

**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. -- The Moody Blues

FADE IN:

INT. STEAM TUNNEL - NIGHT

Large pipes RATTLE and GROAN down the length of a dimly lit passageway. A gauge reads: Steam Temperature 170 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 the box 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  
some band called The Moody Blues.  
Haven't heard a peep.

READER

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

They climb rungs on a wall, killing their lights at the top.

EXT. OFF LIMIT AREA - NIGHT

The dudes emerge next to an "AREA OFF LIMITS" sign, close the  
hatch carefully, and 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 of ARMY GRUNTS, in full combat gear with parachute packs, gaze out the open rear cargo bay at the lush green landscape far below.

CAPTAIN FARRELL (30) yells at them over the 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 - DAY

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. AMERICAN MIDDLE CLASS NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

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

INT. FARRELL FAMILY HOME - DAY

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

On the living room TV, WALTER CRONKITE reports on the war. Newsclips roll of an intense ground assault, of helicopters dispensing Agent Orange, of troops torching a bunker.

ANNE

Is that where Daddy is?

BARBARA

Near there, Annie.

ANNE

(wide-eyed)

Why do they do that to the forest, Mommy?

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 in awe 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, and 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, and she clings tightly to his tanned neck. He hugs Barbara with his free arm and 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. When the fit subsides 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 the football. At the last second Greg intercepts it, but he slows down and lets Elliot tackle him.

GREG  
 Good job, shrimp!

ELLIOT  
 Dad never throws it 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, we move forward in time.

A HIGH SCHOOL RECEIVER leaps into frame and snags the pass. The crowd ROARS as DEFENDERS stop him on the two yardline.

Rain gusts through barren trees. Brass bands BLAST and tom toms TAP. Both TEAMS are covered in mud.

On the sideline, a COACH makes a T excitedly with his hands.

COACH

Greg! Timeout!

The menacing frame of the QUARTERBACK, in a jersey that says "SAMOURZAKUS" across the shoulders, 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 game.

EXT. CONCORD HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL BLEACHERS - DAY

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

Two 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 for the home team.

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 toward the bench.

EXT. CONCORD HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL FIELD - DAY

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

COACH

Elliot!

Elliot starts to run, but 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.

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.

In slow motion, Greg takes the snap. He drops back. Fakes a handoff. Turns left. Looks right. The clock runs to 00:00. The BLITZ closes in.

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

ELLIOT

(to Adams)

I got it!

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

Back to real time, as Elliot lands with a SPLAT.

EXT. CONCORD HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL BLEACHERS - DAY

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

TEENAGER #1

Dude! Did you see that?

YOUNG WOMAN

He's hurt, you idiot!

EXT. CONCORD HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL FIELD - DAY

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

GREG

Adams! Lateral!

A tackler grabs Adams, but on the way down, he tosses the ball to Greg, who runs back toward left field and deftly evades 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!

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

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

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

Exiting the building, BRIGADIER GENERAL ROBERT BALMER, old and grey but with eyes of steel, answers questions from a throng of REPORTERS.

REPORTER #1

What can you tell us, General?

GENERAL BALMER

One at a time, please.

REPORTER #2

Will the honor code 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 acceptable.

REPORTER #3

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

GENERAL BALMER

The honor code is enforced by cadets themselves. However, since so many are implicated, the Secretary of the Army has decided that the problem must be with the system, as opposed to individuals. Today he ordered that most of the cadets accused of honor violations be allowed to return and graduate with the next class.

REPORTER #1

Did you say that the cheaters are being allowed back in?

GENERAL BALMER

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

REPORTER #2

How can you be sure of that?

GENERAL BALMER

No more questions at this time.

He proceeds toward a waiting four-door sedan.

INT. GENERAL BALMER'S CAR - DAY

Balmer gets into the back seat.

GENERAL BALMER

(to the driver)

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

CAPTAIN

Yes, sir.

EXT. THE PENTAGON - DAY

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

INT. GENERAL BALMER'S CAR - DAY

Bowman gets into the back seat.

MAJOR BOWMAN

Good afternoon, sir.

GENERAL BALMER

Major. The Captain and I have  
been discussing the scandal.  
About what can be done.

