

A Slow Dance of Death

Written by

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FADE IN

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREET - NIGHT

A pick up truck is parked along the curb of a dingy residential street. The street is paved, but everything else is dirt. The lone streetlight illuminates the ground in a yellowish hue while the truck is just outside of it's glow.

INT. PICK UP TRUCK - SAME

Driver MORRIS ROBERTS (40's), dark hair, clean shaven, calm and collected, wears slacks and suit jacket with black shirt. The kind of look you'd find in a Howard Hawks film.

Passenger JOE (20's), scruffy hair, smokes nervously.

JOE

So now what?

Morris stares intently into the side view mirror which shows the target house behind them - 583 G Street.

MORRIS

We wait, like kittens waitin' for
mama.

JOE

It's been hours.

Joe pulls out a pack of cigarettes and lights one.

MORRIS

Calm down; patience is the name of
the game, kid. We can't go in there
until the place is empty.

JOE

Hard to be patient in here with
you. You're not very personable, ya
know that, right?

Morris turns and grabs Joe by the shirt. Joe loses his cigarette between his legs.

MORRIS

Listen up. I'll tell you this once,
don't make me repeat it; sit there,
have a smoke and wait.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOE
(picking up the butt he
dropped)

That time of the month, or what?

Morris' smirks. His phone rings and he answers it.

Joe lights another cigarette.

MORRIS
Yo.

WILLIAMS (V.O.)
Status.

MORRIS
You want the long or the short?

WILLIAMS (V.O.)
Short.

MORRIS
Parked here with the new guy, no
sign of the target, but someone
still in the house.

WILLIAMS (V.O.)
Let me know when it's done.

Morris hangs up the phone.

INT. PICK UP TRUCK - MORNING

They drink from styrofoam cups and eat french fries and
burgers.

JOE
I told her no more after that, no
way in hell.

MORRIS
What, couldn't perform?

JOE
This dirty bitch wanted to put her
finger in my ass, you try
performing after that.

MORRIS
One thing I've learned is if you
get the chance to experience
something new, you man up and go
for it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOE

You're a dirty mother fucker.

They laugh.

Morris crumbles his empty burger wrapper and throws it out of the driver side window.

Morris sees through his mirror that a car pulls out of the driveway of the target house.

MORRIS

Hey, get ready to go to work.

Joe flicks his cigarette out of the passenger side window, wipes his mouth and shakes his body as if to loosen up.

MORRIS (cont'd)

The fuck you doing?

JOE

Getting ready, what does it look like?

MORRIS

I have no idea. Gloves.

Morris pulls out a small photograph of their target, looks at it for a moment and places it back into his jacket pocket. A gun can be seen in a shoulder strap holster under his jacket.

Joe grabs a bag from the back seat and tosses Morris a pair of black gloves. Joe also puts on gloves.

They exit the truck.

EXT. 583 G. ST. - SAME

The house is plain, nothing special about it. It's modest in size, you wouldn't call it small, but rather comfortable. The paint is chipping away and the roof needs work.

Joe dashes across the street to the side of the house, scared to be spotted.

Morris strolls casually as he adjusts his clothing and doesn't have a care in the world.

A car speeds down the street, slows down and honks as Morris kindly gestures for the car to go ahead.

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CONTINUED:

JOE

Will you hurry the fuck up!?

Morris finally reaches the side of the house to meet with Joe.

MORRIS

Don't worry about me, how about you act like you've done this before, alright?

JOE

But I haven't.

MORRIS

This is your first time, right now, on this job?

JOE

Yea, so what?

MORRIS

Williams picked a hell of a job to pop your cherry.

They scale a wooden fence into the backyard.

EXT. BACK YARD OF 583 G. ST. - SAME

Joe hops down and knocks over a metal trash can, he falls backwards and creates even more noise.

Morris pulls Joe away from the mess and stands up the can, picks up some of the trash that fell out.

MORRIS

We're trying to be quiet here;
there is a reason I brought that
bag you're holding.

