

THE LAND I ONCE KNEW

by

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The past, present, and future are all an illusion, albeit a stubbornly persistent one. -- Albert Einstein

Red is grey and yellow, white, but we decide which is right, and which is an illusion. -- Moody Blues

FADE IN:

INT. U.S. MILITARY ACADEMY STEAM TUNNEL - NIGHT

Large steel pipes RATTLE and GROAN down the length of a dimly lit passageway. A temperature gauge reads: 180 F.

At an intersection, TWO CLEAN-CUT COLLEGE DUDES in Converse sneakers and identical grey sweatsuits hang out. One aims a flashlight on pages of a tattered journal. The other takes a pinch from a baggie and loads a pipe.

READER

Whoa. You're quite a poet, man.

(reciting as if on stage)

Wrought by winter's hellish gloom,
mid-August's screaming heat,
contumacious spirits shackled,
marching to the beat.

(resuming normal voice)

The hell does contumacious mean?

The poet lights the pipe and passes it.

POET

Rebellious.

READER

(resuming thespian voice)

Clasped of steel a trove resides,
buried deep though unobscured.
At reveille its face is guileless,
plainly viewed, and thus ignored.

(back to normal)

...the hell?

The poet puts the baggie into a small metal lockbox and shines his flashlight down the passageway.

POET

(with a Brummie accent)

It's a bleedin' double entendre. I
cannot believe there are still
buildings in America heated by
steam. By pipes laid back in the
eighteen-hundreds.

READER

I'm pretty buzzed, man, but
seriously, you should submit your
work to The New Yorker.

POET

Come on then. Give us the
parchment. This place is givin' me
the eebie jeebies.

He stands to leave.

READER

Wait. I really dig the ending.
(resuming thespian voice)
Once a plebe, always a plebe, no
man unscathed escapes. Surrendering
the right to choose, one's soul
emaciates. Yet instinct long ago
forewarned: resign from an
existence, where walls of stone
eclipse the mind, and curb one's
walking distance.

POET

It sounds bloody awful when you
read it. Give it to me.

The poet puts the journal and pipe in the lockbox, climbs
up and stuffs it into a dark space, and jumps back down.

POET(CONT'D)

A while back I sent one to me mum
in Birmingham. She sent it to some
bloke she knows. He's in a band
called The Moody Blues. Haven't
heard a peep.

READER

I've never heard of them but hey,
you never know, bro. Let's head.

They climb up metal rungs, killing their lights at the top.

EXT. USMA GROUNDS NEAR MACARTHUR BARRACKS - CONTINUOUS

The dudes emerge by an "AREA OFF LIMITS" sign, close the
hatch carefully, hightail it past grey granite buildings.

As they round a corner, they bounce off of TWO MILITARY
POLICEMEN, who draw their pistols.

MP #1

Hold it right there, misters!

The poet and his pal freeze, hands raised. Busted.

INT. U.S. ARMY CARGO PLANE - DAY

CREDITS ROLL as the poet, his pal, and dozens more ARMY GRUNTS, in full combat gear with parachute packs, gaze out the open rear cargo bay at the lush green landscape below.

CAPTAIN FARRELL (30) yells at them over the ENGINE NOISE.

CAPTAIN FARRELL
Alpha Company! Prepare to
disembark! Air-BORNE!

THE GRUNTS
Hooahh!

From the PILOT's POV, a grassy clearing comes into view. He gives Farrell a thumbs up.

EXT. ARMY CARGO PLANE - CONTINUOUS

The plane swings lower and parachutes fill the sky.

EXT. DEEP JUNGLE - DAY

Silence, except for distant ibis birds. Dragonflies flit about. In the brush, an Asiatic golden cat steals closer.

SUPERIMPOSE: NORTH VIETNAM, 1966

A family of Tonkin monkeys harken and exotic birds take wing, as the RUMBLE of jet engines grows louder and louder, until incendiary bombs EXPLODE, obliterating everything.

CROSS FADE:

EXT. PENSACOLA, FLORIDA NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Two fighter jets ROAR past treetops lining a suburban street. Blackbirds CHIRP as a fluffy kitty halfheartedly chases bushy-tailed squirrels on a sunny front lawn.

INT. FARRELL FAMILY HOME - CONTINUOUS

A pigtailed ANNE FARRELL (8) helps a beehived and aproned BARBARA (29), put bibs on LUCY (2) and MARY (1).

