

Treatment: *Locust* by Noel Vinson

Logline: After twenty-five years in prison, Samson Pike finds his life's final season beginning after he takes a job with Esra, a young transgender escort with whom he falls in love and tries to protect for better or for worse.

Story Summary:

In 2023, fall guy Samson Pike approaches his final day in San Quentin on a twenty-five-year prison dive he took for his outlaw motorcycle club boss, and father figure, George Shand. Freshly showered from the night before, Sam is woken up at 5am by two guards who run him through the bureaucratic paces of being processed out of the institution, and upon the final formalities, Sam exits with only a stack of letters and a one-way bus ticket to Los Angeles on his person.

Once in L.A., Sam finds himself waiting at the Greyhound bus station for well over an hour, only to find his old colleague – and George Shand's son – Roy Phillips, pulling up in an old junker of a truck to pick him up. Not finding much between them to catch up on in the past twenty-five years, other than Sam's divorce and the coveted letters written to him by his son, Mason, Roy navigates through the rush hour traffic toward Sam's old Hollywood stomping grounds. And as the distant sun sets, Sam slowly takes in all manner of life that scatters about the changed city that envelops them.

With no probation on his books, and expecting a handsome payday for his misplaced loyalties, Sam is disappointed to learn that things are not going to turn out in the favor that had originally been promised to him, although he'll need to speak with George to find out why. Nonetheless, Roy patronizingly furnishes Sam with his old wallet which now contains a newly counterfeited, but legit-enough, California Driver's License adorned with his most recent mugshot. Following this, they pull up to a 1920's style apartment building situated just south of Hollywood Boulevard. Unfortunately, there looks to be a large homeless population loitering about the surrounding streets and Sam is once again disappointed to find himself at the center of such a subpar homecoming.

On the second floor of the building, Sam finds George waiting inside of a derelict studio apartment which looks to have been furnished with the barest necessities. Asking Roy to excuse them, George pours Sam a welcome home drink and explains that he will need Sam to lay low for a few months while he gets some things in order to begin making good on their arrangement. Feeling that he has no other option, Sam reluctantly agrees, but makes a point to let George know that he is intent on seeing Mason, regardless of George's requirement for his anonymity.

Then, on his father's call, Roy re-enters the apartment and provides Sam with a smartphone and reintroduces him to his old, dated wardrobe which hangs in the closet. Taking a moment to run his fingers over some old *Widowmaker Motorcycle Club* patched denims, Sam is joggled

back to reality when George gets up to leave. Roy then hands Sam a one-hundred-dollar bill from his own wallet which accidentally reveals a flash of gold that Sam clocks for a police badge. Drawing his attention to it, Sam is put in his place by Roy when he boldly tells him that, nowadays, it would be safer for Sam to simply keep his eyes *straight*. Reluctantly agreeing to keep his temper in check, blood begins to inadvertently trickle down Sam's fingers from a tightly clenched fist. Before leaving, Roy draws his attention to that.

Later that night, in the hopes of seeing Mason as soon as he can, Sam misguidedly takes the stack of letters and brings them, uninvited, into North Hollywood where he visits his ex-wife, Renee. Unfortunately, upon their first reunion in twenty years, Renee does not look at all happy to see him, though her tradesman husband, Greg, hankers to invite the former convict inside for a drunken game of comparison. Worse than that, once Mason is introduced, the young man strangely comes across as a listless burnout, seemingly not as invested in making up for lost time as Sam had hoped he would be, given the spirit of their correspondence. Still, to appeal to the kid's good graces, Sam offers up Roy's one-hundred-dollar bill, a gesture that perks Mason up quickly as he takes the note and shoves it into his pocket. Sadly, that same gesture makes Greg angry with the embarrassment of being shown up in his own house, and after Mason leaves the room, he attacks Sam who is busy writing his contact details down. However, always a man quick on his reflexes, Sam counters the drunken man and slams him down to the floor - an act that causes him to be banished from the house by both Renee and Mason, who promptly runs back into the room to push Sam away before dropping to the floor in defense of his *father*. With the consequences laid out in front of him, Sam regretfully leaves, letters in hand.

