

"HOMECOMING"

Adapted from the short story
"Death and Suffrage"

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FADE IN:

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

OVERHEAD VIEW of a dark, hilly, tree-lined road in Northern Virginia, fifteen or twenty minutes outside the nation's capital. A SPEEDING CAR approaches.

SQUEALING BRAKES as the car takes a hairpin curve at 50 MPH, leaving a trail of burnt rubber behind it. But it keeps the road.

INT. CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

A GAUNT, LEGGY BLONDE WOMAN in the passenger seat stubs out a cigarette in the ashtray, shakes out another, lights it. The car is already full of smoke and the MAN AT THE WHEEL is practically gagging.

DAVID

Do you have to -

JANE

Just drive!

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

A SQUASHED RACCOON, bisected by tire treads, lies on the edge of the asphalt several hundred yards away. The tip of a CRUTCH stabs down, plants itself in the steaming innards.

The crutch belongs to a MOONLIT FIGURE who's just shambled out of the woods. He's moving slowly and with extreme difficulty: one leg, obviously shattered, dangles uselessly from his hip. His left arm is missing altogether.

He seems to be wearing some sort of military uniform.

We can't see his face, because it's dark out, and because his back is to us as he makes his way along the gravelly shoulder of the road. DISTANT HEADLIGHTS come into view just as he passes a SIGN that reads:

WASHINGTON, D.C. 19

INT. CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Jane is turned in her seat, staring through the rear windshield, as if scanning the road for possible pursuers.

David squints at the straightaway up ahead . . .

DAVID

There's someone out there.

Jane's head jerks around. She squints too.

EXT. ROAD - THAT MOMENT - NIGHT

As the car speeds toward the man on crutches, HEADLIGHTS catch him full in the face. In the instant before he throws his one good hand up to shield his eyes from the glare, we get a quick glimpse of the burned, puckered skin that covers half of his almost-hairless skull.

INT. CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

Barreling toward the figure on crutches, who is now plainly visible in the opposite lane up ahead.

JANE

It's one of them.

DAVID

I don't think s-

JANE

IT'S ONE OF THEM!!

David's natural inclination is to swerve right, giving the man on crutches a wide berth. But Jane lunges at the wheel and JERKS IT TO THE LEFT -

EXT. ROAD - THAT MOMENT - NIGHT

-- and the car, at full speed, PLOWS DIRECTLY INTO the man on crutches. It's as if he's held together by pins and baling wire: an arm hurtles off in one direction, a leg in another.

The crutch flies upward, end over end ...

INT. CAR - MOVING - NIGHT

... and SMASHES INTO THE WINDSHIELD of the car, leaving a spiderweb of cracks behind it. As David struggles to regain control of the wheel, the car hits the gravel shoulder of the road and SKIDS OFF --

EXT. ROAD - THAT MOMENT - NIGHT

-- slamming into a TREE at the edge of the woods.

EXT. CAR - NIGHT

David is slumped over the wheel, stunned. He comes around slowly, wincing, as the airbags deflate (assuming we can afford airbags). He glances over at Jane -- who's badly rattled, and sporting a cut on her forehead, but otherwise intact.

DAVID
You all right?

JANE
I hit my h--

Before she can finish the sentence she glances at the cracked windshield -- and lets out a piercing SHRIEK.

They have company. The HEAD of the man on crutches seems to have landed in the groove between the hood of the car and the windshield. In fact it's stuck there, practically face-to-face with Jane. She squirms in her seat, SHRIEKS AGAIN, pulls her legs up in front of her.

Then the head OPENS ITS EYES. Stares at her. Seems to recognize her. The mouth opens, as if to say hello.

She begins POUNDING HYSTERICALLY on the dashboard. David turns on the windshield wipers -- dislodging the head, which rolls off the hood and bounces off into the trees.

He grabs her by the arm to let her know that the head is gone, and it's okay to stop screaming.

JANE
Sorry. I, uh ...
(sheepishly)
I think I knew him once. Where
are we?

David opens the door and climbs out.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

As Jane gets out of the passenger side, wiping blood from the cut on her forehead, she sees David leaning against the car, clutching his side in obvious pain.

DAVID
Jesus ... I think I broke a
rib...

JANE

Suck it up. We've got to get out
of here.

Their heads turn at the sight of the DISTANT HEADLIGHTS rounding a bend, approaching on the straightaway. Jane pulls off her heels and scampers, barefoot, to the edge of the road.

JANE

Honk the horn! Maybe they'll
give us a ride.

She stands directly in the path of the oncoming headlights, waving her shoes as if they were semaphore flags. The vehicle slows and stops. It's big -- a truck of some sort.

CLOSEUP -- ON JANE

The headlights are shining right in her face; she holds up one hand to shield her eyes. A truck door opens O.S. All at once her face is full of apprehension...

JANE

David...

Now she turns and runs, in a full-fledged panic.

JANE

David! Jesus! Pop the trunk!

EXT. ROAD - ON TRUCK - THAT MOMENT

It appears to be a canvas-topped army troop transport. And it's carrying a load of passengers, several of whom have already climbed out.

We can't see them well; they're still a good ways off. But there's enough moonlight to make out the occasional missing arm or leg. Some of them can't even walk without the help of their comrades.

They're all wearing raggedy, tattered UNIFORMS.

EXT. ROAD - ON CAR - NIGHT

Jane rips a swath of cloth from her already-short skirt and ties it around her bloody forehead bandanna-style. From the trunk of the car she pulls out a double-barreled shotgun and a box of shells.

Wheezing, David stumbles to her side.

JANE

There's an automatic in the trunk.

DAVID

What's the point, Jane?

JANE

The point is, we are not giving up. And we are definitely not giving up to a bunch of crippled, stinking, maggot-infested, brain-dead zombie dissidents.

(to the truck)

COME AND GET IT! COME AND GET IT, YOU PUSSIES!

She fires a shotgun blast into the air, then reloads.

DAVID

What are we going to do?

JANE

We're going to take their goddam truck right out from under them, that's what. Now grab that gun, you chickenshit.

One of the fellows from the troop transport is tramping slowly but steadily toward them. With a feral gleam in her eye, Jane lowers the shotgun slightly and fires. Both barrels.

The twin blasts knock the legs out from under this "zombie dissident." He hits the road HOWLING IN PAIN - and his weird keening plaint is picked up by his comrades, one by one, until the entire company is CATERWAULING in harmony.

JANE

That's the trick, see ... aim low, take their legs out ... can't kill 'em, but you can slow 'em up ...

(firing again)

GET UP, YOU PANSIES! BRING IT ON!

David smiles ruefully at Jane, who is, in some bizarre way, thoroughly in her element. As she blasts away, he hobbles to the trunk of the car and comes back with a .38.

DAVID
I'm sorry, Jane. I'm truly
sorry.

JANE
Who cares?! Shut up and shoot!

DAVID
It's my fault, you know. The
whole damned mess. It's all my
fault.

The undead troops are still advancing - no more than ten or
fifteen feet away now. Jane can't reload fast enough to
hold them off.

JANE
Holy Mother of Hip-Hop Jesus ...

DAVID
I'm sorry, Jane. I never
should've opened my mouth.

He levels his gun at the back of her head and squeezes the
trigger. SCREEN GOES BLACK.

DAVID (V.O.)
I remember the night the whole
world went to hell. It was the
night I first met Jane.

SUPER TITLE: "Four weeks earlier"

FADE THROUGH TO:

INT. CABLE TV STUDIO - DAY

The set of an interview show on cable news network WEDL. On
the count of three a camera swings in toward grizzled host
MARTY CLARK, who is holding up a book; the cover shows an
angular blonde in a leather mini, arms akimbo, standing
before a bank of TV screens - one of which is turned to
Marty Clark Live!, the very show we happen to be watching.

CLARK
We're back on Marty Clark Live!,
with our guests - constitutional
scholar Jane Cleaver, whose new
book is Subversion: How the
Radical Left Took Over Cable
News - thanks for the plug,
there, Jane ...

ANGLE ON the flirty, overcaffeinated Jane in her leather mini, long legs crossed, one foot swinging metronomically.

JANE

You're very welcome, Marty.

CLARK

And our good friend David Murch, former presidential speechwriter and high-priced campaign consultant. Welcome, David.

David nods politely, as self-contained as Jane is fidgety.

CLARK

With the election three weeks away the President is in full campaign mode. This week, at a rally in Boulder, three protesters were arrested when they took off their coats to reveal antiwar t-shirts.