MAJOR BOWMAN

Yes, sir.

GENERAL BALMER

What the academy needs right now  
is a hero. Someone to make the  
corps of cadets, and America,  
proud again. A scholar athlete  
who exemplifies West Point.

MAJOR BOWMAN

I'll find us that guy, sir.

GENERAL BALMER

Outstanding. Let me know if you  
need me to pull any strings.

INT. SAMOURZAKUS FAMILY HOME - DAY

A couch and two well-worn easy chairs decorate a TV room with wood panels and green shag carpeting.

In a stained t-shirt and jeans, Greg enters backwards through a screen door, pulling Elliot in a wheelchair.

ELLIOT

Don't be like that.

GREG

I'd just rather run cross country in college, shrimp.

ELLIOT

Because of me.

GREG

Because, truth be told, I never really liked football.

ELLIOT

I'm not buying it.

GREG

All you get are screwed up knees and back problems. Arthritis by the time you're thirty. Look at Dad for chrissake!

ELLIOT

Look. Let's be real. The doc said I might never walk again. Even if that's true, it's no reason for you to throw away your talent.

A beat.

ELLIOT (CONT'D)

It wasn't your fault.

GREG

I should have listened to Coach. I should have thrown to Adams. You weren't ...ready.

ELLIOT

Know what? The mailman cometh.

A MAILMAN pops letters through a slot in the door. Elliot rolls over, grabs the stack, rifles through it, opens one.

ELLIOT (CONT'D)

Hey, this one looks interesting.

GREG

If it's another scholarship, but they won't cover my tuition unless I play football, fuck'em.

Greg goes to the fridge, lifts a jug of OJ, takes a swig.

ELLIOT

This one won't require you to play football. And your tuition. Room. Board. All covered.

Greg pulls out a chicken leg and chomps on it.

ELLIOT (CONT'D)

On top of all that, they'll even pay you a salary, chicken lips.

GREG

What's the catch?

ELLIOT

No strings attached whatsoever.

GREG

Then that's where I'm going.

ELLIOT

...unless you decide to stay past your sophomore year.

GREG

Hmmm... Sounds like R.O.T.C. I don't care. I'll just milk the system for two years, then finish college somewhere else.

ELLIOT

I think you have illusions.

GREG

I'll get a student loan, shrimp.

ELLIOT

I meant about milking the system at this particular institution.

GREG

(with his mouth full)  
Piece of cake.

EXT. FARRELL FAMILY HOME - DAY

A much older (but still fluffy) kitty naps on the porch, as an arm shoves a letter in the box at the end of the driveway.

TWO PIGTAILED GIRLS race from the front door to retrieve the mail. The taller one gets there first, yells toward the door.

LUCY

Annie! You got a letter!

MARY

Let me see it. Let me see!

They run back into the house.

INT. FARRELL FAMILY HOME - DAY

On the mantle are pictures of Captain Farrell. One in dress greens. One with all the girls on his lap and Barbara behind.

The breathless sisters run past Barbara to find Anne, now a petite, attractive teenager, who rips the letter open.

ANNE

...pleased to inform you...  
 ...selected for appointment to  
 the class of nineteen eighty...  
 United States Military Academy  
 at West Point, New York.

BARBARA

I knew it. With your grades. Your  
 father would be so proud, Annie.

ANNE

I got in. Oh my God. I got in!

Big and little sisters squeal with excitement.

BARBARA

It won't be easy being part of  
 the first class with women.

ANNE

I know. But this is the best path  
 for me, Mom. If I graduate from  
 there, anything is possible.

BARBARA

You don't have to prove anything  
 to me. Or to anyone else.

ANNE

This is what I want to do.

BARBARA

You've never needed much mothering. Always been a bit fearless. If this is what you want, then I support it.

ANNE

Thanks, Mom. ...I miss Daddy.

BARBARA

Oh, honey.

They hug.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

I remember how much he loved being a cadet. How close he was to his academy buddies. The scandal happening right now must be tearing the place apart.

ANNE

Today's paper said, so far, over two hundred West Pointers have been booted out. For cheating.

BARBARA

That includes cadets kicked out simply for tolerating cheaters. What a shame it's all happening during America's bicentennial.

