

BLACKWATER ELEGY

written by
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EXT. LAKE - DAY

We see still black water. In SLOW MOTION, the outermost wave of a wake creases through the frame. Then another. And another.

We PAN up to see two old men in a small outboard heading down a canal toward a lake.

CATTAILS -

J.T., the man piloting the boat, now paddles, pushing the boat through a patch of cattails. HOLLIS sits at the bow, bending the cattails aside. Both are in their seventies.

HOLLIS

...so then, after Dub's daddy made that old mud pie, he slung it right at Mr. Delameter. Pow!

J.T.

Who?

HOLLIS

Mr. Delameter. Henry. You-know who's daddy.

J.T.

Uh-huh.

HOLLIS

So that mudpie hits him right in the eye. Knocks him clear back onto his bohunkus. So he's rollin' around, holding his eye, when lo and behold there's Maybell Larkin. She seen what's happened, and she leads Henry off back to her house. Well she and her momma tend to him and what you'd figure'd happen happens and they court the whole rest of the summer and come next summer they're married and two summers after that... he

(motioning)
shows up.

J.T.

What's your point, Hollis? I'm an old man.

HOLLIS

My point is, he starts off as a mudpie and finishes out pretty much the same. Don't seem like much progress. Kinda depressing if you think about it.

J.T.

I'd say that's a lotta talking for so little payoff. What do you think, Charlie?

HOLLIS

Leave him alone.

J.T.

What's the matter?

HOLLIS

You know how superstitious I am.

J.T.

I'm just talking.

HOLLIS

Well just don't... just don't say his name. I don't want you wakin' him up.

J.T.

I swear Hollis, if common sense was money you couldn't mail a postcard.

J.T. pilots the boat to a small clearing inside the cattails, what appears to be a fishing spot.

They wait a moment as the water becomes still.

J.T. (CONT'D)

Alright then, let's do it. Where is he?

HOLLIS

Right here.

Hollis sets a can on the seat between them.

J.T.

In our bait can?

HOLLIS

Uh-huh.

J.T.
Oh Hollis, for Pete's sake.

HOLLIS
I thought it was pretty
appropriate.

J.T.
Sentimental, yeah. Appropriate,
no.

HOLLIS
Well heck J.T., you don't have to
make me feel like a heel. Day's
sad enough as it is.

J.T.
(sighing)
Fine. Let's go.

HOLLIS
I'm not doing it.

J.T.
Why not?

HOLLIS
I just... uh-uh, no.

J.T.
Hollis.

HOLLIS
You should do it, you knew him two
whole years before me.

J.T.
But you were his best friend.

HOLLIS
And as his best friend, by the
power vested in me, I appoint you
to do it.

J.T.
There's nothing to be scared of.

HOLLIS
I'm not... well you're scared as
me.

J.T.
I'm not scared. I just don't think
I'm supposed to do it.

Beat.

HOLLIS
What should we do?

J.T.
Let's fish.

HOLLIS
Good idea. "C" would want us to.

J.T.
I'm sure "C" would like to be here
himself.

HOLLIS
In heaven you get to fish everyday.

J.T.
Heaven?

Hollis turns to J.T. with a dirty look, not appreciating his
implication that their friend didn't make the cut.

HOLLIS
Let's fish.

J.T.
Did you bring bait?

HOLLIS
What's the point of stepping into a
boat 'less you got bait?

LATER -

The guys' cane fishing poles now hover over the water.

J.T.
...so I feel some magazine in the
mailbox and I'm thinking 'this must
be my Today's Fisherman or maybe
the swimsuit issue came early.' So
I pull it out. And you know what
it was? Modern Maturity.

Hollis' blank face fails to deliver the desired indignation.

J.T. (CONT'D)
Modern Maturity. A mature person
doesn't mail dirty limericks to the
mayor until he agrees to make more
handicap spaces. A mature person
doesn't drink a half bottle of
rotgut whiskey and then parade
around the park gazebo in the
middle of the night buck naked.

HOLLIS

That was you?

J.T.'s turn to give a dirty look.

HOLLIS (CONT'D)

You better be careful, J.T., your age.

J.T.

My age what?

HOLLIS

Well, you know how when you're the average Joe Nobody, and you're weird, they'll say 'that Joe Nobody, he's weird.' But if said Joe Nobody gets rich, well sir, now he ain't weird, he's eccentric.

J.T.

What's your point, Hollis?

