neglect, despair.

A battered TRASH TRUCK wends its way up the street. On its side in faded letters: "McCain RECYCLING."

The truck's mechanical ARM snags a large trash BIN, dumps it. Not perfectly. Some of the trash falls back onto the street.

The truck halts. OLD MAN McCain, 70's, climbs down from behind the wheel. An old man in faded coveralls. He moves slowly, but with purpose. He begins picking up the spilled trash using a bag and stick.

The passenger door OPENS. JOEY, skinny, jaded at 16, looks back in dismay. McCain continues work, humming contentedly.

JOEY

You stoppin' again?

MCCAIN

Job ain't done till it's done right. Get yourself over here and give me a hand.

JOEY reluctantly squirms out of the vehicle and joins McCain. Joey wears the orange vest marked "COMMUNITY SERVICE."

JOEY

Stupid waste of time. Stoppin' every time this boat drops a paper clip.

McCain hides a smile. Hands him a bag. Joey grits his teeth and gets to work.

MCCAIN

Part of your deal, right? You are officially serving your community. And you never know when you're gonna ...

He stops, sees something in the trash heap.

MCCAIN (CONT'D)

...strike gold. Just look at that.

McCain takes out a HANDKERCHIEF. He bends down and wraps up a small OBJECT. Joey strains to see the object but McCain has put the handkerchief in his pocket.

JOEY  
What was it?

MCCAIN  
Gold, Joey. Pure gold.

Joey's eye falls instead on the large gold RING McCain wears on his hand.

They complete the trash pickup. McCain pauses, wipes the sweat off his forehead.

MCCAIN (CONT'D)  
That's it for today. You thirsty?

Joey nods. They head back to the truck.

CUT TO:

EXT - MCCAIN RECYCLING - DAY

An old storefront with rooms above. Clean and well kept, in contrast to the rest of the street.

CUT TO:

INT - MCCAIN OFFICE - DAY

A nice office. A couple of chairs, a desk. Behind the desk is a large safe. McCain tosses his keys on the desk and EXITS.

Joey glances around. On the desk beside the keys is a family picture - man, woman two boys in a farmyard. He looks at the keys, the safe... His hand reaches out as

McCain ENTERS from the back room, with two SODAS. Joey quickly moves his hand to pick up the picture. As if that were his original intent.

MCCAIN  
This was a farm in my daddy's day.  
I loved to help him grow things.  
My brother Abe loved animals. All  
kinds...

JOEY  
You live here alone?

MCCAIN  
I'm all that's left.

Joey looks guilty for a moment.

MCCAIN (CONT'D)

I have my work, good money and the health to enjoy it. That's God's gift. And that's what I wanted to talk to you about.

McCain pops open his soda. Sits down across from Joey.

MCCAIN (CONT'D)

Joey, you're a hard good worker when you want to be. I'd like to keep you on after your service hours are done.

Joey reacts. Not what he expected.

JOEY

My momma has 4 kids and 3 jobs. She works too hard. Like you.

MCCAIN

Pay's decent. You could learn the business and help out at home.

JOEY

Makes no sense why you work so hard. Guy your age, you could be retired. Livin' the good life.

MCCAIN

Let me show you something.

He crosses to the back window. Motions Joey to join him. Together they look out on:

A small but well tended GARDEN - McCain's pride and joy. Fruit trees, vegetables and flowers -- an oasis of color and life in an urban desert.

MCCAIN (CONT'D)

I work hard. But at the end of the day I go out back and sit in my garden. My definition of the good life.

Joey senses a sermon in the making. He drains his soda and stands to leave.

JOEY

That's cool, man. For you. I got bigger plans than being a garbage man.

MCCAIN

I hope those plans aren't the ones got you community service in the first place.

Joey EXITS. McCain shakes his head.

CUT TO:

EXT - JOEY'S APARTMENT BUILDING - LATER THAT DAY

Joey, now in street clothes walks out of his building. As he heads down the street he is met by two friends wearing street colors and sporting gang tattoos - JUDGE is 18 going on 40, tall and street tough and PINKS, younger, smaller but no less dangerous.

PINKS

Hey, man. 'Zup?

JOEY

Nothin much. Finishing up my time in "community service."

JUDGE

With Old Man McCain?

PINK

We hear you got invited to place.

JOEY

Yeah, so?

JUDGE

Think you could get us inside?

JOEY

(puzzled)

I guess. Why?

JUDGE

Word is the dude's loaded. But he doesn't trust banks. Keeps his all his money in a big safe. You see anything?

Joey reacts, remembering the gold ring and the wall safe.

JOEY  
 Maybe. Yeah.

PINKS  
 The guy lives alone. He's old.  
 Easy mark.

JUDGE  
 This could be big, Joey. A score  
 like that could make a reputation.

Joey hesitates. He likes the old man.

PINKS  
 You want in with the DK's, right?

Joey nods. These are his peers.

JUDGE  
 You know the code. You either buy  
 in, or you blood in.

PINKS  
 McCain's your ticket. Either way.  
 You ain't scared?

Joey sure is. But would die before he shows it. He  
 swallows. Hard.

JOEY  
 When?

PINKS  
 Tomorrow morning. You show up  
 early for work. Real early.

As Joey and the DK's make whispered plans...

CUT TO:

EXT - MCCAIN GARDEN - EVENING

McCain is in his garden. He tenderly fingers the plants,  
 checking their growth. He nods, satisfied.

He walks up to a small COMPOST BIN. And now he takes out his  
 handkerchief and unwraps the contents -- an old banana PEEL  
 and some veggie scraps.

He lifts the lid, tosses the contents inside.

MCCAIN

Pure gold. And folks just throw it  
away.

