

"Over There!"

By

Glenn Campbell

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www.KilroyCafe.com

702-812-0400

July 29, 2008

Screenplay #4

The screen is black. We hear a scratchy and staticy recording of an old George M. Cohen song, the World War I standard "Over There"...

Over There, Over There
 Send the word, send the word,
 Over There
 That the Yanks are coming,
 The Yanks are coming,
 The drums rum tumming everywhere...

While the song is playing, we...

FADE IN:

EXT. - A SMALL AMERICAN CITY - 1917 - DAY

With the song playing in the background, we see grainy black-and-white archive footage of World War I soldiers marching off to war. It is a great celebration, and the whole community has turned out to see the young men off. There are streamers in the air and much waving from the sidelines. The scratchy song continues...

So prepare,
 Say a Prayer
 Send the word,
 Send the word to beware
 We'll be over, we're coming over.
 And we won't be back till it's over
 over there!

Initially, we see this scene like a faded memory, something quaint and remote to us. But then the graininess of the film fades to clear color, and the scratchiness of the music turns to clean sound and now we are there! It's our young men marching off to war!

We see a block formation of about 100 young soldiers marching down Main Street. They are strong, handsome, enthusiastic young men, eager to defend their country and prove themselves in battle.

As the formation marches down the street in unison, a brightly dressed YOUNG WOMAN breaks into their ranks. She is no older than 20. Her long, luxurious hair flows behind her as she disrupts the soldiers' orderly

march. She weaves energetically through the maze of young men looking for her man. She cries out...

YOUNG WOMAN

Alan!

There he is: the YOUNG SOLDIER! He is in the middle of the ranks. He looks both embarrassed and thrilled to see his new wife coming toward him. The other young soldiers around him exchange smiles.

The YOUNG WOMAN reaches the YOUNG SOLDIER, throws her arms around his neck and kisses him full on the lips.

The YOUNG SOLDIER is thrown off balance. This is not the time or place for such a thing, but the YOUNG WOMAN virtually overpowers the YOUNG SOLDIER. He is trying to march forward with his platoon, but his wife is holding him back. The other soldiers flow around the couple. The YOUNG SOLDIER looks up from his wife's embrace to see his DRILL SARGEANT looking sternly at him in disapproval.

Forcefully, the YOUNG SOLDIER pulls away from the YOUNG WOMAN.

YOUNG SOLDIER
(yelling back to her)

I'll write as soon as I can!

He then races to catch up to the rest of the platoon, leaving the YOUNG WOMAN behind in the street.

YOUNG WOMAN
(shouting behind him)

I'll always wait for you!

FADE TO BLACK

In the blackness, we hear the sounds of a World War I battlefield. Shells whistle through the air, then explode.

FADE IN:

EXT. - WORLD WAR I BATTLEFIELD - SOMEWHERE IN EUROPE

In C.U., we see the head and shoulders of the YOUNG SOLDIER, frozen in terror. His eyes are wide open, and his hair is standing straight up. He isn't moving.

The camera rotates 180 degrees to reveal that the YOUNG SOLDIER is actually hanging upside down, dead.

We pull back to reveal that his body is hanging out of a trench in a grim killing field. There are other dead soldiers all around him.

We hear the whistle of another shell in the air. As it explodes we...

CUT TO BLACK

The screen remains black and silent for a beat.

FADE IN:

EXT. - A PARK IN A SMALL AMERICAN CITY - 1919 - DAY

In C.U., we see a stone monument recently erected in a city park in the same small American city. The monument is engraved...

FOR OUR SONS WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES
IN THE GREAT WAR

We then scan down a long list of male names until we stop at one name...

ALAN T. BEDELL

A woman's hand comes into the frame. With her finger, she gently traces the outline of the letters engraved in the stone: A-L-A-N-T-B-E-D-E-L-L.

The hand then pulls away and pauses, as if thinking.

The hand is withdrawn, and we turn to see who it is attached to.

It's the YOUNG WOMAN. She seems much older now. All of her energy is gone. Her previously flowing hair is now tied up in a tight bun.

She is not crying. In fact, her face shows no emotion at all.

She draws her hand to her mouth and gently kisses it.

FADE TO BLACK

The screen remains black and silent for a beat, then audio fades in:

In the blackness, we hear the sounds of a modern city. There are traffic noises and a distant siren.

FADE IN:

INT - FOYER OF NEW YORK CITY APARTMENT BLDG - 1990

We are in the small vestibule of a New York City apartment building, near the end of the Twentieth Century. This is the public foyer where there is a mailbox and doorbell button for each apartment, about twenty of each. One door of the foyer opens to the street and is brightly lit, while the other leads to a dark inner hallway and staircase. The inner door is locked, and you can only go through it with a key or by being buzzed in by a resident. Although this is close to the modern day, everything in the foyer seems antique. This building was built around the 1930s and hasn't changed much since then.

A DELIVERY MAN, in a modern FEDEX uniform, comes in through the outer door carrying a package.

He searches the long vertical line of antique doorbell buttons until he finds the name he is looking for...

MRS. ALAN T. BEDELL

He presses the button, but there is no sound. This is not unusual, because the apartment is probably far away, and the buzzer can't be heard from here.

The DELIVERY MAN presses the button again.

CUT TO:

INT - OLD WOMAN'S APARTMENT

Now we hear the door buzzer. It is very loud.

We are inside a dimly lit apartment, looking at an OLD WOMAN sitting in an antique padded chair. Her gray hair is tied up in a tight bun. Her head is bent over, so we can't see much of her face.