Watching the questionable nightlife pass by as he rides a bus back into Hollywood proper, Sam decides that it'd be better to drown his sorrows, so instead of heading home, he follows the Walk of Fame down to the Frolic Room, an old haunt from his younger days. Inside, Sam is even surprised to see that an old bartender friend, Mitch, still works there. The two men catch up long enough for Sam to down two beers and ask for a job. Unfortunately, there is nothing on offer for an ex-con, and after taking pity on him and his situation, Mitch decides that Sam is a safe enough bet to place in contact with a friend about a different kind of job.

That job comes in the form of Esra Simone, who upon meeting, Sam learns is a high-end escort, who is also transgender. Assigned male at birth, Esra coolly infers that while she retains particular *qualities* of that assignment to niche out her clientele, she is every bit a woman, and will be treated as such. Nonetheless, she vets Sam long enough to also see him as a safe bet, legally, given his history. As such, she offers him a job to chauffeur her from client to client and lend any muscle that may be needed. Rationalizing that her choices in life do not reflect the value of the cash in her hand, Sam accepts Esra's offer. He even sees himself as quite the progressive guy, having witnessed enough of that kind of *behavior* back in Quentin to easily warrant a blind eye to anything Esra gets up to professionally. Understanding that Sam's frames of reference could use an upgrade, she still sees potential in the man and firstly instructs him to pick up a car in storage: her grandfather's green 1980 Cadillac Sedan Deville.

Through the wearing neon nights, Sam learns the ins and outs of Esra's brand while reacquainting himself with Los Angeles in the process. From their first meeting in the iconic Sunset Tower Hotel to staking out Clifton's Republic in the downtown theater district, only to be forcefully ejected from the Millennium Biltmore Hotel in Pershing Square, Esra and Sam work through their personal points of contention and ultimately form a bond, recognizing that, by choice or not, both of their lives exist on the fringe, and as such, they are like creatures who, for better or for worse, become increasingly attracted to one another.

As a display of faith, Esra takes Sam shopping in an upscale Melrose men's store where they share that flicker of attraction before she asks him to drive her to a seemingly random elementary school – a place that looks more like a prison than a place of learning. Here, she confides that she has an eleven-year-old son named Richie and that this is his school. She further explains that she is Richie's estranged father, a fact that both shocks and endears Sam even more toward her, being that he is likewise trying to make amends with Mason. He learns that Esra's goal is to augment Richie's current educational trajectory and send him to a school that is more inclined to nurture his creative talents and, therefore, secure his future. Richie is an artist. Unfortunately, those kinds of institutions are too expensive for what she can presently afford, so in an attempt to brighten her spirits, Sam decides to bring Esra to one of his favorite spots in all of L.A. – the Griffith Observatory.

Upon arrival, Sam leads Esra to the building's viewpoint and, almost with a childlike wonder, explains that when he was younger – before his motorcycle club days – this is where he would come whenever he wanted to feel like he could achieve his dreams. He says that he was always able to see the *opportunity* waiting on him out in the distant city. He continues to explain that his formative years were solely influenced by films and television, and that as a teenager, he wanted to be like James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause*, as he saw a stoic gallantry in the tragic figure that he always felt in line with. This made him want to be in the movies. Not so much for the celebrity, but for the heroism that stardom always seemed to bestow on those who carried it. Esra understands this more than he could ever know, seconding his sentiment by explaining that she always wanted to be like Whitney Houston in *The Bodyguard*. She even laughs that her mother would have expected something more in the way of Kevin Costner and, after giving him a kiss on the cheek, she cajoles Sam into taking a selfie with her.

Unfortunately, the heartening moment is interrupted by a highly inebriated Mason who reveals himself, along with his friend Dylan, just to accost them. An angry drunk, Mason verbally abuses Sam, accusing him of being a worthless waste of time. Even worse, Dylan attempts to troll Esra, going so far as to grope her between her legs and roar out his findings with an acrimonious laugh. Embarrassed by the disclosure, Mason begins to fling words like “deadbeat” and “faggot” toward Sam, escalating his aggression in a physical attempt to attack him, just like his stepfather, Greg, had done three months prior. Instead, he is met with a forceful slap and ultimately put down by Sam in front of a gathering crowd before two security guards break the commotion up and order each of them to leave the grounds. As they make their way to the front of the Observatory, a shaken Sam apologizes to Esra, who decides to hail a cab home.