ON A MONITOR: video footage of Secret Service agents manhandling a trio of tubby, superannuated HIPPIES - two women, one man. Their t-shirts read "NO BLOOD FOR OIL."

CLARK

Now David, we've seen several of these incidents. The protesters say they have a right to free speech. Does the President have a policy of suppressing dissent?

DAVID

Look, Marty, the President has a First Amendment right to take his case to the American people without being shouted down. But to answer your question, there's no "policy." The Secret Service is there to protect the President. They're gonna err on the side of caution.

CLARK

I see Jane is about to jump out of her chair ...

JANE

Marty. Please. If you look at these "protesters" you see men with breasts and women with armpit hair. They are ugly, stupid, clueless, they have nothing to offer but hate for our country, and they know that the only way they could ever get on TV is to defecate, in public, on our President and our troops -

CLARK

Now, Jane -

JANE

-- and you, Marty. You are their collaborator. You put these awful repulsive people on TV, which is all they want to begin with. So like, thanks, Mission Accomplished!

While Jane is sputtering, a pleasant, plump-faced WOMAN appears on a flatscreen behind Clark's desk.

CLARK

We go live now to Altoona, Pennsylvania, where we'll be joined by Janet Hofstadter. Mrs. Hofstadter, welcome. You're what used to be called a Gold Star Mom.

MRS. HOFSTADTER

That's right, Marty.

CLARK

Your son, Cpl. Gordon Hofstadter, was killed in action?

MRS. HOFSTADTER

July eighth of this year.

CLARK

And you were detained by the Secret Service at a Presidential rally this past week -

MRS. HOFSTADTER
That's correct.

CLARK
-- for "heckling" the President.
What exactly did you say to him?

MRS. HOFSTADTER
I stood up and I asked him, "Why
did my son die?"

CLARK
"Why did my son die."

MRS. HOFSTADTER
And he didn't answer, and I
asked him again. And again.
And then I was grabbed by the
arms and taken out.

CLARK
Why did you say that to the
President?

MRS. HOFSTADTER
Because no one else will.
(beat)

We were told there was a threat
to America. But the Weapons of
Mass Destruction weren't there.
The nuclear program wasn't
there. The threat wasn't there.
And here's the President,
surrounded by his supporters and
his yes-men, talking happy talk
about his war; and I have the
right, Mr. Clark. I have the
right to ask him: why did my son
die?

CLARK
David, what do you say to that?

DAVID
First of all, I would say: Mrs.
Hofstadter, I honor you for your
sacrifice. I had an older
brother who gave his life in
Vietnam. And believe me, if I
had one wish, I ...

David inexplicably FREEZES in mid-sentence. His eyes seem to glaze over; it's as if he's not even in the room.

The silence drags on - four, five, six seconds, an eternity in TV time. Jane stares askance at David; even old pro Clark is getting nervous.

DAVID

If I had one wish ... I would
wish for your son to come ...
back ...

David covers his face with one hand, as if stricken by an especially potent migraine. When the hand comes away, TEARS are streaming down his face.

DAVID

... because I know he would tell
us all ... how important this
battle is to the safety and
security of all Americans ...
and how proud he is to have
served his country.

Although David has regained his composure by the end of the speech, the onlookers are uniformly stunned. It's been quite a spectacle.

MRS. HOFSTADTER

Frankly, sir, I don't think you
know my son well enough to --

CLARK

We'll be right back after this
message.

At the break, David is mobbed by crew. Someone shoves a cup of water into his hand. MAKEUP PEOPLE dab at his eyes, reapply pancake to cover the tracks of his tears.

DAVID

I'm fine now. I'm fine.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

A popular D.C. watering hole not far from the SBS studios. A WAITER serves a second round of martinis to Jane and David, who are at a booth in the corner.

JANE

There is no way you're gonna
tell me that wasn't planned.

DAVID

It wasn't planned.

JANE

Come on. I've been hearing about you forever. You're supposed to be the smartest guy in D.C.

DAVID

The scary thing about D.C. is, I probably am. But look: the smartest guy in D.C. fucked up, okay?

(shaking his head)

I just blanked out. On live TV. I never had it happen before.

JANE

But it was great. You were like ... crying. And it was like ... moving. That's the thing. You have this credibility. I mean, you and I are basically saying the same shit, but people treat me like some kind of circus act.

DAVID

Do you believe in what you say?

JANE

Yes! Well ... you know. Come on, it's words. It's a game. You say whatever it takes to win.

DAVID

Maybe that's your problem.

JANE

Okay. So you believe what you say? You believe a soldier would come back and be like, "By the way, thanks for getting me killed"??

DAVID

No, I don't believe that.

(the start of a grin)

Okay, there are a couple of small tricks I can teach you.

Jane rubs her hands together in anticipation.

The waiter glides over with a fresh round of drinks.

DAVID (CONT.)

That waiter keeps winking at you.

JANE

I think I knew him once. You were saying?

DAVID

Okay. Here's the thing. You want the audience to see you thinking. You get a question, you already know what you're gonna say, it's some dumbass talking point. But you think about it. Drag it out. You go, Welllllll, Marty, that's reeeeeeeally innnnnteresting.

JANE

Okay, ask me a question.

DAVID

(imitating Marty Clark)
"Jane. What color panties are you wearing tonight?"

Jane scrunches up her face in thought.

JANE

"Welllllll, Marty ... I'M NOT WEARING ANY PANTIES!"

Since the third martini, Jane has been a little louder than absolutely necessary, and this line draws stares and laughs from the surrounding patrons. Slapping David on the forearm, she cracks up at her own dry wit.

JANE

See? I'm fun. I'm so much fun. And the men in this town, they're such emasculated pussies, they're all afraid of me. Why is that?

DAVID

Maybe they just don't like you.

JANE

No, seriously.

DAVID

Maybe it's the force of your
intellect.

JANE

But what can I can do about
that?

(gripping his forearm)
You know why I like you? I've
known you over an hour, and you
haven't made a single joke about
my name. That's all I hear from
these bozos. "Meat Cleaver" ...
"June Cleaver" ... "Beaver
Cleaver" ...

DAVID

That would be rude. I hardly
know you.

JANE

(leaning in closer)
We can fix that. In a hurry.

DAVID

What do you have in mind?

JANE

Welllllllll, Marty ...

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

TIGHT ON a cellphone, resting on a bedside nightstand. It
RINGS - a custom tone, the first few bars of "Hail to the
Chief."

DAVID (O.S.)

Sorry, honey, I have to take
that.

WIDER: David's handcuffed to a four-poster bed with
clothespins on his nipples. Corset-clad Jane is astride
him, lighting a candle.

JANE

No.

DAVID

It's POTUS. That's my POTUS
tone!

JANE
 (suddenly excited)
 Oh, Jesus. Can I listen?

He nods yes. She flips the phone open and sets it on the pillow beside his head. By craning his neck he can almost carry on a normal conversation.

DAVID
 Murch here.

VOICE ON PHONE
 (FILTER)
 David! Catch you at a bad time?

DAVID
 No, no, not at all.

Jane is leaning in close so that she can eavesdrop on the conversation. At the sound of the reedy drawl on the other end of the line she glowers at David.

JANE
 That's not the President!
 That's Kurt Rand!

DAVID
 (stage-whispering)
 Same thing.
 (into phone)
 Sorry, Kurt, I -- had someone here.

INTERCUT: DAVID AND KURT RAND

RAND, pale, pudgy, bespectacled, is the political fixer universally known as the President's Brain. He's calling from campaign HQ; coffee cups, soda cans, and pizza boxes are scattered everywhere, and the walls are covered with signage that does not mention a candidate's name -- it's all generic slogans: "FOUR MORE YEARS." "STAY THE COURSE." "MISSION ACCOMPLISHED." "RE-ELECT THE PRESIDENT."

KURT
 It's not Jane Cleaver, is it?

DAVID
 Uh, no.

KURT

Well, tell her hi if it is.
Hey, we caught you today on the
Clark show - POTUS was
watching...

DAVID

Yeah, I don't know what happened
there, I just had some kind of
brain fart -

KURT

Naw, listen, he loved it. He
was moved by it.

DAVID

Moved by it?

KURT

Hell yes. That's why I called.
That bit about the wish, and the
soldier coming back - that's
great stuff, man. He wants to
put it in his stump speech.

A bit of a coup. Jane gets very excited - pumps her fists
in the air. David, of course, doesn't have that option.

DAVID

Jesus. Be my guest!

KURT

But here's the thing, see - he
said it to you. You just went
on the Clark show and repeated
it. Okay?