The door buzzer is heard again, but the woman doesn't move.

The woman could be asleep - or dead!

Slowly, we pull back to see the rest of her apartment. It is the typical apartment of a cloistered elderly person, filled with memories frozen in time.

We hear an old mechanical clock going...

TICK, TOCK, TICK, TOCK...

The buzzing has stopped, indicating that the DELIVERY MAN has probably given up. We continue to slowly pull back, away from the woman, as the clock goes...

TICK, TOCK, TICK, TOCK...

Then we hear a "click" and the sound of gears turning.

The clock strikes one.

CUT TO:

INT - STAIRWELL OF APARTMENT BUILDING

We are looking straight down the open stairwell of the dingy 1930s-era apartment house. We are on the fourth floor, and we can look all the way down to the first. A stairway spirals around the open center.

There is motion and sound near the bottom of the stairway indicating that several people are climbing it, awkwardly carrying something large.

As they get closer to our level, we see that it is two PARAMEDICS carrying a stretcher. They are being lead

by the BUILDING SUPERINTENDENT, a middle-aged man who is nervously trying to make conversation.

BUILDING SUPERINTENDENT

She was a very good tenant. Always paid her rent on time. She's been here since the building opened. No one had seen her since Thursday. The other people on the floor were worried, so they asked me to check.

CUT TO:

INT. - OLD WOMAN'S APARTMENT

We are looking at the door of the apartment from the inside. We hear a key being inserted and a locked being turned, and the door opens. The BUILDING SUPERINTENDENT holds the door open and the PARAMEDICS pass through with the stretcher.

The BUILDING SUPERINTENDENT looks at the old woman sitting in the chair on the other side of the room. He isn't comfortable with death and doesn't care to approach any closer.

The PARAMEDICS set up the stretcher in the middle of the room then begin to assess the condition of the body. Unlike the Super, these men feel no discomfort here. They're just doing their job.

PARAMEDIC #1

Yeah, she's been dead a couple days at least.

PARAMEDIC #2

This is going to be a challenge. Look, she's almost falling apart.

The BUILDING SUPERINTENDENT turns away uncomfortably. He tries to find something to distract himself with as the PARAMEDICS work.

The clock goes...

TICK, TOCK, TICK, TOCK...

The Super turns his attention to a wall where the woman's memories are displayed. There are a lot of old photos and news clippings here, all of them neatly framed and impeccably arranged. He deliberately concentrates on this display to take his mind away from the unpleasantness in the room.

There is a faded wedding photo of the YOUNG WOMAN and the YOUNG SOLDIER, both of them beaming. Beside it is a browned but neatly framed and well-preserved newspaper clipping:

MURIAL WHITE AND ALAN BEDELL WED
IN GARDEN CEREMONY

Moving along, we see another clipping attesting to Bedell's prowess in some kind of sport...

BEDELL SAVES GAME IN FINAL
SECONDS

Another clipping is even more dramatic. It's a front page headline that reads...

YOUNG MOTORCYCLIST TAKES CROSS-
COUNTRY RECORD: NEW YORK TO SAN
FRANCISCO IN 5 DAYS, 17 HOURS

Below the headline is a grainy photo of the YOUNG SOLDIER beside his vintage motorcycle.

After a few minutes of examination, the BUILDING SUPERINTENDENT realizes there is a common thread to everything on this wall -- indeed everything displayed in the apartment. Everything here concerns Alan Bedell, and there is nothing dated after 1917.

The super's reverie is broken by...

PARAMEDIC #1

Dude, it's not going to work. We have to get the sheet under her first. There's nothing holding her together.

The Super turns back to the wall. One headline is illuminating...

OUR BOYS - OFF TO WAR!

It is accompanied by a grainy news photo of the same platoon we saw earlier, marching in formation.

Very faintly, but growing slowly louder, we hear the same stratchy song we heard at the beginning...

Over there!
Over there!
Send the word, send the word
to beware...

CUT TO:

INT. - OLD WOMAN'S BEDROOM

We are looking at the closed door of the OLD WOMAN'S bedroom, from the inside. We still hear the faint sound of the song, but now the scratchiness is removed.

The Yank's are coming,
The Yank's are coming.
The drums rum tumming everywhere...

The door slowly opens and the BUILDING SUPERINTENDENT pokes his head cautiously inside.

It is a bedroom frozen in time, with furniture dating from the beginning of the century. Nothing in the bedroom speaks of 1990. It's all from 1917!

The queen-size bed is unmade, and the blankets are bunched up on one side. As the Super gets closer, it becomes clear that there is someone lying in the bed, under the blankets.

Slowly, cautiously, the Super approaches the bed. All along, the song is getting louder and louder...

So prepare,
Say a Prayer
Send the word,
Send the word to beware
We'll be over, we're coming over..

With a sense of dread, the Super pulls back the blankets to reveal...

A soldier!

The Super pulls back in horror!

Actually, it is only a department store mannequin, dressed in the formal uniform of a World War I U.S. infantry soldier. The mannequin's eyes are staring blankly at the ceiling.

The music is quite loud now. We hear the song but the Super apparently doesn't.

His fear abating, the Super scans the uniform for some kind of identification. Indeed, he finds it on the mannequin's chest: a name tag...

PVT. ALAN T. BEDELL

Simultaneously, the song comes loudly to its final words...

And we won't be back till it's over
over there!

CUT TO BLACK

THE END