

TURNING TIDES

Original Screenplay

by Marc Serhan

ROUGH FIRST DRAFT

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EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

City street life screaming 'Xmas is coming'. People scurry about, sounds of car HORNS and street VENDORS blend with the distant jingle of Christmas MUSIC.

Store windows are being decorated for the holiday season.

Amid the burgeoning holiday rush, TESSA GRANGER, early 30s, stands out. With a camera bag slung over her shoulder and a notepad in hand, she moves with purpose, her gaze irresistibly skipping over the seasonal decorations.

Her PHONE rings, she checks caller, picks it up.

TESSA
(into phone)
Yes, got it. Also got pictures. -
Andy didn't show up this morning..
Oh, he's here now? Tell him he owes
me. - Yes, I'm on my way as we
speak. See you in a bit.

FURTHER AWAY - CONTINUOUS

Tessa strides along, weaving through the crowd. She pauses, her eyes catching a shop window being decorated for Xmas. The shopkeeper notices her; they wave at each other.

Tessa's PHONE rings. She glances at the caller ID...

...Gerald.

She declines the call with a determined swipe and plunges back into the city's embrace.

INT. CITY CAFÉ - DAY

Tessa waits in line at the busy coffee shop.

BARRISTA (O.S.)
Tessa! Medium-black!

Tessa waves and elbows her way toward the counter.

INT. MAGAZINE / VARIOUS SPOTS - DAY

Tessa walks briskly in the aisle between cubicles toward her boss's office, camera bag over the shoulder.

A young man rushes toward her, ANDY, the photographer.

TESSA
(walking, teasingly)
There you are! Where were you this morning?

He is about to say something, striding along with her, she holds her hand up, cutting him off.

TESSA (CONT'D)
I don't wanna hear it. I hate it when people make up excuses.

She hands him the camera bag, still on the move.

ANDY
Sorry, Tess, I overslept. Long night culling those photos.

TESSA
Good. You still owe me lunch.

ANDY
Not a problem.

She is at her boss's office, MR. SIMMONS, editor in chief, elegant 60s. Tessa leans against the door frame.

TESSA
All done and the article is under way. Senator Dawson is still go but she wants it done in the Hamptons. She's sending a car Friday.

SIMMONS
(impressed)
She's sending a car?

TESSA
She can afford it. Say, boss, I was thinking I could take a couple days off while I'm out there. Clear my head. I'll be back Monday... Afternoon.

SIMMONS
A hotel in the Hamptons?

She shrugs.

INT. TESSA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Tessa enters her apartment, weary. She locks the door behind her; leans against it momentarily as if to shut the world out, emotionally fatigued.

Pictures of Tessa in happy times adorn walls and furniture.

She drops her bag, picks up her phone, and scrolls through a barrage of call notifications —all from Gerald.

Raging, she throws the phone onto the couch where PUFFY, her fluffy cat, is resting. He jumps sideways with a startled meow.

TESSA

Sorry, Puffy, I didn't see you there. Come get your chow.

She goes to the kitchen, pours some food into Puffy's bowl, and bends to stroke his back. Puffy purrs, momentarily drawing a tired smile from Tessa.

TESSA (CONT'D)

Let me shower and change, and I'll come play with you.

The PHONE rings. She hesitates, then decisively rushes to pick it up from the sofa.

TESSA (CONT'D)

(into phone, angry)

Eight messages, Gerald? Where do you find the time? Stop calling me! It's over!

She didn't let him say one word, hangs up and throws the phone back on the sofa, out of it.

INT. MAGAZINE / SIMMONS OFFICE - DAY

Tessa sits with Simmons in his somewhat cluttered office, watching the end of SENATOR DAWSON's press conference on the TV screen.

SENATOR DAWSON (ON TV)

...It would be the result of hard work and an unwavering commitment to our community. As we look to the future, we must keep the fight for what is right, for our children, for all of us. Thank you, and God bless.

Simmons clicks off the TV with a remote.

SIMMONS

(earnestly)

She sure knows how to sell a dream, doesn't he?

TESSA
(*cynical*)
If by 'dream' you mean a carefully
crafted PR pitch, then yes, she's a
regular toon trying to further her
political career.