DAVID

Well, of course, Kurt. Everyone
knows what a silver-tongued de-

He lets out a yowl of pain. Jane has lit the candle and is
dripping hot wax on his naked belly.

KURT

Something wrong?

DAVID

No, everything's fine.

KURT
Well, good work. You tell Janie
bye-bye for me.

JANE
BYE, KURT.

KURT
Bye, Janie!

End of call. Jane snaps the phone shut and replaces it on the nightstand. She hovers over David with a truly demented gleam in her eye.

JANE
Oh, I am so gonna make you
scream.

DAVID (V.O.)
Henry Kissinger said power is
the ultimate aphrodisiac. In
D.C., even second-hand power has
its compensations...

INT. DAVID'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Late night: David sprawled on the sofa, Jane (now a regular fixture) curled up beside him in t-shirt that reads "NO SEX FOR OIL." She's chain-smoking and eating popcorn as they watch (offscreen) news footage of POTUS addressing a crowd.

JANE
God, he's good. They just adore
him. What is it? What has he
got?

DAVID
It's a gift. He's not stupid,
but he has a way of making
stupid people feel like they're
just as smart as he is. They
love that.

JANE
Shhh! I think this is it!

She grabs the remote and cranks up the volume. HOLD ON THE TWO OF THEM as POTUS quotes David onscreen:

POTUS (O.S., FILTER)
 I want you to know. I suffer.
 I suffer when I see those
 numbers every day. I see 'em
 before you do. And I tell my
 staff. I tell 'em all the time.
 If I could have one wish, one
 big wish, I would bring those
 brave young Americans back.
 Because - if they could come
 back - I think I know what they
 would say ...

David stares at POTUS with a free-floating anxiety he
 couldn't explain if you asked him to. Jane stares at David
 with something that, had it originated in a human heart,
 might be called love.

She points the TiVo remote at the TV screen and backs up the
 President's borrowed speech so they can watch it again.

DAVID (V.O.)
 He was wrong about that. Dead
 wrong. The first incident took
 place less than 48 hours
 later...

INT. HANGAR - DOVER AFB - NIGHT

Six spit-and-polish Marine pallbearers carry a FLAG-DRAPED
 COFFIN into a hangar and place it on a temporary bier.

Several similar flag-draped coffins are already inside,
 arranged in orderly rows.

DAVID (V.O.)
 ... when the regular night
 flight arrived at Dover Air
 Force Base, carrying a brand-new
 batch of caskets from the war.

Having offloaded the last of the caskets, the PALLBEARERS
 stand at attention, salute their fallen comrades, then march
 out of the hangar in formation. A Marine GUARD holsters his
 walkie-talkie and gestures to his buddy, MARINE GUARD II.

MARINE GUARD
 We got another civilian taking
 pictures. Last seen southwest
 corner by the storm fence.

MARINE GUARD II
Newspaper guys again?

MARINE GUARD I
Don't know. Main thing is,
secure the camera.

Guard II exits behind the pallbearers. Guard I ambles to the open hangar door, scans the perimeter.

After a moment, his walkie-talkie SQUAWKS.

MARINE GUARD I
Copy.

MARINE GUARD II
I seen a figure. Running around
back of the hangar.

A sudden CLANGING noise from the opposite side of the hangar - perhaps a door slamming. Marine Guard I moves in warily to investigate.

It's an open door, all right - flapping in the wind. Guard I unholsters his sidearm and looks for traces of an intruder as he secures the door.

He turns suddenly at the sound of a muffled THUNK.

Three seconds pass. Another THUNK. And another.

They seem to be coming from the general direction of the flag-draped coffins. Guard I advances carefully ...

MARINE GUARD I
SIR, YOU ARE TRESPASSING ON A
UNITED STATES MILITARY
INSTALLATION. I SUGGEST YOU
MAKE YOURSELF KNOWN.

THUNK. He catches motion out of the corner of his eye. His head pivots. One of the caskets appears to have been moved - the others are in perfect rows, perfectly squared, but this one is resting at an odd angle on its bier.

MARINE GUARD I
SIR? THERE ARE NO CAMERAS
ALLOWED HERE. IT IS AGAINST THE
POLICY OF THE U.S. MILITARY TO
ALLOW --

Behind him: THUNK. THUNK. The sound of fists pounding against metal. The guard turns suddenly. Then:

CRASH.

His eyes bug out. It appears that the metal lid of a coffin has been forced open ... from inside. The occupant is sitting upright under the flag, which is draped around him like a teepee on a tentpole.

Guard I is losing it now. Whoever's inside the casket is starting to climb out. Transfixed by the spectacle, training his gun on the moving flag, he backs into a second casket -

-- and WHANG! The occupant of that casket forces the lid open as well, almost smacking Guard I in the face!

He backs into a corner of the hangar, swinging his gun wildly back and forth between the two caskets.

Someone - something - comes shambling toward him, freed of its coffin, but still wrapped in Old Glory, like a child in a sheet at Halloween.

MARINE GUARD I

STOP. STOP THERE. Look. I
know you're alive ... we'll send
for a medic ... just ... STOP.

The flag falls away just enough to reveal the gruesomely disfigured face of a dead soldier. The top of his skull is missing. Alive? Not bloody likely.

And now a SECOND flag-draped creature is marching toward him.

In a state of hysteria, he opens fire.

The dead soldiers are still advancing on Guard I, who's in a state of hysteria, firing wildly. The soldiers SHRIEK IN PAIN with each hit - the unearthly, high-pitched KEENING SOUND we heard in the opening - but whatever pain they may be experiencing is not enough to stop them.

The bullets tear straight through their desiccated bodies, leaving holes that drain not blood, but a thick, viscous ichor. Finally the dead soldiers CONVERGE on Guard I - flattening him against the wall as one of them wraps a bony claw around his gun hand -

-- and this is the tableau that greets Guard II as he bursts in through the door.

MARINE GUARD II
Jesus Fuck. FREEZE!

The dead soldiers turn in unison, stare at him. He levels his gun at them and empties the clip.

Unfortunately, since corpses don't offer much resistance, the bullets wind up perforating Guard I, who is right behind them. The dead men step aside and Guard I, bleeding from seven wounds, pitches forward. He's dead before he hits the hangar floor.

Guard II, horrified, drops to his knees. He tries to put a fresh clip into his automatic, but his hands are shaking too badly. He just can't. He sits there watching helplessly as one of the creatures shuffles toward him.

Guard II gasps in fear as the thing lays a hand on his head.

It opens its mouth and a strange rasping CROAK comes out - not really words at first; the vocal cords are not in working order. But eventually the creature manages to say something that sounds almost like -

DEAD SOLDIER
At ease, soldier.

Then it turns and walks away, leaving Guard II to sob and gibber on the floor.

MORE THUMPING from other coffins. The two reanimated soldiers remove a flag from atop a coffin and, working in tandem, fold it neatly, according to regulations. Then they pop the lid of the casket open, freeing a THIRD DEAD SOLDIER inside.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CEMETERY - ESTABLISHING - LATE AFTERNOON

David's car drives through ornamental gates, entering a hillside cemetery in a D.C. suburb.

INT. CAR (MOVING) - THAT MOMENT - LATE AFTERNOON

David at the wheel, with his MOM -- seventies, slightly deaf, slightly fussy -- riding shotgun. There's a box of chocolates and a vase of flowers in the back seat.

MOM

Peggy Pepper's daughter came and took us out to the Wounded Steer. Have you tried that buffet? I love those croutons they have ...

David's cell phone rings.

DAVID

Sorry mom, gotta take this ...
(into phone)

Murch ... what? Yeah, sure, I'm just dying to do his show again after he called me a dick on the air. Hey, let me call you back, I'm with my mom.

Mom's monologue has continued throughout the above.

MOM

... but his hip never really healed up from the truck accident. Slow down! You drive so darned fast.

DAVID

Sorry, mom.

David slows to a more leisurely pace, which is not at all natural for him. His cell rings again.

DAVID

Murch ... He what?? Well, fire his ass. You don't need me to tell you that. Listen, I'm with my mom, can I call you back?

EXT. CEMETERY - LATE AFTERNOON

David pulls over to the shoulder of the gravel road just above a spreading chestnut tree. He fetches his mom's aluminum walker from the trunk, then opens her door and helps her out.

MOM

Patty Ranahan's boy came by to see her last night ...

She keeps talking as David reaches into the back seat for the flowers and the chocolate.

MOM

He was standing outside the window. In the moonlight, she said. And she went out on the patio. He just wanted to tell her goodbye.

David hasn't been listening very closely, and it's only now that the penny drops:

DAVID

Patty Ranahan.