HOLLIS

My point is, you. When you were younger, the stunts you pulled, you were "wild and crazy." You do that stuff now, you're "senile." They catch you, they'll lock you up in the old people's home.

J.T.

They're already trying to.

HOLLIS

Who.

J.T.

More or less. My family. With the subscription. The non-slip mat in the shower, that g-d ginko crap they make me swallow. They see J.T. Forrester: Old Man. That's my new job now, that's my new address. I just want to shake 'em and say 'you don't know me. You don't know my history. You don't know that I limp cause a Jerry eighty-eight millimeter shattered my knee in the war. You don't know I met Ernest Hemingway at a bullfight in Madrid and drank with him til sunup. You don't know I've read every book by Kierkegaard or that I backpacked across South America.' They don't know and they don't care.

HOLLIS

We're W-W-Two. They're W-W-W.

J.T.

You know The Middle Ages, what else they called them? The 'Dark Ages'. And now I know why. And if the middle ones are dark, then what the hell comes after that? Charl--

Hollis turns sharply.

J.T. (CONT'D)

"C", got off easy.

HOLLIS

"C" ended up talking through a tube in his throat.

J.T.

Yeah, but it all worked out, didn't it? Mavis'll be sitting pretty after her settlement.

Silence.

HOLLIS

I believe I want a cold drink.

He opens the cooler and pulls out a drink.

HOLLIS (CONT'D)

You want one?

J.T.

Okay.

Hollis hands one to J.T., closes the cooler, and sits back.

HOLLIS

Whatever happened to Rock Creek Cola?

J.T.

They don't make it anymore.

HOLLIS

I wonder why.

J.T.

Don't know.

Silence.

HOLLIS

Rock Creek Cola was a good drink.

J.T.

Yes it was.

Hollis looks concerned. He pulls up his line to check his bait: still there. He lowers it back into the water.

HOLLIS

Do you believe we get what we
deserve at the end?

J.T.

(uninterested)

I don't know.

J.T. feels Hollis' eyes on him, waiting for him to reciprocate the question.

J.T. (CONT'D)

Hollis, do you believe we get what
we deserve at the end?

HOLLIS

What I believe and what I hope are
two different things altogether.
Do we get what we deserve?
Probably.
But what I hope is that, before we
do, maybe we get one chance to say
something, just this one moment
when the timing is right and
everything is ordered just so and we
get to speak something, some piece
of wisdom we've picked up during
this long, hard trip, and we say it
and maybe the wind picks it up and
carries it to someone else who
needs to hear it right then and
then maybe their trip won't be so
hard.

(beat)

Do you ever get afraid?

He pauses as he half turns to J.T., then continues.

HOLLIS (CONT'D)

I do. I get afraid. Of being
around my family, that I'll be a
burden to them. But I get afraid
of being alone, too. That doesn't
make sense, does it? No. That's a
contradiction. It's bad enough our
bodies betray us, but now my mind
does too.

(sighs, eyes getting
misty)

Sometimes I just think about how
many people are out there in the

world, feeling alone. All of us.
Walking next to each other, feeling
alone. Working together, feeling
alone. Breathing, living, fishing--

J.T.

Hollis, please, don't get yourself
all worked up, alright? Ain't
nothin' sadder than some old fart
crying. Let's talk about something
else.

HOLLIS

I want to talk about this.

J.T.

I'm trying to fish.

HOLLIS

But this is something on my mind.

J.T.

Can we do it later?

HOLLIS

Alright, let's talk about the
weather. That okay?

J.T.

(relieved)

Yes.

HOLLIS

Let's talk about the goddamn
weather.

(nearly yelling)

It sure is sunny today. I'll say.
Can you believe the weather we've
been having? My, my, I hope it
lasts. The weatherman said
yesterday was a record high. You
don't say.

(back to J.T.)

Yes, J.T., let's talk about the
weather, 'cause guys like you and
me, we're young, and we got all the
time in the world to talk about
things that matter.

J.T.

Godamighty, what's gotten into you?
Are you off your medication?

J.T. forces a laugh.

HOLLIS

You like to tease me 'cause I think

about things. You think I'm simple, I'm a fool. But you make fun of things you know nothing about and that makes you a bigger fool than I'll ever be.

J.T. stares in stunned silence. Blinks.

J.T.
Well hell, Hollis, if... I mean, if you want talk about fear and all then...

Hollis' shakes his head as if to say 'that wasn't my point.'