The backyard is in larger disarray than the residential street - beer cans and liquor bottles are everywhere. The patio area is full of shitty furniture and dog shit covers the dead grass.

They reach the back door and Joe aggressively turns the knob and attempts to push it in.

Morris snatches the bag and pulls out a smaller bag that contains a lock picking set.

MORRIS (cont'd)

Keep an eye out.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Morris kneels down and begins to work on the lock while humming the "mama" section of Queen's Bohemian Rhapsody.

JOE

Queen? Why the hell are you humming that?

MORRIS

Shut up.

Morris continues to hum and work on the lock.

JOE

Come on, come on already.

MORRIS

Please shut up?

JOE

Watch out I'm gonna kick it-

Joe reaches his limit and puts his hands on Morris' shoulders and begins to pull at him.

Morris drops the lock pick and bucks Joe back. He steps close to Joe, and their noses almost touch.

MORRIS

-Don't you ever put your hands on me again, you got that? Let me concentrate. If I get to 'nothing really matters', I know the lock won. Matter of fact, I just enjoy Queen, so don't interrupt.

(beat)

How bout you be constructive somewhere else?

Morris points towards the fence and smacks a couple of kisses at Joe.

Joe walks through the minefield of dog shit and looks over the fence toward the neighboring house.

MORRIS (cont'd)

Got it, get over here quick.

Joe retraces his steps through the grass.

Morris pushes the door open as a blast of some foul odor pours out.

Joe violently coughs and dry heaves.

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CONTINUED:

JOE
Jesus fucking Christ!

MORRIS
Gonna be alright, tough guy?

Joe covers his mouth and nose with the collar of his shirt.

INT. 583 G. ST. - SAME

The kitchen is a mess, dirty dishes pile in the sink and on the counter. A large pool of something dark is dried up on the linoleum floor.

The source of the smell is revealed as a dead dog is curled up in a corner.

JOE
Where we going?

MORRIS
We're waiting here until he shows up.

JOE
Who?

MORRIS
Martinez.

JOE
And we have to wait inside?

Morris stops in the middle of the kitchen, trying hard to not step in the pool of dried gunk, turns around and looks at him with a state of confusion.

MORRIS
Did Williams tell you anything about what I do? Or are you some kind of laborer looking to make a little dough?

JOE
He told me a little. Said you get things done and take care of people.

MORRIS
(complimented)
Interesting way of putting it, but that says enough.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JOE

What does that even mean? You kill people?

MORRIS

(sarcastically)

Ding, ding, ding, we have a winner!
What does he win Johnny?!

Joe gives Morris a double thumbs up.

MORRIS (cont'd)

So you're the Fonz now?

JOE

Who?

MORRIS

(scoffs)

Nothing, never mind, just stay close to me.

They enter the dirty living room where the furniture is torn and stained. The carpet is crunchy when stepped on.

Puncture marks, probably from a drug educated mad man, scatter one of the walls; the coffee table is littered with various drug paraphernalia.

Morris leads the way up the staircase, hugging the wall.

INT. UPSTAIRS - SAME

They enters each room carefully and quietly. Each room has mattresses and one has s plastic bucket used for a toilet. It wreaks to high heaven and their faces show it.

Joe walks forward to the closed door at the far end of the hall.

Morris waves at him to come back but Joe doesn't listen. He opens the door and suddenly:

An ear piercing boom echoes from the room.

Morris winces in pain from the ringing in his ears.

Joe stumbles back into the hall as his eyes briefly meet with Morris' before he falls dead.

Morris does a quick 180 turn but is stopped in his tracks by an unknown voice that is barely heard over the high pitched ringing.

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Morris slowly reaches into his jacket and pulls his gun, keeps it hidden as he turns around and puts his hands behind his head.

FRANKIE MARTINEZ (50's), Mexican, carries a sawed-off shotgun. The gold around his neck, tangled in his hamburger meat for chest hair, is enough to feed a small country.

He steps over Joe's convulsing body and removes tiny plugs from his ears.