(pause)

Isn't she the one ... wasn't her son killed in the war?

MOM

Yes, that's him. -- I thought it was odd when she told me.

DAVID

(snorting)

Well, what? Is she off her meds?

MOM

I don't know, honey. Maybe I just got the details wrong.

Concerned, David helps his mom negotiate a hillside path that leads to a gravesite with a MILITARY HEADSTONE:

LANCE CPL. PHILIP W. MURCH
May 6, 1951 - Oct. 22, 1971
Beloved Son and Brother

Mom places the flowers in a small urn at the head of the grave and adjusts them to her liking. Then she sets a single chocolate truffle at the base of the urn.

MOM

He liked chocolates.

DAVID

You're making some little squirrel very happy.

David helps Mom to her feet. He gives her a truffle from the box and has one himself. As the two of them stare wistfully at the grave his cell phone rings again. Twice.

MOM

Oh, go on. You can answer it.

DAVID

No. It's just my ... it's a woman I've been seeing. On and off.

MOM

Oh. Have I heard about this one?

DAVID

Actually, it's Jane Cleaver.

MOM

From TV?? Oh, you be careful, hon. She's what we used to call a skank.

They walk up a gently sloping hill to the car, which is parked on a gravel access road that snakes through the cemetery. As David is helping his mom into the front seat, something peculiar catches his eye.

He squints off into the distance. Downhill, maybe a hundred yards away, a FIGURE is hunched over a grave, flinging dirt clods into the air. It's almost sunset and the light is bad, but he's plainly not an employee of the cemetery. For one thing, he doesn't have a shovel.

DAVID

Hey, mom? Wait here a minute.

A drunk? A fraternity prankster? David starts down the hillside to get a closer look.

DAVID

Hey! Buddy! What the hell are you doing?

The hunched figure turns to stare at David. There's not much skin covering his skull. It's a UNIFORMED CORPSE.

And all at once, the corpse is up on its feet, coming right at David. For an agonizingly long moment David finds himself rooted to the ground. Finally he turns ...

... just in time to see a SECOND FIGURE coming over the crest of the hill, working its way down toward the car. Toward David's mom. He sprints up the hill shouting:

DAVID

MOM!! LOCK THE DOORS!!

Uniformed Corpse #2 has a game leg. Just as Mom is leaning over to lock the driver's side door, the creature loses its balance. He hops downhill, picks up speed, and SPLAYS HIMSELF across the hood of David's car.

As David slides in on the driver's side, Mom lets out a nice, full-throated SCREAM. The thing on the windshield matches it with one of the plaintive, unearthly WAILS we've heard before. David gets the engine running with Corpse #2 still clinging to the hood.

He hits the gas; Corpse #2 slides off onto the gravel. But now Corpse #1 has arrived to block the road; and as David slows, trying to weave around him --

-- Corpse #2 sticks his arm through the partially-open window and GRABS DAVID around the throat!

Gasping, David raises the electric window until the corpse's arm is pinned between the door frame and the glass. He pulls the creature's hand away from his throat and, by leaning over as far as he can to the right, manages to stay out of its grasp as he drives. He floors the pedal again.

As they speed toward the cemetery gates, the hand continues to open and close, groping at David. Mom points out the window and SCREAMS AGAIN ...

... because they seem to have left Corpse #2 behind some time ago. Now there's just a SEVERED ARM dangling from the window -- detached from its owner, but still, apparently, alive!

EXT. CEMETERY GATES - ON CAR - CONTINUOUS

David lowers the window just enough for the detached arm to fall out onto the road. The two Uniformed Corpses come shambling into view just as David's taillights vanish through the cemetery gates.

INT. CAR (MOVING) - SUNDOWN

Mom uncovers her ears, opens her eyes, and looks to David for an explanation - more confused than frightened.

MOM

What happened? Those men - they
looked like they were -

DAVID
 Look, mom, I don't know wha-
 (catching himself)
 - I don't know who they were,
 but we're safe now. So just
 relax.

As he massages his bruised throat, his cell phone rings -
 "Hail to the Chief", the POTUS tone. David and Mom both jump
 an inch out of their seats.

DAVID
 (froggy-voiced)
 Murch.

KURT RAND (O.S.,
 FILTER)
 David, we got us a little
 situation developing here. If I
 tell you what it is, you gon'
 think I'm crazy.

DAVID
 Try me.

CUT TO:

INT. UNDERGROUND CORRIDOR - DAY

A windowless hallway in a secure subterranean facility not
 far from Washington. Kurt and David ride a golf cart past
 MILITARY GUARDS who are standing watch beside each door.

DAVID
 All vets?

KURT
 Veterans of the current
 engagement, to be precise. You
 know that little speech of yours
 about the soldier coming back?

DAVID
 Yeah...

KURT
 That one is no longer in heavy
 rotation.

The golf cart stops. Kurt shows his ID to a guard - who
 unlocks a panel on the wall, revealing a retinal scanner.

INT. LAB - DAY

A hydraulic door hisses open. David's jaw drops as Kurt ushers him inside.

KURT

David, I'd like you to meet PFC
Bobby Earl Beeler.

(turning)

Well say hi, peckerwood.

WHAT DAVID SEES: a legless soldier strapped to an upright gurney. There's a crater where his left eye was. His torso is full of bulletholes, incisions, ragged stab wounds. His rotting flesh is festooned with electrodes and wires trailing off to vast banks of telemetric equipment.

Yet the poor bastard is plainly alive, in his own way, staring at Kurt and David with his one working eye.

KURT

Oh, sorry; you can't say hi, can you? No vocal cords. Could wave, though, if you had any manners.

(to David)

Private Beeler here died on the operating table. After which he kicked up a hell of a fuss.

DAVID

How many of these ... cases ... are there?

KURT

'Bout two dozen that we know of. Word's getting around, but the papers are afraid to touch it 'cause it's so damn lurid.

DAVID

They're on the streets, Kurt. There's no hushing this one up.

KURT

I figure we have a day or two. After that we'll need a good solid lie.

DAVID

But what's happening? How can a dead soldier get up and --

KURT

Don't know, buddy-roe. That's why we got this lab. Thing is, you can't kill 'em, and God knows we've tried ...

Kurt picks a sidearm off a lab table and SHOOTs the living corpse twice in the chest at point-blank range. The creature WRITHES in obvious agony.

KURT

Here. You wanna try it?

DAVID

No thanks.

KURT

Shoot 'em, they keep coming. Cut 'em up, the pieces keep coming. We amputated his leg, and you know what it did? Damn thing kicked a doctor square in the ass!

Gasping and wheezing, the creature clutches at the fresh wounds in its chest. It stares balefully at David.

KURT

Not to be premature, but I'm thinking supernatural.

DAVID

He feels it, Kurt. He feels pain.

KURT

Hell, he volunteered.

Bobby Earl SNARLS at Kurt. Kurt snarls back. Then he throws a tarp over the gurney and the patient. He picks up a can of air freshener and fires off a few random spritzes.

KURT

Something to think about, huh?
 Soldier who can't be killed ...
 takes a lickin' and keeps on
 tickin' ...

(chuckling)

I mean, shoot, our recruitment
 numbers are in the sewer. If we
 could keep the same dead G.I.'s
 out on the battlefield --
 forever -- that's like the
 answer to a prayer.

DAVID

Kurt? Why do you think they
 came back? - What do you
 suppose they want?

Kurt chuckles. Until now he hasn't thought to wonder about
 it. In fact he's just as happy not knowing.

DAVID (V.O.)

A day later, when the story
 broke wide, we found out what
 they wanted. And
 coincidentally, we found out how
 to kill 'em.

INT. MUNICIPAL BUILDING - DAY

A number San Franciscans on their lunch hour are lined up
 under a sign that reads:

EARLY VOTING HERE

1. Check in with Registrar (ID REQUIRED)
2. Read Printed Instructions
3. Cast Ballot Here ---->

Another line is waiting at the Registrar's Desk, which is
 laid out like a series of tellers' windows at a bank. A
 CITY OFFICIAL directs traffic to and from VOTING BOOTHS in
 b.g.

Everything is proceeding in an orderly fashion until:

HEADS TURN at the sound of a SHRIEK. There appears to be
 some kind of commotion in the building.

A HULKING DEAD MARINE stumbles down the broad central
 stairway into the basement voting area, with a SECURITY
 GUARD clinging to him like a barnacle, trying and failing to
 hold him back.

In no time flat, early voters are SCREAMING and SCATTERING.