J.T. sits thinking. His face changes from tense to sober as he remembers something.

J.T. (CONT'D)
I'll tell you about a time. When I had my cancer. I wasn't scared of that though. I figured, we all have a death coming, at least I get to look mine in the eye. Then one day the doctor does the test and poof -- gone. Not in remission, not even on the radar. Completely disappeared, no explanation. And that's when I got scared, because something like that smells like a miracle. And you know I don't go in for all that. But there it was, right on doc-o's print out, that... mystery.

HOLLIS
God healed you.

J.T.
That isn't exactly comforting, Hollis. If there is a God, then I really am screwed.

HOLLIS
But at least you wouldn't be alone.

A significant pause.

J.T.
I uh...
(clears his throat)
Sorry about making fun of you. You know, this day and all. And I understand that's what's got you all boogered.

Hollis looks away, brow furrowed.

J.T. (CONT'D)
You alright?

Hollis shakes his head.

J.T. (CONT'D)
What's the matter?

HOLLIS
I gotta tell you something. Been
weighing me down. For a while now.

J.T.
(carefully)
Alright.

HOLLIS
Me and Mavis, we had a thing.

J.T.
Hollis! When?

HOLLIS
Summer forty-eight.

J.T. does some math.

J.T.
Not forty-eight.

HOLLIS
Yes.

J.T.
No.

HOLLIS
J.T...

J.T.
No, they were married spring of
forty-eight.

Hollis nods sorrowfully. J.T. sits back in his seat, taking
in this revelation. After a moment he smiles and shakes his
head.

J.T. (CONT'D)
No, you're figuring wrong.

HOLLIS
Uh-uh.

J.T.
Nope. No.

HOLLIS

J.T., please...

J.T.

Hollis, your memory ain't what it used to be, okay? That's all. You're just misremembering.

HOLLIS

NO! No, no, no. That's what happened. I know that's what happened and when it happened. I was there. I remember... I remember she'd play Glenn Miller real loud on the Victrola after "C" left so I could just happen by and I'd know. I remember the pattern on their bedspread was two little yellow stripes next to a big yellow stripe. I remember she'd put his picture face down before and I'd set it back up 'cause I didn't care. I wanted him to watch us. I wanted him to see that she was mine, not his. Wasn't any wedding band that would change that.

(beat)

I keep losing more and more of my memories and every night I pray that when I wake up the next morning, this will be one of them.

Silence.

HOLLIS (CONT'D)

Just tell me I'm alright, J.T. Okay? Just tell me this is how it plays out for everybody and I promise I'll believe you.

J.T.

I don't know what to tell you, except that wherever "C" is, he doesn't give a damn what happened now.

HOLLIS

There's just these certain things that even when you let go of them, they don't let go of you. That's a lousy thing to carry for so long.

J.T.

(dawning)

And this is your last chance to put things right with him.

Hollis nods in silence.

J.T. (CONT'D)
Are you square now?

Long pause. Finally, a small nod.

HOLLIS
I think so.

Silence.

J.T.
I think so, too.

Another moment passes, then Hollis takes the can, opens it, and gracefully decants the ashes in an arc across the still water.

HOLLIS
Goodnight, Charlie. See you soon.

A breeze plays over the water and riffs through the pair's remaining, graying hair, unbeknownst to them, fulfilling Hollis' wish.

J.T. looks out across the water, speaking aloud, but not necessarily to Hollis.

J.T.
And we love and toil and rage and
dance and turn, turn, turn and
nothing changes, but everything
changes and we think that these
ties that bind us to each other are
holding us back, hemming us in but
you realize, you realize that
they're actually holding us
together and that without them we'd
fly apart into a million pieces
and we dwell in that gap between
the way things are and the way we
thought they would be and between
the hurt we perpetrate and the love
we receive and pass on we get lost,
so easy we get lost and this moment
is quickly passing but listen to
me: in the end though, wouldn't
you agree that it's amazing? Isn't
it amazing?

HOLLIS
Let's go home. The fish aren't
biting anyway.

J.T.
They never do.

J.T. starts to pull the start cord on the engine, when Hollis stops him.

HOLLIS

J.T.

J.T.

Huh.

HOLLIS

Do you think reincarnation is real?

J.T.

God, I hope not. I'm too tired to do all of this again.

He CRANKS the engine and they motor off.

We HOLD on the black water until it once again becomes placid.

FADE OUT.