FRANKIE

No no, you can't leave yet. Turn around, slow.

Morris' holds his free hand up to one ear in a "what did you say" manner.

MORRIS

(disoriented)
Come again?

FRANKIE

This is my property, what are you doing here?

MORRIS

ah, Martinez.

The blood from Joe's gut reaches Morris' feet. He widens his stance so as to not dirty his shoes.

FRANKIE

I thought you'd be coming, pleasure to finally meet you.

MORRIS

Wish I could say the same thing.
(beat)
so you're what all the hubbub is about, huh?

INT. SHERIFF JASON VALDEZ APARTMENT - MORNING

SHERIFF JASON VALDEZ (50's), a paunchy, dark skinned man is asleep alone in his bed. A clock radio, pack of cigarettes and an overfilled ashtray sit on an end table near his pillow. The room is messy and furnished with only the bare essentials - bed, dresser and table.

The clock radio turns on to wake him - an oldie station, classic Motown.

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A landline phone starts to ring in the kitchen.

He gets up, groggy, waddles into the kitchen.

He carries the corded phone back to his room, hits the top of the clock radio to turn it off, answers the phone.

He dresses while he talks.

SHERIFF VALDEZ
Sheriff Valdez.

INT. SHERIFF STATION FRONT DESK - SAME

LUCY MENDOZA (20's), dark haired and wears glasses, sits at a small desk with a CB radio, computer and phone. The fiddles with some paperwork while she is on the phone.

LUCY
Mornin, sir, sleep well?

INTERCUT BETWEEN SHERIFF VALDEZ AND LUCY

SHERIFF VALDEZ
Lucy, how did I know it was you?

LUCY
Maybe because I call you the same time each morning?

SHERIFF VALDEZ
So what's the verdict this morning, mija?

LUCY
Deputy Cochran is over at Mrs. Sanchez' house. She called in this morning to report hearing possible gunshots. You know how she gets, but Cochran is asking for assistance.

SHERIFF VALDEZ
Sure thing, I'll be there in 20.

He hangs up, pulls a cigarette out of the pack and lights up, he takes a heavy drag as if it was his first real breath of the day. His uniform is wrinkled and shirt more of a sweat stained yellow rather than white. What is supposed to be a shiny brass Sheriff's star is as dull as the toe of his boots.

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CONTINUED:

He grabs his Sheriff's hat from a coat rack near the front door and exits.

EXT. MRS. LAURA SANCHEZ' HOME - MORNING

Sheriff Valdez pulls into the drive way in his early 1990's Crown Victoria police car, pops the shift lever into park.

The emblem on the door reveals the city to be Winterhaven, CA. A small town of about 400, 10 miles west, you're in Mexico, a few miles south, you're in Arizona.

Another DEPUTY exits his patrol car which is parked along the curb in front of the house.

DEPUTY RONALD COCHRAN (20's), black, has very short hair, mustache, muscular and wears a neatly pressed uniform with a mirror like shine on his star and boots. One of the few people in town that isn't Hispanic or white.

Cochran walks to Valdez' car.

DEPUTY COCHRAN
Morning, Sheriff.

SHERIFF VALDEZ
Hola mijo, how are things?

Valdez exit's his car and they walk up the driveway to the front steps.

DEPUTY COCHRAN
Good, yourself?

SHERIFF VALDEZ
Can't complain, let's see what she has to say this time.

DEPUTY COCHRAN
This time, Sheriff?

Valdez and Cochran go up the small set of stairs. Planters with various flowers decorate the small porch. The smell of wet soil is fresh in the air.

SHERIFF VALDEZ
Mrs. Sanchez has grown quite lonely since her husband's passing. Plain and simple. Likes to call in and report this, that and the other. Means no harm, and makes a great cup of coffee.

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Cochran knocks on the door.

DEPUTY COCHRAN
I see. How long ya'll been dating?

Valdez gives Cochran and stern look.

The front door opens.

MRS. LAURA SANCHEZ (70's), long hair, glasses, frail.

MRS. SANCHEZ
Good morning Jason, deputy.

