

AT NIGHT WE WAIT

Written by

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EXT. SUBURBAN BACKYARD - NIGHT

The moon peeks from behind the clouds, illuminates a large oak tree that stands majestically in the middle of the manicured lawn that extends to a shallow, dry canal.

SUPER: Rancho Cordova, CA - 1978

We travel up the trunk to a small, wooden treehouse.

INT. TREEHOUSE - NIGHT

The wooden fort is filled with the ephemera of a teenage boy's childhood:

Baseball cards, books and dice for Dungeons & Dragons, tattered adult magazines clearly liberated from a dumpster, slingshot and bucket with a curated rock collection, posters of George "The Iceman" Gervin, Farrah Fawcett, and Bruce Lee.

A sleeping bag is rolled up in one corner, a cheap telescope points out one of the windows, aimed at the dry canal.

Music leaks from a small transistor radio, then fades to the deejay.

DJ FANDANGO

(from radio)

That's it for me. Up next, it's deejay Diana Dana with the top ten countdown for October 6, 1978 on KZAP, 98.5 on your radio dial, Sacramento's rock legend.

CHARLIE ANDERSON (13) sits crosslegged in his ramshackle domain, walkie-talkie in one hand, the other stuffs his mouth with cookies from a tray of Oreos.

He seems to be waiting for something and his impatience gets the better of him. He holds the walkie up to his ear and presses the talk button.

CHARLIE

Where are you, already? Over.

He waits while STATIC crackles from the walkie.

RITCHIE

(from walkie talkie)

I'm at coordinates 25 west by 10 east.

CHARLIE  
What does that mean? Over.

RITCHIE  
I don't know, I thought it sounded cool.

CHARLIE  
That doesn't help. Over.

RITCHIE  
I'm on the other side of the River Styx, about to traverse the bridge of doom.

CHARLIE  
The what? Over.

RITCHIE  
\*sigh\* I'm crossing the canal on the two-by-four your brother threw across it.

CHARLIE  
Oh, cool. Hurry up.

Nothing but LOW STATIC.

CHARLIE  
Ritchie?

RITCHIE  
You didn't say over.

CHARLIE  
Hurry up, over.

RITCHIE  
I'm hurrying. Jeez, hold your hor-

Ritchie's voice gets cut off. Charlie listens, nothing but LOW STATIC.

CHARLIE  
Ritchie... Ritchie? Where are you... over?

RITCHIE  
Shhhhhhh.

More static.

RITCHIE  
I think I see him.

CHARLIE

Him? Over.

RITCHIE

Yeah, *him*.

Charlie scrambles to a window, no more than a square opening cut out of the wall.

He scans back and forth with the telescope.

CHARLIE

I don't see anything.

RITCHIE

There, a shadow, right under the fort.

Charlie freezes. He goes to respond, then stops, thinking the noise will give him away.

He carefully slides his butt back to the far wall of the treehouse.

Then, footsteps on the wooden ladder, a jiggle on the handle of the trapdoor, the unsettling sound of rope being pulled taught.

Charlie stops breathing, grabs the slingshot, places a rock in the sling, pulls it back and shakily aims it at the trapdoor.

RITCHIE (15) pops up through the trap door with a BANG!

Charlie shuts his eyes, lets fly the rock. It hits the wall a few inches to the side of Ritchie's face.

CHARLIE

Holy shitballs, Ritchie. What in the actual fuck?

Ritchie displays a glorious shiteating grin as he climbs up into the treehouse.

RITCHIE

My brother's right, you really are a chicken shit.

CHARLIE

Dude, you're lucky I can't shoot straight.

RITCHIE

If you had scarred this pretty face, my dad would sue you. I have a Casablancas audition at the mall tomorrow.

Ritchie climbs into the treehouse, lowers the trap door and secures it with a shoestring looped around a bent nail.

CHARLIE

My dad says those things are a scam. You're gonna be sent to Arabia and sold into a harem.

RITCHIE

I should be so lucky. It's either that or trade school like my brother. Sounds like a life of leisure.

CHARLIE

Your asshole will disagree.

RITCHIE

My asshole and I are like this.