The Security Guard draws his gun. The Dead Marine claps a hand under his jaw, lifts him off his feet, and HURLS HIM bodily out of the room.

By now, the place has just about emptied out. The only people remaining are a pair of REGISTRARS behind the desk - an elderly MAN and a young WOMAN, not much past twenty.

The elderly fellow gallantly interposes himself between Dead Marine and young woman. But the young woman, staring into the Dead Marine's glassy, vacant eyes, lets out a GASP OF RECOGNITION:

YOUNG WOMAN REGISTRAR

Robert ... ? Robert Buntin??

Slowly, with some effort, the Dead Marine cracks a smile.

The young woman steps out from behind her colleague.

YOUNG WOMAN REGISTRAR

Why are you here? What do you want, Robert?

He points at the sign on the wall: "EARLY VOTING HERE."

YOUNG WOMAN REGISTRAR

You want to vote. Do you have your ID?

The Dead Marine rips the dogtags from around his neck and drops them on the desk. The young woman gathers up a packet of materials and a ballot and passes them over to the late Robert Buntin.

His rancid aroma is almost enough to make her gag, but she remains polite and professional throughout.

YOUNG WOMAN REGISTRAR

Do you need instructions? You know how to use the punchcard? Then you can go right over there. When you finish, put your ballot in the envelope, seal it, then drop the envelope right there in that box.

(beat)

It's ... good to see you, Robert.

With a nod of gratitude, Robert turns and stumbles toward

the voting booth. The elderly registrar, who has been shaking and sweating uncontrollably throughout the above exchange, hightails it out of the room --

-- passing, on his way out, the SECURITY GUARD, who has returned with an ARMED COP for backup. The Guard shouts at the Young Woman Registrar:

SECURITY GUARD
Where is he?!

YOUNG WOMAN REGISTRAR
Over there. He's voting.

SECURITY GUARD
He's what?!?

On cue, Dead Robert exits the voting booth and drops his ballot in a box. He lurches across the floor toward the panicky trio in the doorway. The cop draws his sidearm...

... but before he can shoot, Dead Robert collapses to the floor like a marionette whose strings have been cut. The guard kneels, lifts Robert's arm, lets it fall limply at his side. Whatever spark animated him is plainly gone.

SECURITY GUARD
He's dead. Really dead, I mean.

The Young Woman Registrar kneels to touch Dead Robert's face.

In death he wears a great big smile of satisfaction.

YOUNG WOMAN REGISTRAR
Look at his face. He died happy.

CLOSEUP - REV. LUTHER POOLE

A jowly TV evangelist who spends one day a week preaching and six days raising funds for his lobbying group, Traditional Family Values, Inc. He addresses the camera:

REV. POOLE
A miracle, Marty, nothing less than a miracle. The hand of God reaching down to touch our nation, our President, our brave warriors and their grieving families ... He is the resurrection and the life.
Amen!

WIDER - CABLE TV STUDIO

We're on the set of the Marty Clark show. Poole, who represents the slobbering religious right, is balanced by Jane Cleaver, from the photogenic secular right.

CLARK

In addition to the San Francisco incident, we now have confirmed reports of resurrected soldiers in Boston, in Detroit, in the Florida panhandle ... and several cases here in D.C. Jane?

JANE

Well, Marty, far be it from me to offend members of a loser religion, but if I'm an Islamofascist right now, I have to take this as an omen. I mean, talk about Our God Is Bigger Than Your God ...

CLARK

So you take all this as a stamp of Heavenly Approval?

JANE

I'm sure our atheist liberal friends are looking for a different way to spin it. But if you remember what our President said a couple of weeks ago -- how he wished that our fallen soldiers could come back and tell us --

INT. CABLE STUDIO - WINGS

Not far off, watching Jane's performance on a playback monitor, are David, Kurt, and a six-foot-tall Texan woman from POTUS's inner circle, KATHY HOBART.

JANE (ON MONITOR)

-- how they felt about the sacrifice they made in this great cause -- that's exactly what we're seeing now. Not even death will stop the march of freedom.

David looks vaguely nauseous, but Kurt and Kathy are beaming.

Kathy pokes David on the shoulder --

KATHY

That's a Murch line if I ever heard one.

INT. CABLE STUDIO - ON CLARK AND JANE

CLARK

Which raises another point. The Marine in San Francisco, the late Sgt. Robert Buntin, went to an early voting center and apparently cast a ballot for president. Now Jane ... is that legal?

Jane screws up her face. Long pause.

JANE

Welllll, Marty ... the laws vary by state. There are two questions here: one, are these soldiers legally dead? Is undead the same as dead? And two ... this man is a hero, who died fighting for this country. Who's gonna tell him he doesn't have the right to vote??

INT. CABLE STUDIO - WINGS - ON DAVID, KURT & KATHY

Practically bursting with glee, Kurt high-fives Kathy.

KATHY

(to David)

You have transformed that gal. She's so damn ... credible.

DAVID

I just gave her a couple of talking points.

KURT

What do you say, Kathy? Think we could put that gal in office?

David's head jerks around suddenly. He finds the notion too bizarre and horrifying even to contemplate.

KURT (CONT.)
 Something small at first ...
 maybe the Senate ...

KATHY
 Oh, Gawd, can you see her in a
 debate? With this guy feeding
 her lines?

KURT
 And those legs of hers? In a
 little leather mini?

KATHY
 (smacking him)
 Yeah, like you care.

Their attention returns to the monitor, where Jane is about
 to deploy the punchline to her entire schtick:

JANE (ON MONITOR)
 If you want to talk about
 precedent, Marty, in Chicago,
 dead people have been voting
 since time began.

This gets a huge yock from Clark, the Reverend, and the
 entire CAMERA CREW -- not to mention Kurt and Kathy. David
 is the only one not laughing.

KATHY
 I do believe we've created a
 monster.

KURT
 Smile, bad boy. You done good.

DAVID
 We don't know what we're messing
 with here, Kurt. This could
 jump right up and bite us on the
 ass.

DAVID (V.O.)
 Well, it jumped, and it bit.
 The dead wanted to vote, all
 right. They just didn't want to
 vote for us.

INT. DAVID'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jane on the sofa with chopsticks, eating Chinese food from a to-go container. The TV, as always, is on in B.G.

JANE

I saw one of those things today...I was at Caffeine City and I looked out the window and God! There it was...I mean, I always liked guys in uniform, but only if they had, like, skin...

(taking a bite)

I think he knew me.

David is reading the Capitol Street Register and eating from him own individual to-go container when his cell phone rings -

- the POTUS tone. He answers, and his eyes widen --

DAVID

WHAT?

He snaps his phone shut, dives for the remote and starts flipping through channels.

JANE

HEY! My segment's on right after the --

DAVID

Not now! -- We got a talker.

He finds the channel he wants and turns up the volume.

NEWSCASTER (ONSCREEN)

-- first-ever video footage, from a campaign rally in Pennsylvania, where a Q & A session with Senator Shelly was interrupted by a Deceased Veteran.

IN CLOSEUP: SGT. THEODORE ARBUCKLE, croaking into a microphone. He's more presentable than most undead vets; he has a neat little bullet hole in the middle of his forehead.

SGT. ARBUCKLE
(ONSCREEN)

Have you been to war, sir ... ?
Have you seen men killed ... ?

CUT TO SEN. LAWRENCE SHELLY, standing behind his podium, swallowing hard. He's never been quizzed by a corpse.

SEN. SHELLY (ONSCREEN)

No. No, I ...

SGT. ARBUCKLE
(ONSCREEN)

I've seen men killed ... for a
lie. Women, children killed ...
for a lie. I've seen my friends
killed ... for a lie.

(beat)

I was killed for a lie.

SEN. SHELLY (ONSCREEN)

What is it you want, Sergeant?

SGT. ARBUCKLE
(ONSCREEN)

We want one thing. We want to
vote. And we will vote for
anyone ... who ends this evil
war.

For a moment, David and Jane stare at the tube with identical slackjawed expressions as offscreen spectators APPLAUD. Their heads turn in unison. They stare apprehensively at one another.

JANE

Bastard!!

CUT TO:

CLOSEUP - REV. LUTHER POOLE

At the cable studio, in his usual seat across from Marty Clark, wattles jiggling with evangelical fervor.

REV. POOLE

Marty, it's as if the bowels of hell opened up and disgorged these demons in our midst, this Satanic devilspawn walking among us ... the end is at hand, and we had best beg God's forgiveness for the sin and the immorality that brought this plague upon our once-great nation.