ANNE

The honor code is pretty strict.

BARBARA

It has to be. West Point sets the standard for the Army.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREET - NIGHT

A hot summer night in an "iffy" part of town, on a sidewalk lined with small shops, HUCKSTERERS, PIMPS, and PROSTITUTES.

JASON MCGRATH (20), in jeans and a polo shirt, strides along. TWO HOOKERS hit on him, but he waves them off politely.

He eyes a scrap of paper, locates an erotic store, and looks around before entering it.

INT. EROTIC STORE - NIGHT

Various kinky gadgets, some scary, line the walls. McGrath approaches a pasty CLERK, who greets him without words.

MCGRATH

Angela is expecting me.

The clerk lets him behind the counter, opens a hidden door.

INT. MISTRESS ANGELA'S CHAMBER - NIGHT

A room with brick walls, a cement floor, and a throne-like chair next to a large wooden rack in the shape of an X.

The door SHUTS and LOCKS behind McGrath. He removes all of his clothes in silence.

MISTRESS ANGELA (28), in thigh-high boots and a red bustier, approaches from the shadows, patting a riding crop.

MISTRESS ANGELA

You're late. Get on your knees.

MCGRATH

Yes, Mistress.

She CRACKS him across the back.

MISTRESS ANGELA

Did I tell you to speak?

Silence.

MISTRESS ANGELA (CONT'D)

Answer me! You worthless shit!

CRACKS him again.

MCGRATH

No, Mistress. Fuck! I mean, yes!

MISTRESS ANGELA

Well? Which is it?

Again with the crop already.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY STREET - NIGHT

Sweaty, his shirt untucked, McGrath stops to light a cigar.

As he walks up the sidewalk, a chatty PIMP touches his shoulder. McGrath winces. Like lightning, he decks the pimp, but before onlookers gather, he disappears up the street.

INT. MAJOR BOWMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

In khakis, Bowman stares out a rainy window, puffing a pipe. A NAVY LIEUTENANT in dress whites leans in the doorway.

NAVY LIEUTENANT

Hey, Major! Wait till you get a load of our offensive line.

MAJOR BOWMAN

I wouldn't count your chickens just yet, Lieutenant. This is the year Navy's winning streak ends.

NAVY LIEUTENANT

Yeah, yeah. You say that every year. So, what's the wager?

MAJOR BOWMAN

Quadruple or nothing.

NAVY LIEUTENANT

(smirking)

Fine.

As the squid departs, Bowman's demeanor turns serious.

MAJOR BOWMAN

(into a phone)  
Send McGrath up here. Pronto.

EXT. WILMINGTON, DE, AMTRACK STATION - DAY

Wearing cutoffs and a t-shirt, Greg shakes his father's hand, then hugs his mom, IRIS (43). He lifts a bag, nods at Elliot.

GREG

Shrimp.

ELLIOT

Tit weasel.

DIMITRIS

From Grand Central Station, take the bus that goes to Newburgh.

ELLIOT

He's got it, Dad.

Greg steps aboard a silver train and waves.

IRIS

Call us when you get a chance.

ELLIOT

Don't let 'em brainwash you, man!

GREG

Never gonna happen.

INT. MAJOR BOWMAN'S OFFICE - DAY

McGrath, in dress greys, knocks on the open door. Salutes.

MCGRATH

Sir, Cadet McGrath, as ordered.

MAJOR BOWMAN

Come in, Jason. I have a mission for you. A guy named Samourzakus will be assigned to G-three this fall. We need him to play ball for Army. Understood?

MCGRATH

Sir, I will do my best to encourage that.

MAJOR BOWMAN

Do whatever it takes. Just don't disappoint me.

INT. PENSACOLA GREYHOUND BUS TERMINAL - DAY

TRAVELERS board a bus in a sunny parking lot. Anne Farrell hugs tearful sisters, as Barbara looks on.

ANNE

Do you know how important you are to me? Do you have any idea?

BARBARA

You sure this is what you want?

Anne straightens and gives her mother a determined look.

BARBARA (CONT'D)

You know, you can change your mind at any time. And come back home. We'll still be proud of you. Just for making it this far.

A warm hug.

ANNE

I'm gonna change the world, Mom.