Ritchie crosses his fingers. Charlie drops the slingshot on a stack of comics.

CHARLIE

That was fucked up.

Ritchie sits down crosslegged and grabs one of the adult magazines.

RITCHIE

Speaking of assholes.

CHARLIE

Shouldn't we be keeping an eye out?

Ritchie looks at his calculator wristwatch.

RITCHIE

Yeah, ok. I'll take first watch.

Ritchie crawls over to the telescope and peers through. He scans the canal.

RITCHIE

All quiet on the western front, sir.

Ritchie salutes, Charlie busies himself by drawing a dungeon map on graph paper.

CHARLIE

Oh boy this one's gonna get'cha.  
It'll make Tomb of Horrors look  
like The Keep On The Borderlands.

Ritchie glances back to see what Charlie's talking about.

RITCHIE

You're still into that stuff?

CHARLIE

You're not?

RITCHIE

Meh.

CHARLIE

You're not supposed to outgrow  
things before I do.

RITCHIE

I'm a man of the world, Charlie. No  
time for the trivial pursuits of  
the suburban nerd. I have a  
modeling career to think about.  
First-class air travel, nice  
clothes, all the Vuarnet sunglasses  
and MCS Spyders a growing boy could  
want.

CHARLIE

A Bukowski-sized heroin addiction,  
chaffed skin from the manacles. And  
you hate hummus.

RITCHIE

Jealousy does not suit you,  
Charlie.

Ritchie goes back to scanning the canal.

Charlie continues his dungeon mapping. He draws two parallel-lines for a tunnel, then a square room at the end. Inside the room, he writes: "Shadowman". An arrow points at the entrance with "secret door" written in.

CHARLIE

How's your mom?

Ritchie's sly grin fades.

RITCHIE  
Still in the hospital.

CHARLIE  
I know. I mean, how's she doing?

Ritchie continues to scan the canal.

RITCHIE  
I can't get a straight answer from  
my dad.

CHARLIE  
Have you seen her?

RITCHIE  
I'm not allowed.

CHARLIE  
That's fucked.

RITCHIE  
No shit, Sherlock.

Ritchie looks away from the telescope, crawls over to the  
stack of nudie magazines.

While he talks, he grabs a Sharpie and carefully fills-in a  
single tooth on each of the smiling, naked women as he flips  
through the magazine.

CHARLIE  
Hey, don't ruin those.

RITCHIE  
Jeez, Charlie, you don't jack it up  
here, do you? This is our fort, our  
Sankatorium.

CHARLIE  
Sanctum sanctorum.

RITCHIE  
Yeah, that. I don't want you  
painting the walls with your  
splooge. Now that I think of it,  
what exactly is holding up those  
posters? I mean, I don't see any  
thumb tacks.

Charlie throws down his graph paper pad and rips the nudie  
mag from Ritchie's hand.

CHARLIE

Look what you've done to Gwenevere.

He looks at the topless model, her tanga undone, a broad, uneasy grin and a black space where a front tooth should be courtesy of Ritchie's Sharpie.

CHARLIE

Ruined. She's looks absurd.

RITCHIE

Listen man, I draw what I feel, and I felt that she should have the blue collar grin of a third-string hockey goalie.

Charlie hugs the magazine.

CHARLIE

Sorry, my love. I will avenge your honor.

RITCHIE

I knew it. This fort has become your masturbatorium.

CHARLIE

You can pronounce masturbatorium, but not sanctum sanctorum?

RITCHIE

So? What's the difference?

CHARLIE

One is the magical refuge of the Sorcerer Supreme, the other is-

RITCHIE

This treehouse.

Charlie laments the loss of his magazine, Ritchie finds a MadLibs pad and flips to a page.

RITCHIE

I need an adjective.

CHARLIE

You're still on duty.

RITCHIE

Pretty sure it's your turn.

Charlie relents and crawls over to the telescope, sets his eye on the small targeting lens.

RITCHIE  
I definitely don't have pink eye  
any more. I think.

Charlie wipes it off and shoots Ritchie a look.

RITCHIE  
Waiting on that adjective.