INT. CABLE STUDIO - TIGHT ON MONITOR

SHAKY HANDHELD FOOTAGE of six or eight SOLDIERS in full combat gear trying to force an uncooperative UNDEAD G.I. into an armored vehicle.

CLARK (V.O.)

We're looking at, I believe, Baltimore here, and as you know the government today declared zombie soldiers a public health threat pending further tests. How about it, Jane? Do these deceased veterans have rights, and are they being violated?

INT. CABLE STUDIO - ON CLARK AND JANE

JANE

The fact is, Marty, they've studied these creatures, and they have no higher brain function. Their intelligence level is basically that of a liberal.

CLARK

Do you let 'em vote?

JANE

As I've always said: you stand by the law. The law says deceased voters are supposed to be routinely purged from the voting rolls.

CLARK

But just last week you said --

JANE

On top of which, Marty, these
... things ... they're
turncoats. They've betrayed
their country and their
government and their fellow
soldiers, and they're giving aid
and comfort to the enemy.

(beat)

Now as I said, they're brain-
dead, maybe they're not
responsible. Maybe they won't
go to hell. I don't know.

CLARK

So what's the solution?

JANE

Monsters, traitors, there's one
solution for both. Mobs ...
torches ... pitchforks.

DAVID (V.O.)

The face of this war had always
been ugly. We'd always tried to
hide it from the public...but
then they were among us, these
dead young men, these "monsters"
-- demanding only that we look
at that face, and acknowledge
what we had done.

EXT. SMALL TOWN STREET - NIGHT

A ZOMBIE SOLDIER stumbles down the street in a TORRENTIAL
DOWNPOUR. The OWNER of a small mom-&-pop lunch counter,
sweeping out the entry to his store, watches him pass.

MR. BAKER

Son ... ? Son?

The rain-soaked zombie stops in his tracks and gapes at Mr.
Baker. He's not used to being addressed by the living.

BAKER (CONT.)

You ought not to be out in that
rain.

INT. LUNCHEONETTE - A MINUTE LATER - NIGHT

The zombie soldier sits at a side table next to a heat vent. BAKER drapes a blanket around his shoulders as his mildly-terrified WIFE looks on from behind the counter.

BAKER

You'll be warm here for a bit.
Do you want something to eat?
We have some coffee if you -

The zombie soldier laboriously shakes his head no.

BAKER (CONT.)

We know what you've, uh ... we
just want you to know that
someone does appreciate you. We
have a boy ... our Jim, he's
over there too.

Before he knows it, Baker is crying.

BAKER

We don't complain. We know that
some are called to duty. But
every night we pray that he'll
come back to us... alive ... and
--

A small RAT TERRIER comes out from behind the counter and YIPS at the dead soldier. The soldier extends a hand for the dog to sniff, then scratches it behind the ear.

BAKER

That's Beulah. That's his dog.

A BELL TINKLES. Two CUSTOMERS wander in from the rain. They take one look at the dead soldier, let out a yelp, and BOLT.

The soldier, embarrassed, starts to get to his feet. But Mr. Baker pats him on the shoulder.

BAKER (CONT.)

No. No, it's all right. You
stay here as long as you want
...

(beat)

What is your name, son?

The zombie soldier reaches into his shirt and holds up his dog tags for Mr. Baker to inspect.

BAKER (CONT.)

Michael.

Mrs. Baker marches out from behind the counter and extends a hand to dead Michael.

MRS. BAKER

Michael, I'm Irene. Irene
Baker.

The hand that Michael offers is gruesome - the flesh grayish and starting to flake off. But Mrs. Baker is made of sturdy stuff. She takes his hand and clasps it between her own.

MRS. BAKER

Are you from around here,
Michael?

INT. CAMPAIGN HEADQUARTERS - NIGHT

It's been a long night, and although David and Kathy are ready to pass out, Kurt is a bundle of demonic energy:

KURT

Goddammit, why don't they do something? Eat a brain, or bite somebody's throat out, or something, goddammit. Least we'd have an excuse to round 'em up.

KATHY

We are rounding them up.

KURT

Every time you grab one, another one pops up. We don't have the manpower for this! The whole damn National Guard's overseas! Meanwhile ...

Kurt grabs the morning paper off his desk and waves it in David's face. The headline reads: "POLL: PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR WAR AT NEW LOW."

KURT

Five days to election, and our numbers are off a cliff like Wile E. Damn Coyote. You know why? 'Cause we got these undead creeps at every damn mall and bus stop looking all shot up and pitiful.

KATHY

They do make an impression.

DAVID

What if we just ignored 'em?

KURT

Say what?

DAVID

Just treat 'em like regular
vets. Welcome Home, our Heroic
Sons. Let 'em do what they want
to. Let 'em sit around. Let
'em vote.

KURT

What are you now, the zombie-
rights advocate?

DAVID

Why not? How many are there?

KATHY

What is it, a couple hundred
now? They'll max out soon.

KURT

Not necessarily. We got quite a
few dead ones we're keeping off
the books.

DAVID

Even so: a few hundred votes are
not gonna swing a national
election.

KATHY/KURT

(in unison)

Florida!!

DAVID

Point withdrawn.

KURT

It's not just their damn votes.
It's all the live people they're
getting to!

(beat)

Tell me something. The military
vote is ours. Always. How come
we don't have a single dead
soldier on our side?

A moment of silence from David and Kathy. Then:

DAVID

If they died for a cause they believe in ... they're at peace. They've got no reason to come back.

Kurt chews on this for a moment, decides it must be true.

KURT

How'd you know that?

DAVID

'Cause I started it all, remember? If I had one wish?

KURT

I wish you had that wish back.

(beat)

You know, if that's true... the majority of dead soldiers support the war. They haven't come back.

KATHY

Tough sell, Kurt. "Look at all the soldiers who support our President by staying dead."

KURT

Then GIVE ME AN IDEA. The three of us sold a war, dammit! We sold a war based on nothing but horseshit and elbow grease! We are the best in the goddam GAME!

David finally - uncharacteristically - blows his top.

DAVID

IT'S NOT A GAME, Kurt! Why do you think this is happening? Because WE sold a war based on nothing but horseshit and elbow grease. And those poor motherfuckers DIED.

KURT

Excuse me. There is no defeatist rhetoric in this room. - Hey! Where are you going?

DAVID

I'm gonna get drunk within an inch of my life. Then I'm gonna sleep eight hours straight ... while you go out and find a soldier who was proud to give his life for horseshit and elbow grease.

David has grabbed his coat and is frantically shoving papers into his briefcase. His hand is already on the doorknob when Kurt says:

KURT

Hold it.

(beat)

You know how to piss me off, but you are a goddamned genius.

INT. ZOMBIE INTERNMENT CAMP - DAY

A ten-foot-high chain-link fence, with razor wire at the top.

Behind it, raggedy UNDEAD SOLDIERS shuffling listlessly about (mostly with backs to the camera).

INT. JEEP - THAT MOMENT - DAY

Inside it: the unholy trinity of David, Kurt and Kathy.

KATHY

Which one's him?

KURT

They'll find him. We keep records.

(to David)

Cheer up, Weepy. You're finally gonna get your wish.

DAVID

This blows, Kurt.

KURT

See, I blame Mrs. Janet Hofstadter for all this. Going on TV, mouthing off, making you cry like that ... well, that's her boy right there.

A gate opens, and a half-dozen LIVE SOLDIERS lead a DEAD ONE through it - on what looks like an improvised leash. Poking and prodding him with night sticks.

KURT
Corporal Gordon Hofstadter. Now
how's that for symbolic value?

INT. LAB - DAY

POV SHOT: David, Kurt, Kathy, all wearing unnatural grins.

KURT
How'd you like to be on the
Marty Clark show?

REVERSE ANGLE: the late Cpl. GORDON HOFSTADTER cocks a single eyebrow in response. We're in the same facility where Kurt earlier introduced David to "Peckerwood." TWO ARMED SENTRIES stand guard by the door.

KATHY
Can you talk, Corporal?

Dead Gordon nods yes.

KATHY
Then may I ask, why don't you?

GORDON
Hurts.

KATHY
We do have a prepared statement.
If it's more convenient, we
could have someone read it for
you on the show. And you could
simply nod your head yes.
(beat)
Would you like to read it?

She holds out a one-page document. Dead Gordon reaches into his shirt pocket for a pair of glasses with the left lens shot out. We notice he has only THREE FINGERS on his left hand -- thumb, pinky, index finger.

TIGHT ON THE EXPECTANT FACES of Kurt, Kathy and David as Gordon scans the statement. He looks up. Snorts. And lets the paper slip to the floor.