He sits down on a small BENCH. He closes his eyes and speaks  
to the Almighty.

MCCAIN (CONT'D)

I talked to Joey about stayin' on.  
He's smart enough. But he don't  
like work much.

He shakes his head.

MCCAIN (CONT'D)

Lord I suspect You sent him to me  
for a reason. Somethin' about him  
reminds me...

His gaze rests on a memorial MARKER surrounded by flowers.  
The marker reads simply: ABE MCCAIN. A tear slips unbidden  
down his cheek.

MCCAIN (CONT'D)

Lord, I miss him. Still. After all  
these years.

CUT TO:

INT - MCCAIN KITCHEN - EARLY THE NEXT DAY

McCain, up and dressed, takes JUICE and MILK out of the  
refrigerator.

A KNOCK at the office door gets his attention. Puzzled, he  
sets the breakfast items down on the counter and goes to  
answer the knock.

CUT TO:

INT - OFFICE - EARLY MORNING

McCain peers out the front door. He sees JOEY, standing out  
front, shifting uncomfortably from foot to foot.

MCCAIN

Joey? You're here early...

He unlocks the door.

MCCAIN (CONT'D)  
...we don't start work for another  
hour...

The door OPENS. Judge and Pinks shove Joey past McCain,  
forcing their way into the building.

Judge has a tire iron. Pinks holds a knife. Pinks crosses to  
the desk and ransacks it. Joey watches. On the fence.

McCain looks at Joey. He shakes his head.

MCCAIN (CONT'D)  
This how you thank your momma for  
her hard work? And me?

Joey wavers under his gaze.

MCCAIN (CONT'D)  
Do you know why I took you on?  
Trusted you? You're like someone I  
knew a long time ago.

JOEY  
I didn't ask you for help.

MCCAIN  
You did. You just don't know it.

JUDGE  
Shut up, old man. Open the safe.

McCain moves to comply. A beat later the safe is open.  
Pinks searches it eagerly. But finds only papers and a few  
coins. He throws them on the ground in disgust.

PINKS  
Where is it?

MCCAIN  
What?

JUDGE  
Man, you're loaded. We know you  
got money here. Gold.

MCCAIN  
Now who went and told you that?

Joey can't meet his gaze. Pinks waves his knife.

PINKS  
Where?

McCain smiles ironically.

MCCAIN  
I got gold out back. 

Judge gestures with the gun. McCain shrugs and leads them out back.

CUT TO:

EXT - MCCAIN GARDEN - EARLY MORNING

They follow McCain to his garden. Judge and Pinks exchange a puzzled glance.

McCain nods toward the compost bin.

MCCAIN  
Look deeper.

Judge hands Joey his weapon.

JUDGE  
Watch him.

Judge and Pinks dig through the compost. Soon they are covered with mud but they find

PINKS  
Nothing but crap.

MCCAIN  
(smiles)  
It's compost. To a gardener,  
that's pure gold.

Joey catches McCain's eye. Understanding dawns along with admiration for McCain. They've been had.

Judge is outraged.

JUDGE  
Think that's funny Old Man? Think  
you can make a fool of me?

He starts stomping, crushing the plants in the garden. Pinks joins him. Joey stands apart from both McCain and the gang. He watches the pain on McCain's face as his beloved garden is destroyed.

In moments, the beautiful garden is reduced to a ruin. Finally, Judge pulls up Abe's memorial marker, tosses it onto the compost heap.

Judge turns to Joey.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

Joey. You want to be DK. Time to  
make your mark. Use the gun.

McCain locks eyes with Joey. Despite his heartbreak at the devastation of his garden, there is something in his eyes. Compassion -- maybe even love.

Joey's hand trembles as he holds the weapon. He shakes his head. He's no killer.

McCain, takes advantage of the moment, closes the gap between them. Joey surrenders the weapon. He moves Joey behind him.

MCCAIN

Drop that knife. You two -- step  
back over there.

Judge and Pinks comply, wondering how they lost control of the situation.

MCCAIN (CONT'D)

You all thought you were dealing  
with a tired old man. An easy  
mark. Well, here's my mark. Take  
a real close look.

McCain pulls down the collar of his overalls, revealing a rival gang TATOO.

JUDGE

(disbelieving)  
You're 19th Street.

MCCAIN

Was.

PINKS

(scared now)  
Man, we didn't know...

JOEY

What's he mean?

MCCAIN

There's a truce between the DK's  
and the 19ths. So I'm untouchable.  
Unless these two want to start up a  
turf war.

He gestures toward the gate.

MCCAIN (CONT'D)

Time for you boys to leave.  
Or you stay and I'll call 911.

Judge and Pinks turn and run. McCain drops the gun as he surveys the ruin of his garden.

There's nothing left. He drops to his knees, devastated. His eyes close. But can't cry. Can't even pray.

A slight NOISE beside him. He opens his eyes. Surprised to see Joey is still there. He holds Abe's marker in his hands.

Joey hands the marker to McCain. After a long beat, he accepts it and the offer it represents. He reverently replaces it in the garden.

JOEY

The won't be back. I missed my chance to prove myself.

MCCAIN

No. You didn't.

McCain continues to gaze the marker.

JOEY

Can't believe you were 19th street. You never said.

MCCAIN

Not something I'm proud of.

JOEY

You got out. Why?

MCCAIN

There's no easy road. When your little brother lies dead from a bullet meant for you, you learn that.

They are silent for a moment.

JOEY

I can stay. If you want.

MCCAIN

Somebody got to help clean this up.

Joey smiles tentatively.

They kneel down, and get to work.

Side by side they work to replant the garden, restoring that which was lost.

Abe's marker glimmers in the morning light.

MUSIC UP

FADE OUT.

THE END

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