Simmons chuckles, nodding in agreement.

SIMMONS
Will you be ready for her by Friday?

TESSA
I'm already ready.

She stands up, ready to leave.

SIMMONS
Oh, about that hotel out there, put
it on your expenses, I'll authorize
it.

TESSA
Aw, thank you, Boss.

SIMMONS
I'm doing it for me, kiddo, you
look tired and I need you sharp...
All the time!

Tessa walks back into the bustling newsroom. Reporters and
editors huddled around computers, phones ringing.

EXT. TESSA'S OFFICE BUILDING - DAY

A busy street outside a high-rise building housing the
newspaper office. People hustle by, lost in the rhythm of the
city.

ANDREA, 30s, a fellow journalist and friend, stands away from
the entrance, smoking. Tessa emerges from the building.

Andrea gestures for her to join. Tessa obliges, leans against
the building, tired. Andrea eyes her, concerned.

ANDREA
You look like hell. Rough night?

TESSA
Couldn't sleep. Gerald's been
blowing up my phone. Angry
messages, then apologies... rinse,
repeat... it's non-stop.

ANDREA
I thought you broke up.

TESSA
I did. He's just not taking it.

Andrea takes a thoughtful puff, her eyes narrowing as she processes Tessa's words.

ANDREA
(*shaking her head*)
That guy's trouble, Tess. You should report him. Harassment isn't something taken lightly nowadays, you know.

Tessa contemplates this, her gaze fixed on the passing city life. She rubs her temples, clearly weighed down by the predicament she's in.

TESSA
Maybe you're right. I just... I just want it all to stop.

ANDREA
(*firmly*)
It does need to stop. For your sanity. I mean, look at you, you look like hell.

INT. TESSA'S APARTMENT - EVENING

Tessa, a bit more relaxed, is reading a book on her couch. A LOUD KNOCK at the door startles her. She hesitates, then reluctantly heads to answer it.

GERALD MARTIN, late 30s, large and imposing, pushes his way in. He is visibly desperate and angry. Tessa, shocked and scared, backs off.

GERALD
We need to talk, Tess! You keep ignoring my calls.

TESSA
Gerald, you can't just barge in here. You need to leave.

Gerald doesn't budge. His eyes are fiery, his stance aggressive.

GERALD

I'm not going anywhere until you
hear me out!

Tessa tries to steer him back to the door, but he resists.
The situation escalates quickly as she tries to push him out.

In the chaos, he makes a wild gesture, accidentally striking
her face, gashing her cheekbone. Shock registers on both
their faces.

TESSA

*(hand over her bleeding
cheek, horrified)*

You hit me!

GERALD

Noooo... I didn't mean...

TESSA

(furious)

Get out! Now!

Fueled by fear and adrenaline, she pushes him toward the
door. He stumbles back, is about to say something, but she
shoves him out and quickly locks the door.

TESSA (CONT'D)

(shouting thru the door)

This is it. I can't do this anymore.

She slides down against the door, her body shaking, her hand
still pressed to her bleeding cheek.

INT. POLICE PRECINCT - DAY

A busy, somewhat cluttered police station.

Tessa, a band-aid over her cheekbone, approaches the front
desk, visibly wary but determined. The OFFICER behind the
desk looks up.

TESSA

I'd like to file a report, please.

The officer looks around inside the hall, points at a desk.

OFFICER

See that gentleman there, with the
beard. He'll take care of you.

Tessa walks over to the desk. Officer J.J. BRONSON, middle-
aged, a kind face, looks up from his paperwork.

BRONSON
How can I help you, miss?

TESSA
(*stoic*)
I need to file a report... and I'd
also like to know how to get a
restraining order against someone.

He motions for her to sit. He looks at her, points to the
band-aid on her lightly bruised cheekbone.

BRONSON
That why you here?

Tessa acquiesces, slightly embarrassed.

BRONSON (CONT'D)
Sorry 'bout that. Let's get the
report filed first, then I'll walk
you through the rest. Let me see
some ID.