CHARLIE  
Throbbing.

RITCHIE  
Ok. And a noun.

CHARLIE  
Dickweed.

RITCHIE  
Heh, good one. I can't help but  
feel these are directed at me.

CHARLIE  
Ya think?

Charlie looks through the scope, focuses on the canal bank  
and the 4X4 plank that spans it. Nothing.

He notices Ritchie has stopped talking and looks back to see  
his friend lost in thought, staring blankly at a point on the  
floor.

CHARLIE  
Ritchie?

He doesn't answer for a moment, then suddenly looks up at  
Charlie.

RITCHIE  
I want to kill him.

Charlie goes to ask who he's talking about, but hesitates...  
he knows.

RITCHIE  
I want to kill him, Charlie. For  
what he did to my mom. For what he  
did to my family. The fucking piece  
of shit.

Ritchie returns his stare to the spot on the floor. Charlie  
can't bare to look at him and pretends to scan the canal.

RITCHIE

Stacy Reynolds' sister is a nurse at the hospital. She tells me how my mom's doing. She said she's bruised from head to toe. Looks like she got into a fight with Andre the Giant. She cries all the time. They have to give her pills to make her sleep. My dad just sits there. Asks her questions, like, what did you do... why us?

Charlie closes his eyes, he wants to hug his friend, comfort him somehow, but is frozen by the horror of it all.

RITCHIE

The asshole is being mean to her, Charlie... mean. *Asshole*.

CHARLIE

Ritchie.

RITCHIE

We need to find the fucker. We have to.

CHARLIE

We will.

Ritchie finally breaks his trance and looks right into Charlie's eyes.

RITCHIE

Promise?

Charlie hesitates, knowing he can't really promise that, but he gives in.

CHARLIE

Promise.

Ritchie manages a weak smile. He rubs his wet eyes, grabs the MadLibs pad.

RITCHIE

Where were we... um, I need a noun.

CHARLIE

Revenge.

Ritchie smiles grimly and writes "REVENGE" in bold, uppercase letters.

RITCHIE  
Good one.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TREEHOUSE - NIGHT

Sometime later, the boys play a hand of UNO, with Ritchie at the telescope and Charlie with his head on the rolled sleeping bag, a fan of cards in his hands.

CHARLIE  
Skip. Reverse.

RITCHIE  
Dick.

Ritchie is about to look down at his cards when he sees something in the telescope's viewfinder.

RITCHIE  
Fuck, Charlie.

CHARLIE  
I can't help it if you always draw  
shit.

RITCHIE  
Shhhh.

Ritchie drops his cards, wraps both hands around the telescope and slowly tracks something.

Charlie crawls over to him.

CHARLIE  
Well?

RITCHIE  
It's him.

CHARLIE  
You said that last time and it was  
a raccoon.

RITCHIE  
This isn't a fucking trash bandit.

CHARLIE  
Lemme see.

Ritchie backs away from the telescope as Charlie looks through.

CHARLIE

I don't see anyth- wait. Is that...

RITCHIE

The bike, look at the bike.

CHARLIE

What's he doing with it? Shit, he's covering it with branches.

RITCHIE

It's him. It's fucking him.

CHARLIE

We don't know for sure. Could be Hobo Monty. He's always scrounging for junk in the canal.

RITCHIE

Monty's barely five-feet, this guy is at least six.

Charlie turns to see his friend flip through the stack of baseball cards and select one. He holds it up for Charlie to see.

RITCHIE

Steve Garvey, 1969 rookie.

He rubs it against his chest, stuffs it in his back pocket.

CHARLIE

Hey, that's my-

RITCHIE

For good luck.

Charlie nods his approval. They close their eyes and pray.

CHARLIE & RITCHIE

Hail Garvey, full of grace, the game is with thee; blessed art thou amongst first basemen, and blessed is the fruit of thy glove, Amen.

Ritchie grabs the slingshot, stuffs a few rocks into his jeans pocket, then crawls to the trap door, lifts it up and lowers himself down.

CHARLIE

Shit, Ritchie. What are you doing? Don't.

RITCHIE  
Keep an eye out. I'm just going to  
follow him.