Cochran nods his head to her and Valdez tips his hat.

SHERIFF VALDEZ
Hola, senora. You reported a noise
complaint this morning?

MRS. SANCHEZ
(opening the screen door)
Please come in. Coffee?

Valdez removes his hat.

INT. MRS. LAURA SANCHEZ' HOME - SAME

The old, quaint house is very nice, lots of yellow and blue decor. Thin drapery on the windows allow just the right amount of sunshine. A porcelain village sits on the coffee table between two antique couches. Pictures of family don the walls.

Valdez places his hat on a small table near the front door.

MRS. SANCHEZ
(insistent)
Sit, sit.

Mrs. Sanchez walks into the kitchen.

Valdez and Cochran sit on the couch, Cochran picks up one of the little figurines on the table. Valdez lightly kicks him in the leg.

SHERIFF VALDEZ
(whispering)
Don't touch that. She's very
particular with her decorations.

Valdez puts the figure down, but not in it's correct place.

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CONTINUED:

Mrs. Sanchez carefully walks from the kitchen and carries two cups of coffee that sit in matching saucers.

Valdez and Cochran stand up and take the coffee from her and they all sit.

SHERIFF VALDEZ (cont'd)

(takes a sip)

Mhm.

(beat)

Can you elaborate a little on what you heard? Which direction the noise might have come from?

Valdez motions to Cochran to begin writing the statement.

Cochran puts down his coffee and pulls out a notebook and pen from his shirt pocket.

MRS. SANCHEZ

It was about 5am, a loud bang woke me up. I got to the window as fast as I could. A few moments pass then I heard another, and another not so loud one after that.

DEPUTY COCHRAN

What makes you think it was gunshots, ma'am?

SHERIFF VALDEZ

(holding up three fingers)

So that makes three, right Mrs. Sanchez?

Mrs. Sanchez notices that one of her figurines is out of places. She fixes it.

MRS. SANCHEZ

(to Cochran)

It's my best guess.

(to Valdez)

That's correct.

SHERIFF VALDEZ

Come outside with us for a moment, ma'am.

They put their coffee onto the table and walk to the front porch.

Valdez picks up his hat and puts it on.

EXT. MRS. LAURA SANCHEZ' HOME

Valdez walks down the stairs and holds his arms out to point at the neighboring houses.

SHERIFF VALDEZ
Which way Mrs. Sanchez?

She points to her right - 583 G. Street.

Valdez looks at both neighboring houses, turns to his left and gestures to Cochran to head out.

DEPUTY COCHRAN
Stay inside, ma'am. That really is
some great coffee.

MRS. SANCHEZ
Anytime mijo.

Cochran nods his head and walks down the steps and stand in the driveway.

SHERIFF VALDEZ
Tell ya what, if something
interesting is over there, I'll buy
lunch. If not, you pick up the tab.

DEPUTY COCHRAN
Sounds good to me, Sheriff.

EXT. 583 G ST., FRONT AND REAR OF HOUSE - SAME

Valdez knocks on the front door, motions for Cochran to go around back.

SHERIFF VALDEZ
Sheriff department, open the door
please!

Knocks again, louder.

SHERIFF VALDEZ (cont'd)
Come on now, got a noise complaint!

DEPUTY COCHRAN (O.S.)
Sheriff!

Valdez walks along the side of the house and enters the backyard, pushing the trash cans out of the way.

Cochran stands at the back door, looking into it's kitchen and covers his mouth and nose with the pit of his elbow.

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CONTINUED:

Valdez peeks in.

SHERIFF VALDEZ
Radio Lucy, let her know we have a
possible situation out here.

Cochran pulls out his walkie-talkie affixed to his belt.

DEPUTY COCHRAN
(on walkie-talkie)
Cochran to dispatch.

LUCY (V.O.)
Go ahead.

Valdez walks around the backyard, kicks around beer bottles
on the ground.

DEPUTY COCHRAN
We're over at 583 G. Street. Not
sure what we got yet but something
ain't right.

