

Ted Tolliver had two passions in life, carpentry and movies, and his ambition was to be a screenwriter. He'd spent most of his youth in the cinema and watched the Academy Awards every year, wondering whether he'd ever get a chance to thank his agent, his dead grandparents and his hairdresser.

He wrote his first screenplay when he was nineteen years old and showed it to a friend of his father who worked at a TV station. 'It shows promise, kid,' said the friend, who wore plaid jackets and spoke like a gumshoe from a '50s TV show. 'Needs more broads though.'

By the age of twenty-five he'd written three more features and one of them was read by a guy who worked in the Paramount mail-room. 'It's a nice idea, kid,' said the teenager. 'But nice ideas don't sell tickets.'

Five years later his parents were dead and he was able to indulge his enthusiasm for carpentry by gutting their house and rebuilding it for himself. It took two years to complete and as a final touch he used some maplewood and 40 mm masonry nails to build a shelf in his living room, but left it empty to fuel his ambition. One day, he swore, that's where his Oscar would sit.

An idea for a movie came to him one night and he started writing it the following morning. He wrote all that day and all the next and on the third day, at lunchtime, he had a script that he knew was special. It was a little rough, that was for sure. It needed work. But kid, he told himself, you've finally done it. He put it in an envelope and sent it off to a big cheese in Hollywood. A year later, the cameras were rolling.

'I have a lot of people to thank,' he said the following March from the stage of the Kodak Theatre, seeing his smile reflected in Jack's shades. 'But I'll make it quick. I want to thank ME for never giving up, and I want to thank YOU for making movies. Every one of you has inspired me.' He held the statuette aloft in one hand and the audience cheered; they liked to think it was down to them that he was a winner.

A week later he returned home and placed his award on the shelf above the couch, a life's ambition realised. Now it was time to put it to use. He sat down and opened one of the envelopes that the studio had sent him, scripts that needed work, novels they wanted him to adapt. There was a lot of money on offer. He started reading but didn't get too far. He never heard the nails give way or the maplewood collapsing under the weight of 8½ pounds of gold-plated britannium and metal base.

At the age of thirty-two, Ted Tolliver lay dead in a pool of blood on his living-room floor, killed by his own Oscar.