KURT

So you don't support the war.
You don't support the President.
That'd be too much to ask.

(nodding his head)

Why'd you go to war, Corporal?
To protect your homeland, your
family ... to protect your loved
ones, right? Those are noble
reasons.

(pulling out a cell phone)

What's the mom's number?

KATHY

Speed dial "one."

Kurt does as instructed and holds the phone to his ear.

KURT

Rand here. Put Mrs. Hofstadter
on the line if you would.

(to Gordon)

Your mother would like to have a
chat with you, Gordon.

Dead Gordon takes the phone. We hear a voice:

MRS. HOFSTADTER (O.S.,
FILTER)

Gordon? Honey? Is it you?

GORDON

Yeah, Ma.

MRS. HOFSTADTER (O.S.,
FILTER)

I love you, honey. They said I
could only have a second to
speak to you. But there's a
paper they want you to sign? It
might be best if you signed it,
honey. But you should do what
your conscience -

Mrs. H. stops talking in mid-sentence. Now OTHER VOICES are
audible in B.G. - too indistinct to make out. Then Gordon's
mom comes back on the line:

MRS. HOFSTADTER (O.S.,
FILTER)

It might be best if you signed
it, Gordon. There's so much I
want to say, but - I'm proud of
you, honey. I love you ...

GORDON

I love you, Ma.

MRS. HOFSTADTER (O.S.,
FILTER)

I -

A CLICK and a DIAL TONE. Gordon listens for a moment, then
flips the phone shut and returns it to Kathy.

KURT

Did your mom give you some good
advice?

Gordon holds out his hand. Kathy gives him the paper. Kurt
reaches into his jacket for a pen, but as he's passing it to
Gordon ...

Gordon drops it.

Kurt leans over to pick it up.

With a BANSHEE'S WAIL, Gordon flies out of his chair. We
get a quick, almost subliminal shot of Kurt's bulging eyes,
his open mouth, as Gordon's THREE FINGERED HAND snakes out
toward his face.

As Kurt topples backward his FOOT catches an electrical
cord, pulling a table lamp to the floor ...

ON KATHY AND DAVID

KATHY SHRIEKS as the two of them back away in undisguised
horror. The overturned lamp casts a shadow on the wall
behind them, showing us the action in silhouette:

Dead Gordon has two fingers buried up to the knuckles in
Kurt's eye sockets, a thumb jammed down his throat. Holding
Kurt's skull in a bowling-ball grip, he SLAMS it repeatedly
into the nearby lab table.

The door hisses open and ARMED REINFORCEMENTS pour in. It
takes three of them to pry Gordon off Kurt, but they finally
manage to drag him away. The body slumps to the floor. By
this point Kathy is on all fours SOBBING hysterically.

David, strangely calm, reaches into Kathy's purse, fishes out her cell phone and speed-dials "one."

DAVID

Yeah. You can let Mrs. Hofstadter go now. I don't want her bothered any more. Understand?

(beat)

No. This is David Murch. Mr. Rand can't come to the phone.

INT. DAVID'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

David has three TV sets in his bedroom, all tuned to cable news shows, all showing the latest poll results. He lies in bed, on his back, staring up at the ceiling. Jane is draped all over him, twirling his chest hair.

DAVID

I don't understand it. Why me? Why did I have to be the ... the focus of all this??

JANE

So awful about Kurt. Just awful.

(beat)

I guess Kathy moves into his job.

DAVID

Yeah, I guess.

JANE

Who moves into her job?

DAVID

... Why do you ask?

JANE

Oh, David, I want to be an insider. I want to have real power, like you. I'm learning so much from you. It's amazing even to me!

DAVID

But Jane. You're funny. You're photogenic. You're more useful in front of the cameras.

JANE

I'm not going to be 39 forever.

DAVID

You're 42.

JANE

David, I want to be your protégé! I want you to groom me.

He sighs distractedly. He doesn't want to be having this particular conversation at this particular time. Jane snuggles closer and reaches under the covers.

JANE (CONT.)

Want me to kiss the dead Marine?

DAVID

No.

JANE

Is something wrong?

DAVID

Jane - Kurt Rand was like a big brother to me, and I watched him die today. I watched him die. I've never seen anyone d-

He FREEZES in mid-sentence - stunned, as if someone's just dropped a sack of rocks on his head. His eyes glaze over; He shudders and begins to cry - just as he did on the Marty Clark show the night it all began.

JANE

Jesus. What is it with you?

DAVID

It's like there's an answer to all this. And I know it's there, right in front of me, but I can't see it. I can't quite put my hands on it.

DAVID (V.O.)

Of course I didn't have long to wait before the answer put its hands on me.

INT. CABLE STUDIO - NIGHT

Yes, it's the Marty Clark show! On the plasma behind Marty is a shot of the zombie internment camp:

CLARK

But when you put these Formerly Deceased Veterans into internment camps, David, aren't you calling their patriotism into question? Aren't you saying they're a menace to --

DAVID

Of course not, Marty. The Formerly Deceased Veterans are in medical quarantine. I'm pleased to say they have been cleared. We hope to have them processed and back on the street by Monday.

CLARK

So they can vote on Tuesday?

DAVID

No one in this administration would contest the right of these brave men to vote. And I resent that implication. My brother gave his life in Vietnam.

CLARK

So you deny the allegations.

DAVID

Allegations?

CLARK

It's all over the liberal websites today. This is a typical blog --
"LiberumArbitrium-dot-com" --

An Atrios-style WEB PAGE appears on the plasma.

CLARK

"One question for administration mouthpiece David Murch, who trades on his respect for veterans. If his brother did die in Vietnam - why isn't his name on the Memorial Wall?"

DAVID

That's absurd. It is.

CLARK

Where exactly?

DAVID

Well, I - I never found it. There are forty-some thousand names ...

(losing it)

Marty, this is some kind of baseless, cheap smear. It's despicable!

CLARK

According to the documents reproduced at this website, Lance Cpl. Philip Murch was honorably discharged and shipped home to Silver Spring, Maryland in March 1971.

(no reply)

David, you're among friends. Here's your chance to respond.

David opens his mouth to reply, but can't. He feels as if the floor has just opened up beneath him.

INT. DAVID'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jane on the sofa, watching Marty Clark. Her laptop is on the coffee table nearby; she quickly types in the LiberumArbitrium URL. Her eyes widen. Her jaw drops.

CLARK (O.S.; FILTER)

Before we go to break, condolences to the family of presidential adviser Kurt Rand, dead at 52 of a massive heart attack ...

INT. SUBURBAN DEN - DAY

A cozy, masculine room: big mahogany desk, built-in bookshelves, etc. Judging from the light layer of dust on everything, it doesn't get much use these days. David's Mom stares out a window, avoiding his gaze ...

MOM

We thought it was best for you,
sweetie.

(beat)

When Philip came home he was ...
different. I don't know if he'd
gotten into those drugs or what,
but he wasn't Philip anymore.

David is standing a couple of paces away, listening apprehensively. His gaze goes inevitably to a wooden HUMIDOR on the edge of the desk, and as he stares at it all the color drains out of the scene, transporting us to:

INT. SUBURBAN DEN - DAY (B&W FLASHBACK)

A MAN'S HAND opens the cigar box, plucks out three bullets, and shoves them into the cylinder of a service revolver. He closes the cylinder and gives it a spin for luck.

PHILIP MURCH, 20, bearded, long-haired, dead-eyed, sits at his father's desk contemplating the gun, passing it from hand to hand -- just staring at it, for the longest time, as if trying to make some kind of decision.

He swivels in his chair, and realizes that his four-year-old brother DAVID, is in the doorway watching him.

PHILIP

What's up, squirt?

YOUNG DAVID

Momma said to help her carry the
groceries.

Philip discreetly slips the gun and ammo into a drawer. He locks the drawer and tosses the key into the cigar box.

PHILIP

Come on, big guy. You help too.

He flashes David a peace sign, which David dutifully returns.

The two of them exit together.

Five seconds later, David reenters. He makes a beeline for the humidor; opens it; removes the key ...

CLOSEUP - DAVID (PRESENT-DAY)

Covering his face with both hands as his Mom continues the story:

MOM

You would never have hurt Philip. You worshipped him, David. You had no way of knowing.

INT. SUBURBAN DEN - DAY (B&W FLASHBACK)

Philip returns to the den and freezes in the doorway. David is behind the desk, pointing the gun directly at him.

DAVID

Halt! Friend or foe?

PHILIP

That's not funny, squirt. Put the gun down.

DAVID

Friend or foe?

PHILIP

It's not a game, David. Put it down.