LUCY (V.O.)
10-4. Be careful.

Valdez and Cochran draw their guns and head through the
door.

INT. 583 G ST. - MORNING

SHERIFF VALDEZ
Sheriff's department! Anyone home!?

DEPUTY COCHRAN
What in God's name is that smell?

Valdez points his gun in the corner to reveal the dead dog.

SHERIFF VALDEZ
Check the hallway, I'll take the
living room.

DEPUTY COCHRAN
10-4.

They walk softly through the first floor of the house,
careful not to disturb anything.

They meet back in the kitchen briefly.

DEPUTY COCHRAN (cont'd)
Clear on this end, Sheriff.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHERIFF VALDEZ

Same. Stay on me, we're going upstairs.

DEPUTY COCHRAN

Got it.

INT. UPSTAIRS - SAME

The walk slowly up the steps, guns still drawn. They spot two bodies at the end of the hallway. Blood is pooled and dried on the hardwood floor.

SHERIFF VALDEZ

Eyes up, son.

Cochran has a worried look on his face, nods his head.

They enter and clear each room and come back to the hallway.

They get as close to the bodies as they can without stepping into the blood or displacing any shell casings.

Both of them kneel down over the bodies.

DEPUTY COCHRAN

Is that Joe Fredericks?

SHERIFF VALDEZ

Who?

DEPUTY COCHRAN

He was a senior when I was a freshmen. You don't remember him?

SHERIFF VALDEZ

The coaching years blur together, mijo. Call it age catching up to me.

Valdez stands up and stares at Joe's blood covered face, trying to recall but can't.

SHERIFF VALDEZ (cont'd)

Doesn't ring any bells, poor bastard.

They turn to the second body that has a sawed-off shotgun next to it.

SHERIFF VALDEZ (cont'd)

I've seen this one in the news. Frankie Martinez.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SHERIFF VALDEZ (cont'd)

(beat)

"El Demonio".

DEPUTY COCHRAN

The demon? Why was he called that?

Valdez puts on rubber gloves and looks through the various pockets of Martinez, he removes a wallet.

SHERIFF VALDEZ

Your Spanish is coming along.

(beat)

Story goes that he claimed to be sent from the depths of Hell.

Cochran takes out his notebook and begins to write.

SHERIFF VALDEZ (cont'd)

Had a reputation of being rather ruthless. Kidnapping, torture, rape...real scum of the Earth. We're all better off with him gone. Get Lucy on the line, will ya?

Valdez picks up the shotgun, two spent shotgun shells and a single 9mm shell casing.

DEPUTY COCHRAN

See if the casing smells like gunpowder. If it still smells, it was fired recently, right?

SHERIFF VALDEZ

(laughs to himself)

That's a myth, smell goes away after a minute or so. Besides, they're still in rigor. Couldn't have been here longer than a few hours.

He places them into a zip lock bag.

DEPUTY COCHRAN

(on walkie-talkie)

Cochran to dispatch.

LUCY (V.O.)

Go ahead.

INT. SMALL BAR - NIGHT

Neon beer signs and advertisement posters with scantily clad women don the walls.

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CONTINUED:

An old Jukebox plays classic rock from the 70's. Blue collar patrons play pool on one side of the room while others fling darts at dart boards.

Morris, still in his slacks and suit jacket, sits at an empty, wooden, over-polished bar and drinks a glass of whiskey, neat.

There is a small amount of dried blood on his ear and on one of his shoes.

Sheriff Valdez enters the bar, shakes the hand of one patron and waves to the others. He situates himself a couple of stools down from Morris and gives a long, hard stare.

Morris feels the gaze and looks over, tilting his glass. Before Sheriff Valdez can speak, the bartender ROB, Sheriff's son, (20's) wipes the bar and takes his order.

ROB
Buenos noches, papa.

SHERIFF VALDEZ
Quite.

ROB
Que?

SHERIFF VALDEZ
Just an interested set of events
over on G. Street.

ROB
Aye, guey. The house next to Mrs.
Sanchez?

