

Fire Ground

by

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FADE IN:

An ambulance, running hot, cautiously threads its way through a congested intersection.

It accelerates toward an opening in the traffic, but a HOMELESS MAN suddenly wheels his loaded shopping cart into the street. The ambulance barely stops in time.

INT. -- AMBULANCE

PONFO MORENO, in his 40's, overlarge and with a cruel face, catches himself on the dashboard and slams it with his fist.

PONFO

Run him over, you son of a bitch.

The DRIVER, not daring to look over at Ponfo, tries to maneuver around the Homeless Man, who is now pounding on the front of the ambulance and screaming in at the Driver.

IN THE BACK OF THE AMBULANCE

An AMBULANCE WORKER is doing compressions on an OLDER WOMAN strapped to a stretcher.

JACK COYNE, in his 30's, obviously fit, an Ashford Fire Department Paramedic patch on one arm of his uniform shirt, speaks calmly into a medical radio.

JACK

I have a 66 year old, white female
in full arrest. Algorithm complete.
ETA to your facility is zero three.
What do you--

Ponfo crashes into the back and knocks Jack down. He grabs the Worker and throws him against the side of the ambulance.

Now he pulls the tube out of the Older Woman's throat, kneels next to her, and starts mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Jack grabs the defibrillator paddles and moves toward Ponfo.

JACK

Ponfo, get back in the front.

PONFO

You'll kill her with those.

Ponfo reaches into his pocket and starts to pull out a box cutter, but Jack kicks him in the face before he can get it open. Ponfo sprawls into the passageway to the front.

Jack presses the paddles to the Older Woman's chest.

PONFO (CONT.)

You hurt my mother, I'll kill you.

JACK

You get back in front and maybe I can save her. Now CLEAR.

Jack hits her with the charge and her body jumps, but she doesn't come around. Ponfo struggles up to watch, dread and murder in his eyes at once.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. -- CEMETERY -- DAY

We move along a row of ornate mausoleums, their bases rooted in snow, until we reach a new grave. A mountain of funeral bouquets obscures all but a corner of the frozen dirt.

Ponfo is walking back and forth, erratically, behind the new, black gravestone which reads:

ROSANNA GIL MORENO

BORN -- September 9, 1928

LOST -- December 8, 1994

YOUR SON WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER

We see the determination in Ponfo's face as he walks, then centered, under her name, a much younger portrait of Ponfo's mother in an oval frame, fixed permanently to the gravestone.

EXT. -- SHOPPING PLAZA -- DAY

A black Corvette, with fully tinted windows, is parked inconspicuously between cars in the Ashford Plaza lot.

INT. -- CORVETTE

Ponfo is cleaning his fingernails with a manicurist's nail tool. In his down parka, he fills up half the Corvette.

SHOWTIME, a muscular man in his early 20's, clearly a weightlifter, is nervously watching the front of Plaza Liquors. He wears a light sweatshirt with the hood up, and a pair of blue, paramedic trauma gloves.

SHOWTIME

Hurry up, bitch.

PONFO

Showtime, did you hear me?

Showtime doesn't turn toward Ponfo, but he's listening.

PONFO (CONT.)

I want him to suffer.

Showtime turns now.

SHOWTIME

So do him now?

PONFO

I can kill him anytime. Just let him know I won't forget.

INT. -- PLAZA LIQUORS -- DAY

"Here Comes Santa Claus," sung by Elvis Presley, is playing on the store radio.

BARBARA, a middle-aged professor's wife, in a camel's hair overcoat, has her arms full of expensive liqueurs. Jack Coyne moves from behind the cash register to help her. Even here he walks with determination, like a middleweight approaching a ring.

Before he can reach her, she lets a bottle of Irish Mist slip. It smashes, and Jack leaps to catch another bottle as it falls.

JACK

It's all right, Barbara. Leave it.
Grab another one.

Jack takes the rest of the bottles and starts back to the register. Barbara slides a bottle of Stolichnaya into her coat pocket as he walks away. Then she takes down another bottle of Irish Mist and follows him to the front.

BARBARA

Sorry, Jack. Charge me for that, okay? I don't know -- I get jumpy like this every Christmas.

Jack is ringing up the sale. As Barbara lifts up the cartoon calendar page that announces 14 SHOPPING DAYS UNTIL XMAS, Jack leans over, tears off number 14 and throws it away. Barbara laughs at the next cartoon, then hands him a hundred dollar bill.

BARBARA (CONT.)

It's the shopping, you know, then Ray's mother fell at Heritage House and broke her hip, and all these endless faculty parties.

Jack hands Barbara her change. Then he reaches into her pocket and pulls out the Stoli. He nestles that bottle in among her others and hands her the bag.

JACK

Merry Christmas, Barbara.

Barbara takes the bag from him and hurries out. Jack walks back and starts to clean up the Irish Mist. The phone rings, and Jack answers the extension on the desk in back.

JACK (CONT.)

Plaza Liquors . . . Jennifer, hey, what's up? . . . Whoa, hold it, I can't get into this now.

The front door's electric eye beeps, and Jack turns to see who came in, but there's no one there.

JACK (CONT.)

Jen, come on. You know your mother's in charge. If you take off to live with me, she'll just--

A long, serrated steak knife suddenly appears at Jack's throat. Showtime, snake-thin, motions to Jack to end the call.

JACK (CONT.)

Jen, sorry, got a customer. Love you.

Jack puts the phone on the desk and Showtime hangs it up.

SHOWTIME

Going up front now.

JACK

Relax, pal. You're the boss. You've got the knife.

Showtime steers Jack to the register and then hides behind him, but he keeps the knife at Jack's throat. He hands Jack a K-Mart shopping bag and Jack drops all the bills in it.