DAVID

Friend or f-

The gun goes off. Philip crumples to the floor. David, giggling, runs over and nudges him with his foot.

DAVID (CONT.)

You're dead. Get up.

(no reply)

Get up!

David fires again, at point-blank range. His mother appears in the doorway and lets out a howl of agony.

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY (B&W FLASHBACK)

Post-funeral. Mrs. Murch stares down at her elder son's fresh grave, with young David at her side.

DAVID

You'll see, Momma. I'm gonna wish. I'm gonna wish for Philip to come back and be okay, and he'll tell you. We were just playing a game and he'll be okay.

MOM

I know, baby.

DAVID

That's gonna be my wish every day till he comes back.

Mom pulls him close and holds him tight.

MOM

You're a good boy, David.

DAVID

It was just a game ...

INT. SUBURBAN DEN - DAY (PRESENT-DAY)

MOM

We hoped you'd forget. If we didn't talk about it. And eventually you did. - Son?

DAVID

What, Mom?

MOM

Do you think Philip might come back? Patty Ranahan's boy came back. I would like to see him one more time ... before ...

DAVID

I don't know, Mom. I don't know.

DAVID (V.O.)

I'd forgotten, all right. Mainly I forgot that you don't treat other people's lives as a game. Now I had over a thousand Philips on my conscience.

EXT. POLLING PLACE - DAY

CITIZENS arriving, standing on line to vote, with ZOMBIE SOLDIERS waiting their turn like anyone else.

DAVID (V.O.)

But they voted. I saw to that.
I went in to POTUS and I gave
him the sales pitch of my life
... and on election day, by God,
they voted.

VARIOUS SHOTS of ZOMBIE HANDS as they punch cards, pulling levers.

DAVID (V.O.)

And when they'd made their
point, and their voices were
heard ... they were finally at
peace.

VOTERS look on as ZOMBIE SOLDIERS emerge from voting booths and topple lifelessly to the ground.

INT. CAMPAIGN HEADQUARTERS - EVENING

Kathy and David at a long table cluttered with laptops. The TV's are all tuned to election coverage.

MARTY CLARK

Exit polls show the incumbent
trailing in both of those key
states. And based on our latest
electoral tally, he cannot
afford to lose either one. This
may well go down in history as
the year of the Formerly
Deceased Veteran.

Kathy sits bolt upright as new data arrives on her laptop.

KATHY

We're down six in Ohio.

DAVID

How about Florida?

KATHY

Not quite as bad. Bad enough.
You played it wrong, David.

DAVID
I did what was right.

KATHY
Well, you put us in a bad damn
spot. And now I have to make
the call.

A long moment of silence as Kathy gathers her gear.

DAVID
Do you really have to make the
call?

KATHY
What should I do? Let the other
side steal this election?

DAVID
Steal it? Jesus, Kathy, they won
it.

KATHY
No they haven't. Not yet.
Because we count the votes. We
do what's best for America,
David, and if the voters
disagree, well, that's their
problem.

INT. CABLE STUDIO - NIGHT

Sleep-deprived Marty Clark stumbling around in front of a
giant ELECTORAL MAP.

CLARK
It's a miracle comeback. With
89% of precincts reporting, the
President has pulled ahead in
Ohio. Florida is now too close
to call.

(beat)
The big story, of course, is
what went wrong with all those
exit polls that showed the
incumbent going down to defeat.
But let's not forget -- our news
media have made the wrong call
once or twice in the past as
well!

The famous photo of a grinning Harry Truman, holding up a newspaper with the headline "DEWEY DEFEATS TRUMAN" in the background

DAVID (V.O.)

It was almost four AM before they finally called it. Our side won.

EXT. HOTEL - NIGHT

Confetti-covered REVELERS in party hats wander out of a hotel ballroom onto the streets of downtown D.C. Among them are David and Jane - both half-smashed and giggly as they make out at a bus stop.

DAVID

Six weeks in Bora Bora. That's what we need. That'll fix us right up.

JANE

I can't, David. I have to ramp up. Kathy wants me on the team!

DAVID

Really. Her old job?

JANE

No, you dumb shit. Yours!

David manages to conceal his surprise - just barely.

JANE (CONT.)

She told me you were packing it in. But can still be my mentor and spiritual adviser.

DAVID

Jane! You're so good to m-

AN AWFUL, GHOSTLY KEENING NOISE FILLS THE AIR.

It's everywhere. It's unavoidable. PASSERSBY cover their ears. Jane and David do likewise.

EXT. MILITARY CEMEMTERY (ESTABLISHING)

Row upon row of white military markers.

EXT. MILITARY CEMETERY - NIGHT

TIGHT ON a military headstone. A SKELETAL HAND bursts through the sod before it. Six feet away, another. And then a third ...

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE HOTEL - THAT MOMENT - NIGHT

Up and down the street, PEDESTRIANS are reeling from the omnipresent KEENING. Jane is trying, with some difficulty, to carry on a cell-phone conversation ...

JANE

Kathy! What is it? What's happening?

INT. TOWN CAR - MOVING - THAT MOMENT

Kathy in the back seat, with SECRET SERVICE MEN on either side.

KATHY

I'm about to catch a helicopter.
And I advise you to get the fuck
out of town till we figure it
out.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE HOTEL - THAT MOMENT - NIGHT

The KEENING CONTINUES as Jane flips the phone shut and shouts in David's ear.

JANE

They're coming out of Arlington.
All of 'em. World War II.
Korea. Vietnam ...

DAVID (V.O.)

We said we'd count their votes,
but we didn't. We lied. What
were they going to do? -- Well,
they did what soldiers always
do. They called for
reinforcements.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

A deserted country road outside Washington, where a FIGURE ON CRUTCHES is silhouetted by the headlights of an oncoming car.

The car SWERVES suddenly and PLOWS RIGHT INTO HIM.

A HORN BLARES. A TROOP TRANSPORT rumbles into frame. The car veers off the road, crashes through a barrier, and slams into a tree.

EXT. ROAD - ON JANE AND DAVID

Beside the wrecked car, with dead soldiers advancing on them.

Jane aims her shotgun at the zombies while David reaches in the trunk for an automatic.

JANE

Get up, you pansies! BRING IT ON!

DAVID

I'm sorry, Jane. I never should have opened my mouth.

With that, he shoots her in the back of the head. The zombies keep on coming - so he lifts the gun to his temple, closes his eyes, and pulls the trigger.

Click. Empty clip.

DAVID

Oh, shit.

And now the zombies are all around him. But instead of attacking, they MURMUR among themselves - examining David as if he's some kind of exotic specimen. One of them (with working vocal cords) steps to the front of the group.

CAPT. ZOMBIE

You're the one who called us back.

DAVID

That's right.

CAPT. ZOMBIE

You said we'd have a voice. But you betrayed us.

DAVID

That's right. I've got it coming, okay? And I'm not afraid. So go on. Do what you're going to do!

A long silence. Capt. Zombie smiles, admiring David's grit.

CAPT. ZOMBIE

Help us.

DAVID

How?

CAPT. ZOMBIE

Join us. We're looking for a few good men.

Now David spies an old corpse moving through the crowd. It's little more than a skeleton, in tattered rags, with bits of leathery skin clinging here and there. With two bony fingers it flashes him a PEACE SIGN.

SKELETON

Hiya, squirt. Long time no see.

DAVID

Philip?!?

SKELETON

You did your best, little brother. I'd be proud to fight beside you.

In a tender, brotherly gesture, Skeletal Philip claps his claws on either side of David's head - and TWISTS it suddenly, neatly snapping his brother's neck.

FADE THROUGH TO:

MONTAGE: WASHINGTON LANDMARKS - DAY

STOCK SHOTS of the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial, the White House.

DAVID (V.O.)

The government continues, in exile - but Washington, D.C. is ours. We are here to stay, all across this country, an army of fighters one million strong - to remind you, if you forget, that war is not a game. War is not an means to an end. War is, quite simply, hell.

EXT. STREET - DAY

FIREWORKS EXPLODING in the sky overhead -- a regular fourth of July display.

DAVID (V.O.)

And we here highly resolve that
these dead shall not have died
in vain - that this nation,
under God, shall have a new
birth of freedom -

CAMERA TILTS DOWN to a zombie fife-and-drum corps - David, Philip, and Capt. Zombie in the familiar "Spirit of '76" formation. They keep marching TOWARD CAMERA until David's dead and bloated face fills the frame.

DAVID (V.O.)

- and that government of the
people, by the people, for the
people, shall not perish from
the earth.

FADE OUT.