Before leaving, she thanks him for the day and gives him another kiss on the cheek, hoping to instill the man with a vote of confidence.

That night, Sam pours through Mason's letters over a glass of whiskey. Feeling low, he attempts to call Esra and request the night off. Only receiving her voicemail, a knock comes from the door to reveal Esra who, still dressed in casual clothing, seemingly had the same thought in mind. She says that since it had been a heavy day for the both of them, she feels that they could use a little fun. As such, she offers him a capsule of MDMA. At first apprehensive, Sam ultimately relents and Esra takes him out to an old haunt of hers - Tramp Stamp Granny's.

With the MDMA doing its best, Sam finds himself sitting across from Esra at a small, circular table inside of the upscale, yet debauchorous Piano Bar. They chat loudly as a drag queen friend of Esra's hosts the night. With two martinis - and two waters - in front of them, Esra learns about Sam's prison wrap and, after asking how she ostensibly seems to know every employee there, Sam learns that it's where she used to work. After a few more charged pleasantries, including Sam's own fear of irrelevance, Esra excuses herself to audience applause and joins her friend at the piano. She proceeds to sing a ballad rendition of Whitney Houston's "I Wanna Dance With Somebody" and directs each sultry word, each complicated emotion, and every pleading gaze to her date for the night, who consequently, melts in his seat, directly in front of her.

Before Esra can finish her song, though, Sam quickly abandons the table and makes a beeline to the men's restroom where he locks the door and douses his face in cool water from the sink. With his pulse racing, Sam catches his breath and studies his haggard face in the mirror when a knock comes from the door. It's Esra. He lets her in and she quickly re-locks the door behind her. They stare each other down, both knowing exactly where this moment is headed, though they are both afraid to admit it. Then, with all the desire that had been bottling up for decades, Sam rushes Esra and pins her to the wall where they engage in a chaotically needed kiss. And as his hands travel down her body, he suddenly discovers her arousal, which brings all of his own fears suddenly rushing back. Pulling away, he tells her that he's not gay. She tells him that no one ever said he was. Then she takes the upper hand and resumes where they left off. Unable to fight the growing need any longer, Sam surrenders, only uttering staggered breaths as she unbuttons his shirt and follows through with her actions all the way down.

The next morning, Esra leaves Sam's apartment to find George and Roy coming up the stairs. Met with a passive accusation from Roy, she smiles embarrassed and moves past them. Inside, George wakes Sam up from his sleep and provides him with a glass of whiskey to sharpen his senses. Now awake, Sam gets out of bed and puts his clothes on as George explains that he's got his hands into "a thing" which should set him up to make an initial payment of thirty-grand to Sam. And even though he would still be owed an additional seventy thousand to square up, George promises to make good on that as well, because according to him, Sam is family. Meanwhile, Roy peruses through Mason's letters with a chuckle before handing five-hundred dollars over to Sam. The drug baggie is discovered, and George reinforces his requirement for

Sam to lay low, but Sam grabs the bag and tells George that it's none of his business. Still, he agrees to remain low key.

Later that day, Mason is at work at Jimmy's Burgers in North Hollywood. After taking the trash out to the bin, he lights a cigarette and checks his phone, only to be approached by Sam who has come to apologize to him for the day before. Keeping things civil, the two men have an exchange before Mason cuts it short to attend to a black SUV that suddenly pulls up near them. Sam watches as the kid exchanges a baggie filled with some-kind-of-contraband for a wad of cash. Once the SUV leaves, Mason returns to the conversation and asks Sam if he is a "fag". Caught off guard by the question, Sam discloses the truth of the matter in that he really doesn't know what he is, if anything, anymore. Processing the answer, Mason decides to head back into the burger shack, but Sam stops him, bringing attention to the fact that it was the letters that got Sam through the past ten years. Confused, Mason reveals that he had never written Sam anything before. Then he is called back into work, leaving Sam to stand there, dumbfounded.

A few nights later, Sam finds himself back in the driver's seat of the Cadillac under a full moon in Trancas Beach. Thumbnails of fetish pornography embellish his phone's display, but he's too distracted by the fact that it has been close to three hours on Esra's two-hour call. Consumed with concern, he suddenly hears a *crack* and realizes that he has just cut himself on the - now-shattered - phone display from squeezing it so hard. Then, as if almost on cue, it rings. He wipes his cut across his pants and answers to hear Esra's frantic voice on the other end. She forcefully tells him to hurry into the house. Upon the demand, Sam chucks his phone to the passenger seat and exits the car, running to hop over the beach house's side gate just to make his entryway through the back sliding-glass door.