CHARLIE  
Let's get my dad. Call the cops.

RITCHIE  
Don't be a pussy.

Ritchie drops down out of view as the trapdoor closes.

RITCHIE (O.S.)  
Lock it.

Charlie loops a shoestring around the bent nail to secure the  
trapdoor, then goes back to the telescope.

CHARLIE  
(sotto)  
Come on, Ritchie. Just follow him.

Charlie jumps when the walkie talkie SQUAWKS. Ritchie's  
whispered voice comes out.

RITCHIE  
Come in, Red Leader.

Charlie grabs it and engages the talkback button.

CHARLIE  
Red Leader, here. Over.

RITCHIE  
The fucker is heading over to the  
Varlens house. He's at the hedge  
around their backyard.

CHARLIE  
You know where's he's going. Get  
back here so we can call the cops.  
Over.

RITCHIE  
Not yet.

CHARLIE  
Ritchie.

RITCHIE  
Holy shit, he just took out a ski  
mask. Fuck, it's him. He's going  
through the hedge.

CHARLIE  
Get back here. Over.

RITCHIE  
Shit, I lost him. Gonna follow.

CHARLIE  
Fuck no.

LOW STATIC from the walkie as Charlie waits.

The button is engaged as if Ritchie is going to talk, but it seems to be locked on an open channel. Charlie can hear Ritchie talking to someone.

RITCHIE  
I wasn't following you.

A response comes from a man with Ritchie, but it's too muffled.

RITCHIE  
Is it you?

Another muffled response.

RITCHIE  
Who the fuck is Bonnie?

A LOUD NOISE followed by the sound of the walkie talkie dropped to the ground.

RITCHIE  
I'll fucking kill you. I'll fucking  
kill you.

Sounds of a struggle and then back to the LOW HISS of dead air.

CHARLIE  
Ritchie?

A moment of static and then...

MAN  
Come join your friend. Let's have a  
get-together. Just the three of us.  
In the dark. You can ride on the  
handlebars of my bicycle. I'll take  
you to dreamtown. You'll like it  
there. You and your pal can play  
all the games you want, forever, in  
the house of night.

Charlie is frozen with fear. He can't take his eyes off the walkie talkie in his trembling hand.

He hears a CRUNCH on the leaves under the treehouse.

Footsteps on wooden boards, the SICKENING STRETCH of the rope ladder.

The trap door is forced upward but is held tight by the loop of shoestring around the nail.

The trapdoor slams up, again... again... WHAM! WHAM! So violent, that the nail starts to lift out of the wood frame, the string unravels.

Charlie scurries to the far wall. He reaches for the slingshot but it's gone.

He grabs a rock from the bucket and holds it up.

The trapdoor starts to splinter with every attack. The nail loosens more with a SCREECH.

The sound of each hit is deafening. Charlie drops the rock and holds his hands over his ears, eyes shut tight.

And then, out of the night, someone calls his name.

MR. ANDERSON (O.S.)

Charlie?!

The pounding on the trapdoor stops, an eerie stillness follows.

MR. ANDERSON

Charlie! You in the treehouse?

Charlie is sunned silent.

MR. ANDERSON

You boys had dinner? I got some french bread pizzas in the oven.

One last whisper through the trapdoor.

MAN

I'll see you later, Charlie. Then you'll see your friend, real soon.

A dark stain spreads on the front of Charlie's jeans.

His fingers finally relax and the walkie talkie disengages with a STATIC POP.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

A brunette WOMAN (40s) rolls a hand-truck stacked with file boxes to the back of a mini-van. We only see her from behind or her hands, never her face.

SUPER: Orange County, CA - 2016

The van's rear door is raised and the boxes are placed inside.

Each has a date between 1976 and 1979, and "EAR" in block letters.

The last box, with "April 1978" in Sharpie, slips from her grip and spills a few of its contents onto the floor of the van.

One item is a plastic evidence bag, inside is a blood-stained Steve Garvey rookie baseball card.

She holds it for a moment before stuffing it back in the box.

The rear door slams shut.

CUT TO BLACK.

THE END.