SHERIFF VALDEZ
Again.
(beat)
Give me something a little strong
tonight.
(to Morris)
What are you having, stranger?

MORRIS
(looks straight ahead)
My usual.

Sheriff Valdez notices the small amount of dried blood on Morris' ear, but can't determine what it is.

SHERIFF VALDEZ
(still stares at Morris)
Gin, neat.

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CONTINUED:

Rob stares at his father.

ROB

(beat)

You're drinking gin again?

Sheriff Valdez looks down at the thin gold band on his left ring finger. He twists it for a moment, takes it off and puts it into his shirt pocket. He looks back at Rob with a stern look, not answering the question.

Rob walks away, looks displeased.

SHERIFF VALDEZ

(back to Morris)

You coming or going? Attitude like yours I'd hope you're going.

MORRIS

(still not looking)

Here for a bit of business, that's all. Finish this drink and I'm a ghost.

SHERIFF VALDEZ

Do you got a name?

Morris smirks and turns to the Sheriff.

MORRIS

Sure.

SHERIFF VALDEZ

(tugs at his own ear lobe)

You have a little something...

Morris picks at his ear and realizes that he has dried blood on him. Immediately wipes away at his ear with the napkin under his drink.

MORRIS

Thanks.

SHERIFF VALDEZ

So how long have you been in town, stranger?

MORRIS

(finishing his drink)

Long enough.

Sheriff Valdez stands up and puts his hand on his holster.

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CONTINUED:

Rob holds the gin in his hand but waits for a break in the tension before he delivers.

SHERIFF VALDEZ

What exactly is that shit on your ear? You got some more on your shoe; where were you this morning?

The patrons begin to notice the brewing altercation at the bar; nothing too serious just yet.

Morris stands up and pushes his stool against the bar.

MORRIS

Seems like you have a lot more questions than you do answers, Sheriff. You don't know me, I don't know you, but I don't think you want to try and drag me into your patrol car for questioning.

The background chatter has halted and the only sound remains is that of the jukebox. The handful of patrons all stare at the situation and a couple of them begin to approach.

Sheriff Valdez looks at them, puts on a fake smile and waves them off.

Rob approaches with the Sheriff's drink.

ROB

Gin, neat. Not sure how you drink the stuff.

Morris looks at the patrons, who all stare at him. He adjusts his suit jacket and walks away to the restroom.

ROB (cont'd)

So what happened over on G? Mrs. Sanchez OK?

Sheriff Valdez watches Morris disappear into the restroom, then sits back down.

SHERIFF VALDEZ

She's fine, more problems with the house next door. This chingon here could be related.

(takes a sip)

When did he come in here and what happened when he did?

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CONTINUED:

ROB

About an hour ago, maybe? That was his second drink. Never said a word other than ordering; everyone stared at him when he came in the way they were just now.

SHERIFF VALDEZ

When he leaves, I'll keep an eye on him.

Sheriff Valdez pulls out a plastic bag with the shell casings.

SHERIFF VALDEZ (cont'd)

Found these. Two shooters, but only the shotgun was at the scene.

Morris comes back to the bar, face and hair a little wet but the blood is all gone. He notices the plastic bag and immediately has a look of realization on his face. He's now in a hurry to leave.

MORRIS

See you around, Sheriff.

SHERIFF VALDEZ

You can count on that, stranger.

Morris pulls a money clip filled with cash out of his pocket, flicks a \$100 bill onto the bar.

MORRIS

You two have a nice evening.

Morris walks toward the front door.

EXT. SMALL BAR - SAME

Morris violently bursts through the front door and pulls out his phone. He stands there anxious while it rings.

When the person on the other end answers, we only hear Morris' side of the call.

MORRIS

Looks like I'll be staying a bit longer than I expected.

(beat)

No.

(beat)

An old lush posing as the Sheriff, shouldn't be too difficult.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MORRIS (cont'd)

(beat)

I need to properly introduce
myself, I'll be in touch.

Morris hangs up the phone.