INT. TESSA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Tessa sits on the edge of her bed, the band-aid on her
cheekbone standing out in the low light. She holds her phone
to her ear, a hint of desperation in her eyes.

ANDREA (V.O.)
How are you holding up?

TESSA
Been better. I decided to get away
for a few days. I need some space to
breathe. Away from everything.

ANDREA (V.O.)
That sounds like a good idea.
You've been through a lot recently.
What about Dawson's interview?

TESSA
Can you cover it for me?

ANDREA (V.O.)
Of course, I've got it. I'll talk
to Simmons first thing tomorrow.

Tessa exhales deeply, relieved.

TESSA
Thanks, Andy. I owe you one.

ANDREA (V.O.)
Try and get some sleep, okay?

Tessa nods and hangs up.

INT. TRAVEL AGENCY - DAY

Posters of exotic destinations line the walls of the travel agency. Tessa stands at the counter talking to a TRAVEL AGENT, determined yet weary.

TESSA
How far can I go in less than 24
hours on a plane?

The travel agent, a cheerful middle-aged woman, quickly types on her computer, searching for options.

TRAVEL AGENT
(*knowingly*)
Looking for an escape, are we?

Tessa nods with a faint smile.

TRAVEL AGENT (CONT'D)
I've got just the place: Raiatea,
French Polynesia. It's a real
paradise – quiet, beautiful, and
peaceful. The flight's about twenty
hours with two stops.

Tessa's eyes light up at the description.

TESSA
That sounds perfect. I definitely
need the change.

She leans forward with relief, watching the travel agent finalize the booking.

TRAVEL AGENT
You won't regret it. It's a whole
different world out there.

TESSA
Thank you.

INT. TESSA'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The living room is in mild disarray with clothes and travel items spread out. A pet carrier sits on the couch.

Tessa and Andrea are busy packing a suitcase.

ANDREA

You're doing the right thing, Tess.
Getting away from that... prick.

Tessa selects a few items, her movements a bit hesitant but determined.

TESSA

Yeah, I need some peace, Andy. A
fresh start, you know?

ANDREA

Exactly. And hey, you were brave to
file a report. It's a big step.

Tessa gives a small, grateful smile.

TESSA

Yeah, I hope he gets it once and
for all.

Puffy, the cat, hops on the couch and curls up for a nap.

ANDREA

And don't you worry about Sir
Puffy. I'll spoil him rotten!

Tessa laughs for the first time.

TESSA

Not too much, okay? He's already a
diva.

They share a laugh; finish up the packing.

ANDREA

Call me anytime, okay? Whatever you
need.

TESSA

(hugging Andrea)

Thanks, Andy. For everything.

ANDREA

(pulls back, emotional)

Alright, now, let's not go
emotional and finish this. I have
an early rise tomorrow.

EXT. TESSA'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

Gerald, disheveled and desperate, clutching a large bouquet of flowers, approaches Tessa's apartment building.

He stops in his tracks, spotting Tessa, dressed for travel, standing by a cab watching the DRIVER load her suitcase into the trunk.

TESSA

How long to JFK?

DRIVER

This hour, one hour give or take.

She gets in the cab without noticing Gerald.

The cab departs, leaving Gerald standing there, dejected. He tosses the bouquet and rushes to hail another cab.

INT. AIRPORT - DAY

Tessa, bandaged cheekbone still evident, is done checking in her luggage. She stands in a kiosk, picking up a stack of magazines and a selection of candy to prepare for the long flight.

In the midst of the crowd, Gerald lurks from a distance. His eyes are fixated on Tessa, filled with unresolved anger.

Tessa, unaware of his presence, makes her way to the departure gate as her flight is called for boarding.

PA ANNOUNCEMENT

All passengers for Flight 783 to Raiatea, via Los Angeles, please proceed to Gate 12 for immediate boarding.

There's a brief moment when she looks back, checking, but then turns and continues on.

Gerald watches her disappear into the jet bridge, his expression hardens with frustrated determination.

FADE TO BLACK.

INT. PAPEETE AIRPORT / ARRIVAL GATE - DAY

A charming small airport greets visitors with island music and tropical décor. Tessa passes by a colorful mural depicting island life, on her way to the baggage claim area.