On the living room TV, WALTER CRONKITE reports on the war. Anne watches footage of U.S. troops in action, of helicopters firing missiles, of jets torching a jungle.

ANNE

Is that where Daddy is?

BARBARA

Near there, Annie.

ANNE

(wide-eyed)

Why do they do that to the forest?

BARBARA

To catch the bad guys. His letter said he's coming home next week.

ANNE

(to herself)

But ...what about Bambi?

CRONKITE

...and that's the way it is. For the CBS Evening News, this is Walter Cronkite. Good night.

EXT. PENSACOLA NAVAL AIR STATION - DAY

A small CROWD OF CIVILIANS watches from behind a fence as a string of Navy planes do "touch and go's" in succession. On the fence a sign reads: PENSACOLA NAVAL AIR STATION.

Army C-140 cargo planes taxi to a stop. TROOPS disembark.

Barbara pushes Lucy in a stroller while carrying Mary. As soon as Anne spots a certain highly decorated SOLDIER, she bolts across the tarmac toward him.

A lean but not mean Captain Farrell drops his duffel bag and scoops her up. She clings tightly to his tanned neck. He hugs Barbara with a free arm, plants a big one on her.

CAPTAIN FARRELL

I'm home for good this time, girls.
My God, look at how you've grown! I missed you guys so much.

As they walk out, he sets Anne down abruptly and coughs violently. The fit subsides and he notices concerned faces.

ANNE

Are you okay, Daddy?

CAPTAIN FARRELL
 (mustering a crazy grin)
 Phew! Nasty bug I caught last
 month. I need a big bowl of
 homemade soup. That's what!

The girls laugh. He leads them toward the car, singing.

CAPTAIN FARRELL
 (coughing in between)
 Daddy's home and here to stay!

THE GIRLS
 Daddy's home and here to stay!

CAPTAIN FARRELL
 Nothing'll make him go away!

THE GIRLS
 Nothing will make him go away!

CAPTAIN FARRELL
 Sound off!

THE GIRLS
 One two!

CAPTAIN FARRELL
 Sound off!

THE GIRLS
 Three four!

CAPTAIN FARRELL
 Bring it on down!

THE GIRLS
 One two three four, one two...

EXT. CONCORD HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL FIELD - DAY

GREG SAMOURZAKUS (8) and his brother, ELLIOT (5), run pass patterns in the summer sun with their muscular, balding father, DIMITRIS (45).

DIMITRIS
 ...Three! Four! Hut! Hut! Hike!

The boys run downfield, zig zagging and laughing.

DIMITRIS (CONT'D)
 Go deep, Elliot! Keep going!

Dimitris throws, and at the last second Greg intercepts the football, but he slows down and lets Elliot tackle him.

GREG
Good job, shrimp!

ELLIOT
Dad never throws so I can catch it.

GREG
You're only five, shrimp.

DIMITRIS (O.S.)
Greg! Throw it back!

ELLIOT
When I'm big I'll be like you.

GREG
If you keep practicing.

DIMITRIS
Greg! Throw me the ball!

Greg winds up and throws, but as the ball flies through the air, the sky slowly turns darker, and rain gusts through barren trees behind bleachers, now full of CHEERING FANS.

Brass band instruments BLAST and tom toms TAP, as a CONCORD HIGH RECEIVER leaps into frame and snags the pass.

The fans ROAR as DEFENDERS stop him on the two yardline.

Concord's COACH makes a "T" excitedly with his hands.

COACH
Greg! Timeout!

Both TEAMS are soaked and covered in mud. The menacing frame of the QUARTERBACK, in a jersey that says "SAMOURZAKUS", yells at a REFEREE.

GREG
Timeout, Ref!

The ref blows a WHISTLE. On the scoreboard, it's Home: 22, Visitors: 26, with 00:06 remaining.

IN THE BLEACHERS

MAJOR TOM BOWMAN (33), in an Army trenchcoat, smoking a pipe under a dripping hat brim, watches the game intently.

Four rows below him, a bra-less young WOMAN in a completely soaked sweater has the rapt attention of TWO TEENAGE BOYS, as she hoots and cheers.

TEENAGER #1
Hey, party's at my house later!

YOUNG WOMAN
Thanks. I prefer older boys.

She winks at Bowman. He nods at her, but doesn't smile.

TEENAGER #2
We got some awesome Columbian.

TEENAGER #1
And I drive a Firebird.

