

*This is the original four page sketch for Looper, written in 2002. At the time I intended to film it, just with a video camera and a few friends, but we never did and it sat in a drawer for seven years. It's presented here for the curious, exactly as I wrote it ten years ago. Thanks for reading.*

*Rian*

*December 2012*

*A man in a coat and hat waits in an alleyway, playing with a pocket watch.*

Time travel has not been invented yet. But in thirty years it will be. The mechanical process it requires will be cheap and relatively accessible to the public at large. Needless to say, it will be instantly outlawed, with even unwitting accessories – family, friends, business partners – punished with death. This will not stop certain unscrupulous characters from using it to their own ends. I guess I indirectly fit into that category.

*With a flash of light, a second man appears in the alleyway. Without hesitation, the first man draws a gun and shoots him.*

*MAIN TITLE: looper*

*The man goes home, fixes himself a drink.*

I'm of this time, I'm not from the future. I've kicked around a bit, working as muscle for different crews, scraping by. Then about a year ago word comes across that a small mob that won't exist until thirty years from now is fishing for a looper. I put out, and I got lucky. I got the job. So I'm employed by this mob as a looper. What's a looper?

*We see the man retrieve an envelope that has been left under his door. He walks to a blind alley in the city.*

A looper is a hit man who works exclusively for a mob from the future. When they need someone taken care of, they zap him back in time, to me.

*A second man appears in the alley. Our man shoots him, then tears open the man's jacket, revealing gold taped to his back.*

From their end, their problem has just literally vanished. From my end, I've just killed a man who doesn't exist. Add to this the effects of inflation on my fee, and you can see what a mutually beneficial arrangement this is.

*Back at the man's apartment, drinking.*

I wouldn't say I'm more alone than most people who are alone. I chose it, at least. I don't complain. I've always said it suits me. I have my hobbies. I'm learning the banjo. And I drink.

*Another envelope under the door. Another alleyway.*

There's a reason we're called loopers. If your mob gets broken up or busted, their first priority is to erase any trace of the worst offense a criminal organization can commit – time travel. So they close the loop. If you're still alive thirty years from now, they send you back, to yourself. And you're expected to do the hit. It's part of the code, part of the job. If you don't, you're marked, a halfsy, a rat. Every looper knows the day will come. It's why they get guys like me. It's the job.

*A flash of light, and an old man appears. We don't get a good look at his face, but the looper does, and he freezes, gun raised, numb.*

There is a reason I'm telling you this.

*The old man runs. The looper gives chase.*

I couldn't do it on the spot. Weakness. If I let him get away, I was a dead man. As opposed to what, I'm not sure.

*They chase each other through the city. The old man gives the looper the slip, leaving an aged photograph – a woman in a hat at the beach. On the back, scrawled: "John 15:13"*

My handwriting. Something I should know. Something deep and rooted in me, a flash of anger, at whatever it was. If I had any susceptibility to the trappings of proverbial righteousness I wouldn't still be wearing this hat.

*The looper picks up the old man's trail, and chases him deeper in to the city.*

And if I had a nickel for every verse from the good book I'd gotten from a condemned man on his knees in an alleyway. Live by the sword... cast the first stone... fear and guilt in the moments before death. I knew them. I was immune. I probably knew this one too. But at the moment it eluded me.

*The looper chases the old man into a burnt out building, and stops, walking slowly, listening for a sign...*

At first I thought it was the wind, but then I realized he was talking to me. A low graveled voice I almost didn't recognize. He was telling me about the woman. It was hard for him. He kept starting and stopping. He spoke deliberately, as if very clearly trying to articulate a focused point. But his words were hazy memories, vague but vibrant emotional impressions of this woman.

*Fantasy images overtake the looper. The woman, the beach.*

He began the story of the thirty years between us, his past, my future. How in five years I would meet his wife. The woman who had saved him from my life. The woman he loved more than anything in the world. He told me about a beach. The retrieval of a parasol. The wind.

*Back to the scene. Footsteps clatter. The old man off again, down the street.*

By the time I noticed he had stopped talking, he had a good lead. Smart.

*More chasing.*

Women, or the realm of women, what they mean to men... I never expected to have that. I'm incompatible. My life at least is. Maybe I don't deserve it.

Some recklessness took me. I wanted to put a fist through this life I'd built. Why should he die for it? I wouldn't. I won't. I won't kill him. We'll go into hiding. Hop a steamer to Havana. Run numbers, drink Mojitos on the beach. That's what we'll do. I've

decided. My mind's made up. He must know what I've decided, because he knows what I'll do, cause it's what he did. So. Why is he still running?

*Into a construction site. Through the maze of stacked lumber and framed walls.*

That voice again, carried on the wind. And I felt a panicked urgency, to silence it. I'm going to let you live, shut up. Thirty years from now I still didn't know to shut up when I'm ahead.

*The looper turns a corner, and gets a 2x4 in the face. He goes down. The world slurs around him.*

He didn't say much about her. Three sentences maybe. Incomplete ones. Specific sense memories he described, physical details which out of context might have seemed obscene. But they were careful, specifically chosen. Small charges set to start an avalanche of extrapolation. He knew what a thin hand on the back of your neck meant.

*The woman holds the looper, somewhere.*

It meant casual affection, without direct motive. It meant she was sticking around. A Sunday love. I didn't love myself enough to even look for that. I felt her breath, steady and sleeping, on my throat, like he said. Offhandedly saving me. Forgiving me my old life, trusting me in the new one.

*The cold world slurs back into focus. The looper rises painfully.*

If I found that, I'd give up everything I had for it, in a heartbeat. And I knew now, from this old man I knew that I would find it. But not in Havana. Not on the run.

*In the distance, the old man, glancing back, running.*

I understood then. If I didn't kill him I'd never find her. He'd have never found her.

John 15:13, paraphrased. No greater love than this, to lay down your life for another.

*His gun has fallen in the scuffle. He picks it up, and goes after the old man with grim purpose.*

For someone else, not yourself. Sure I'd give up anything for a life of happiness, who wouldn't. But he would die for her, not for her forgiveness or love – he'd never see her again, and not even have memories, where he was going. But the woman who had loved him enough to take him from what he called his life and put her hand on him, and sleep against him, for her he would die.

*Across broad barren sands. Onto a beach. Stopping at the shore, exhausted, the old man on his knees.*

Maybe this is why he ran. So I'd understand this. So I'd have time to understand. And now I did, and right on the money, now he stopped running.

*The looper unbuttons his overcoat, swings it open. The gun in its holster, his pocket-watch dangling beside it.*

I could feel her already. I could taste her. This was the last death I'd see. She'd saved me from all of it. Now it was just her, and her love. And would I some day do what he did, and die not for my life with her, but just for her?

He told me the end of their story then. The day the mob came to send him back to me. They found them together.

*As the looper hears the old man's silent words we see the mob burst in on the old couple, the old man tied and gagged... the woman, her face unclear, eyes open in horror as her throat is horribly slashed.*

And because she was with him... because of him...

*Back to the scene. The looper removes his gun from the holster.*

I understood. And yes. Yes I would.

*Bang. A hole opens in the looper's chest beside his pocket watch, and he stumbles backwards in the sand, back from the old man, to whom he has just given his gun.*

I will.

*The looper falls to his knees, locks eyes with the old man.*

She saved my life.

*The looper crumples to the sand and lies still, alone on the wide beach.*

10/8/02