Upstairs, Sam finds a fearful Esra in tears, desperately trying to apply CPR to an older, fit-for-his-age man who lays frozen on the ground. They are both dressed in fetish latex gear and the man's face and genitals have been painted red. Moving into action, Sam pushes Esra out of the way and tries to administer the CPR with a little more force, but to no avail. The John is dead. Moving back, Sam notices a slight, even bruising over the John's neck. He questions Esra, who confesses that she was just doing what was asked. The man pleaded with her to prolong the asphyxiation when he suddenly started to go into a seizure. Arguing that Esra should know better as a professional, he discovers that she is burning up and ultimately decides on finding a way to clean the mess. As she gets dressed, Sam moves into the closet where he fortuitously finds a few pairs of leather dress gloves. He puts them on and goes through the closet's drawers, finding a small handgun in the process. Deciding to leave it in its place, Sam also grabs a duffel bag that he brings back into the room, only to find Esra going through the John's pants' pockets to retrieve her payment. Then she pulls out the man's phone and successively enters a wrong passcode into it multiple times to disable it. Handing it back to Sam who exchanges it with the second pair of gloves from the closet, he orders Esra to take the Cadillac back to his place and wait for him there. She shakenly asks him if he thinks she killed the man. He doesn't.

Once Esra leaves the room, Sam goes to work removing evidence of her presence and stages everything to look like an accident. He stuffs the bed's soiled sheets into the duffel bag before

replacing them with fresh linen from the closet. Then he lowers a pull-up bar from its place high up in the bathroom's door frame. Next, he turns the bathroom sink's hot water tap on as well as pulls the bin liner out from an empty trash bin. Following this, Sam secures a side-chair from the bedroom and places it underneath the pull-up bar and hoists the John up from the floor to sit in it. He then runs a washcloth under the hot water tap and uses it to clean the paint from the John's body and face. Once finished, Sam takes the bin liner and places the John's head securely inside of it. Then he chucks the washcloth into the duffel bag and heads back into the closet where he takes a leather belt as well as the handgun from their individual drawers. Returning to the John, Sam tucks the gun into the small of his back and proceeds to loop the belt around the man's neck, making sure that it clamps tightly around the liner before running it up and around the pull-up bar. Then, in one full motion, Sam uses all his strength to pull on the belt, sending the John's body seizing out of the chair and crashing back down onto it. Unfortunately, Sam loses his grip and falls backwards onto the bathroom floor.

Upon returning to his place a few hours later, duffel bag in hand, Sam finds Esra fully clothed and under the covers. She's sick. He tells her that everything has been arranged, but refuses to elaborate on how. He says that they'll need to head out of L.A. for a spell and let the situation die down. She asks if they could first head back to her place to grab some clothes. Sam refuses. Unable to muster the strength to argue back, Esra follows Sam's instructions and, after grabbing a few more things to tie them over, they leave the apartment and head out into the night.

Early the next morning, the Cadillac finds itself out somewhere on Interstate 10 where, behind a plethora of California fan palms, Sam burns the duffel bag. Next, he drives the two of them to a motel in Bombay Beach, a nuclear wasteland of a township that rests on the barren shores of the Salton Sea. Checking in for an undefined amount of time, the friendly proprietor, Ray, agrees to house the Cadillac in his garage for an extra fee, but warns Sam that life has a way of chasing down those folks who come to the desert, running. He says it isn't the place for marathons and leaves Sam to move the car and process the thought on his own.

Almost a month later, Sam and Esra have altered their appearance. Esra has a shaved head and sports a wardrobe that consists mainly of clothes which look to prefer the bodies of younger men. Sam has cut his own hair short and dyed it jet black. Unfortunately, while as safe as anyone could be, Sam is a little paranoid and Esra is a lot, bored. She has inadvertently started to feel like Sam's prisoner, or as she puts it, Kim Novak in *Vertigo*. But because they are running out of money, Sam makes the decision to call Roy and ask for a favor. Finding his cracked phone in a side table lying next to the John's gun, he powers it on to receive a deluge of SMS messages - one of which comes from Mason. He types a quick reply to his son and dials Roy's number.