YOUNG WOMAN
Ha. It's probably your mom's.

On the sideline below, the receiver limps off the field.

ON THE CONCORD SIDELINE

Biting his lip, Concord's coach scans exhausted PLAYERS. A skinny player in a spotless uniform with "SAMOURZAKUS" across his shoulders, also, is his unavoidable choice.

COACH
Elliot!

Elliot starts to run, stops, goes back, grabs his helmet.

COACH (CONT'D)
Tell Greg to do the fakeout play.
Tell him to hit Adams! Got it?

ELLIOT
(scared and excited)
Sure thing, Coach.

Elliot almost slips on his ass. He joins the HUDDLE as Greg looks teammates in the eye and calls the final play.

ON THE FIELD

GREG
How nice of you to join us!

ELLIOT
Coach says run the fakeout play.

GREG

Right! Nate, I'll fake the handoff to you. Adams and Elliot, button hook deep left. The rest of you, stop that blitz! Ready?

PLAYERS

Break!

ELLIOT

Coach said to hit Adams, Greg.

GREG

Just get open, shrimp.

The teams line up, serious game faces on both sides. Greg takes the snap, drops back, fakes a handoff, looks left. The clock reads 00:02 as the BLITZ closes in.

Just before a wave rolls over him, Greg launches an arcing pass toward Elliot and ADAMS, both wide open in left field.

ELLIOT

I got it!

Elliot leaps for it. Just as his fingertips touch the ball, TWO DEFENDERS running in opposite directions cream him.

The ball flies upward as Elliot lands with a SPLAT.

IN THE BLEACHERS

Fans recoil and wince. The two teens near Bowman laugh.

TEENAGER #1

Dude! Did you see that?

YOUNG WOMAN

He's hurt, you idiot!

ON THE FIELD

Adams snags the tipped ball and runs, but defenders force him to reverse direction at the four yardline. As he scrambles back toward right field, Greg gets to his feet.

GREG

Adams!

A tackler grabs Adams, but on the way down, he tosses the ball to Greg, who sprints back toward left field, deftly evading more tacklers before ...diving into the endzone.

Ecstatic FANS swarm the field. Amid the chaos, Dimitris runs from the bleachers toward Elliot, who is out cold.

DIMITRIS
 (on the verge of tears)
 Elliot! Talk to me, son!

LATER

Few revelers notice as PARAMEDICs load Elliot carefully onto a stretcher and into an ambulance.

Greg breaks free of a celebrating mob and looks around, perplexed, as the ambulance drives away, sirens BLARING.

EXT. WASHINGTON D.C. - WHITE HOUSE STEPS - DAY

BRIGADIER GENERAL ROBERT BALMER, old and grey but with eyes of steel, addresses a small throng of REPORTERS.

GENERAL BALMER
 One at a time, please.

REPORTER #1
 General Balmer, can you tell us if the honor code will be abolished?

GENERAL BALMER
 First of all, this situation has been blown way out of proportion by the media. The problem was caused, not so much by cheating cadets, as it was by a lack of clarity. About what types of behavior are allowed.

REPORTER #2
 How can cadets be held to such high standards in today's world?

GENERAL BALMER
 Cadets enforce the honor code themselves. However, since so many are implicated, the Secretary of the Army has decreed that most of those accused of honor violations will be allowed to return and graduate with the following class.

REPORTER #1
 Did you say that the cheaters are being allowed back into West Point?

GENERAL BALMER

All returning cadets will be on probation. Meanwhile, we're in the process of revamping the honor system, so that this kind of situation never happens again.

REPORTER #3

How can you be sure of that?

GENERAL BALMER

No more questions at this time.

He proceeds into the back seat of a four-door sedan.

INT. GENERAL BALMER'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

GENERAL BALMER

(to the driver)

Swing by and pick up Major Bowman. He's riding north with us today.

CAPTAIN

Yes, sir.

EXT. THE PENTAGON - LATER

Balmer's car approaches a curb, where Bowman awaits.

INT. BALMER'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Bowman gets into the back seat.

MAJOR BOWMAN

Good afternoon, sir.

GENERAL BALMER

Major. I've been thinking about the scandal. About what can be done. What the academy needs right now is a hero. A scholar athlete who exemplifies West Point. Someone to make the corps of cadets, and America, proud again.

MAJOR BOWMAN

I'll find us that guy, sir. In fact, I may already have found a perfect candidate.