Surprised to receive a call from Sam, Roy inquires as to where he has been, a question Sam dodges. In any event, Roy has news for him. It would seem like that money George had promised has come through, and because of that, he agrees to wire Sam a grand to tie him over until he can turn back up to L.A. Finishing the call with Roy, he looks to see if Mason has replied. There are no new messages so Sam powers the phone back off and places it back into the side

table. But now with some money coming in, Sam looks to please the woman he loves and agrees to take her out for some fun. So, that night, they find themselves at the Ski Inn, a local bar where Esra tries to stir the pot by flirting with a few would-be *customers*, going so far as to dance with one of them. But when Sam is approached with an inquiry on how much money it is to sleep with Esra, his possessiveness overtakes him and he almost starts a fight with the two bikers who back down, preferring not to catch an STD in a bar brawl with a *faggot* whose blood is suddenly trickling down his knuckles from a clenched fist.

For better or for worse, this display of masculinity turns Esra on, and still in the mood for a good time, she seductively challenges Sam over the bar's small dance floor before dragging him back to the motel, intent on making chaotic, drunken love. Instead, Sam takes the moment to confess how in love with Esra he truly is, a proclamation which she continually denies. Undeterred, Sam doubles down, knowing that she must feel the same way for him. But intent on hearing these same words back, he goads her and goads her until she has no other choice but to lambaste him, telling him that she doesn't love him at all. She even goes so far as to punch him to get him off her and hammers home that he is neither her hero nor is she, his emancipation.

And, in that moment, Esra decides that she has had enough. She grabs the few things she considers hers as well as the keys to the Cadillac and informs Sam that she is going home without him. Taking a final look at the pitiful man on the floor, she heads out of the door and leaves him in the darkness. Moments later, Sam jerks the side table's drawer open and stares down at his phone. And the gun.

With his head in disarray and his heart broken, Sam chaotically travels down the derelict avenues of Bombay Beach when he stops in his tracks at the discovery of an old movie poster propped up on a chair at the side of the road which reveals the entrance to the Bombay Beach Drive-In, a makeshift art installation that mimics a drive-in cinema. Flashing his eyes back to study the movie poster - 1975's *The Day of the Locust* - a young man named Eric approaches Sam and propositions him then and there. Sam accepts.

Eric takes Sam to a crumbling installation along the Salton Sea's shoreline, where under the blue traces of moonlight, they both take poppers and Eric performs fellatio, trying to get Sam to perform. Unfortunately, the more Eric tries, the more unsuccessful he is, ultimately culminating in an angry waste of time that causes Eric to get up and leave. But Sam doesn't let that happen. Falling further into desolation, Sam aggressively grabs Eric and forces him closer to him until they practically stand face to face. And with tears building in his eyes, Sam tries desperately to pleasure himself as Eric finds a new opportunity to challenge the man. And even though they stand on a desolate shoreline, each looking to get off, there is no sexuality here. There is no eroticism. Only an escalating despair that slowly reveals the gun tucked into the small of Sam's back. Realizing that no matter how hard he tries, this forced desire will never be able to fill his current emptiness, Sam gives up and falls to the ground in a fetal position, crying. Ever the opportunist, though, Eric tries to collect the money he feels is owed to him. Then he notices the gun and draws attention to it. Suddenly, Sam arcs up with the roar of a lion, threatening to kill

the kid if he doesn't leave. Then he collapses back down to the dirt. Begrudgingly, Eric heeds the warning, but leaves, offering his own subtle threat in return.

The next morning, Sam wakes up on the shoreline to the police arresting him for obscene exposure. A few days after that, Sam is called into an interrogation room where Roy waits to escort him back to Los Angeles to remand him into police custody for the murder of Duncan Aldridge - Esra's dead John. Being that Sam had Mr. Aldridge's gun on his person, in addition to traces of his own DNA being found at the scene of the crime, it would look as if Sam was the guilty party. And though Roy knows that the real truth probably lays elsewhere, he also knows that Sam is probably the orchestrator to why things have ended up this way. Nonetheless, he passes some papers over to sign, and that is when Sam realizes, by looking at the handwriting on the documents, that it was Roy who had authored Mason's letters the entire time. All at once angered and stunned, Sam simply pleads to know why. Roy confesses that it was his father's call to use it as a way to inspire Sam through the past ten years. And even though it was quite a twisted thing to do, it was George's way to make Sam look forward to something while keeping tabs on where his head was at. And as misguided as his actions were, George does see Sam like a son. Roy is just surprised that Sam could believe that Mason would accept him so unconditionally. Defeated, and deflated, Sam signs the papers.

The next day, Roy escorts Sam through the desert on the way back to L.A. Stopping at a gas station, a car pulls up to reveal George exiting it just to jump into Roy's car. As they all make their way back up the I10, George reveals that the first instalment of Sam's payment is secured, and given the circumstances, he can do with it as he pleases. Sam confirms that it will still be paid in full, to which the answer is yes. After all, it's the least a cop with his hand in the till can do. But then George divulges that Roy's positioning as a cop was ensured when Sam went to prison the first time. It's something that Sam had played a part in helping. But even more than that, in order to survive over the past fifteen years, George had to make the sacrifice of becoming Roy's informant – an agreement that yielded Roy's quick advancement. Upon learning this news, Sam decides to refrain himself and simply stare out to the passing desert, thoughtfully stating that everything probably *is* back in the places they belong.

Then, over a montage of Sam being processed and matriculated back into prison, Roy handing over Sam's letters from the past ten years to Mason, and Esra receiving the thirty-grand from George and subsequently re-connecting with Richie, we hear the voiceover from a letter written to Sam from Esra. In it, she apologizes for the last night they spent together, letting him know that her words on that night were only spoken with the intention of hurting him, nothing more. She never meant them. Still, her embarrassment and the fear of his disappointment toward her have kept her from visiting him. She thanks him for all the things he had done for her, stating that no one has ever cared about her in the way that he has. She reveals that his absence from her life makes her feel like she's been stuck in her own suspended animation because she feels like she screwed the rest of his life up when he was only trying to help her's along. She then tells him about a fable that she had recently read to Richie. It was about a boy who was out catching locusts. In his neglect, he had inadvertently grabbed for a scorpion who revealed its stinger to the boy and warned him that, should he be grabbed, the boy would lose

him and all the locusts that he had gathered up to that point. Esra then asks Sam what he thinks. She wants to know which one of them is which? She can't seem to figure it out.

Laying in his cell, next to Nathanael West's book, *The Day of the Locust*, Sam finishes the letter, finding a drawing from Richie enclosed within. It is of Richie and Esra holding hands at the Griffith Observatory with the glorious Los Angeles skyline artistically rendered behind them. Written directly above the picture are the words: "Thank you for the *opportunity!* E." Smiling, Sam is interrupted by a guard who informs him that he has a visitor.

Escorted into the visitor's area, Sam scans every portion of the room looking for Esra. Maybe even Richie. But to his surprise, he finds Mason instead. And as Sam takes a seat in front of him, Mason nervously says hello. Just as nervous as his son, Sam says hello back.

Characters:

Samson Pike – Sam is a fall guy. He spent the past 25 years in prison over a murder he did not commit. Upon release, Sam realizes how much of a dinosaur he is in the current world and accepts a driving job with Esra Simone as he tries to re-establish his own purpose and worth in life.

Esra Simone – Esra is a 29-year-old high-class escort. She owns her choices and is quite confident in her boots, knowing that her end game justifies her nightly means. Assigned male at birth, Esra is the estranged father to a 10-year-old son with whom she wants nothing more than to see succeed. But in Sam, Esra may find her first real confidante in a long time.

George Shand – Like Sam, George is also a dinosaur. He was Sam's underworld boss – and surrogate father – and the man who asked Sam to take the fall on murder committed by his son, Roy. The years have not been too kind to George as his once-illustrious dealings have tanked and his existence has evolved into nothing more than mere survival.

Roy Phillips – Roy is George's son and, as such, a little-brother to Sam. To cope with the changing times and ensure his father's legacy in any way he can, Roy has become a police officer, a point of contention for Sam, who took the fall for Roy's own crime years earlier.

Mason Pike – Mason is Sam's son and was Sam's only consistent contact – through letters – while in prison. When his father is released, Mason will have to decide how exactly to let this man assimilate into his life, and whether it's worth it or not for him.