SHOWTIME

That all the money? . . . What you got in that drawer?

JACK

Rolls of coins.

SHOWTIME

That's money, ain't it, Jack.

Jack tenses when Showtime knows his name. He picks up the penny rolls, but Showtime knocks them out of his hand.

SHOWTIME (CONT.)

Not that shit. Get the quarters.

JACK

Make up your mind, will you?

Jack drops the quarter rolls into the bag.

SHOWTIME

That all you got?

JACK

That's everything. Have a nice day.

Now Showtime works the knife in enough to draw blood, and Jack drops the bag. He moves the knife to Jack's ear.

SHOWTIME

Now we going in back, asshole. Ponfo
want this ear for his collection.
You remember Ponfo?

Jack takes a couple of steps toward the back and then whirls to hit Showtime, who panics and stabs Jack twice in the chest. Jack gets off a punch that blocks his third swing, then Jack grabs his knife hand and they both go down. Showtime falls heavily on top of him, and Jack wrestles the knife away.

JACK

You want your fucking knife back?
Here, take it.

Jack connects with the knife, burying it halfway to its handle in Showtime's upper arm. Showtime rips it out and swings it at Jack's face. Jack moves, and the blade snaps against the floor.

Showtime punches wildly at Jack's head now, but Jack grabs him by the balls and twists until Showtime tumbles off to one side.

Now Jack pulls himself up by the counter. Showtime is still groaning, but Jack can hear him struggling to get back on his feet. He grabs a pint bottle of Smirnoff's vodka from the wall near the register and smashes it squarely into Showtime's forehead as he advances. It breaks, but Showtime doesn't even stop to wince.

Showtime throws Jack across the store and Jack slams into the Cordials section. Bottles of brandy and schnappes explode off the shelves, hitting Jack as he falls and shattering all around him. Showtime hurries over to finish him off.

SHOWTIME

You remember Ponfo's mother?

Showtime picks up an unbroken brandy bottle and splinters it over Jack's head.

SHOWTIME (CONT.)

Stay down, motherfucker.

Jack rolls onto his hands and knees and tries to stand.

JACK

When I get up you'll . . .

Showtime roundhouses another brandy bottle into his head.

SHOWTIME

Lay down, asshole, you dead and
don't know it yet.

JACK

. . . sorry you ever came in here.

Jack struggles to his feet, but he's covered with blood and swaying in place. He still tries to swing at Showtime, but his eyes are full of blood, and he keeps missing. Showtime puts a choke hold on him, forcing him to his knees again, but he seems to remember Ponfo's orders now. He grabs Jack's ear and tries to tear it off, but there's too much blood and Showtime's glove keeps slipping.

SHOWTIME

Ponfo gonna kill you one piece at a
time, you sorry fuck.

Suddenly Jack points out the window.

JACK

The cops just pulled up. You're
screwed now.

Showtime abruptly throws Jack to the floor. He lunges for the K Mart bag and then runs toward the back of the store.

JACK (CONT.)

I hope your ass is ready for jail.

Jack crawls toward the phone next to the register.

INT. -- BEAUTY SALON -- DAY

SALLY is showing a WOMAN how to apply exfoliant when Jack staggers into the store. He's so bloody that only his eyes are white. We can hear a distant siren, growing louder.

JACK

Hey, Sally, it's me. I'm all right.

Jack slips on his own blood and falls back against the door. Sally screams, and the Woman backs against the wall.

SALLY

Oh, my God.

JACK

It's just a head wound. They bleed a lot.

Jack slides slowly down the door until he's sitting, and the Woman tries to get past him. The siren is closer.

WOMAN

My husband is right outside, waiting for me. I can see him.

JACK

Don't let me stop you. Just don't step on me, okay?

Jack's blood is spreading on the floor in a circle around Jack, and the Woman doesn't want to step in it. Sally is moaning.

JACK (CONT.)

Sally, I need a towel. You got towels, right? My hair's wet.

An Ashford Fire Department emergency medical truck, its siren still wailing, stops in front of the store. The Woman starts out the door now.

TOM LASKEY, a tall fire lieutenant in his early 30's, carrying a trauma box and an oxygen bag, runs to the door and startles her. She steps back, and Jack falls over against her leg, making her scream. Tom pushes the door enough to squeeze through.

WAYNE PAUL, in his mid-20's, trim, with a waxed handlebar moustache and carrying a heart monitor, has to push the door even more to get the monitor through. As he does, the Woman, still hollering, rushes out behind him.

TOM

What's your name, buddy?

Tom is pulling on his blue trauma gloves and Wayne is setting up the monitor. Sally comes up now, jabbering.

SALLY

I thought he was a robber, all that blood on him, I thought he had a red ski mask, I didn't mean to--

TOM

Calm down, okay? We're here. We need some towels, a pile of them. Hurry up.

(into his radio)

Dispatcher, portable 301. Get a zone car to Ashford Plaza beauty shop, and dispatch the Rescue Squad. I'll need an ETA on the ambulance.

DISPATCHER (O.S.)

Received. Zero-nine-forty.

Jack is lying half on his face now, and Tom gently rolls him over onto his back.

TOM

Hey, pal, what's your name?

JACK

It's me, Tom.

TOM

Okay, Tom. That's my name, too.

Sally dumps a stack of towels next to Tom, as he starts to cut up the front of Jack's shirt. Jack grabs Tom's arm.

JACK

It's me . . . It's Jack.

WAYNE

Jesus, Tom, it's Jack Coyne.

For a second, that doesn't register. Then Tom drops the scissors and wipes the blood away from Jack's face.

TOM

Shit, man. What happened?

Jack is slipping in and out of consciousness now, his eyes closing and popping back open. Tom rips the rest of Jack's shirt and finds the two chest wounds, still oozing blood.

TOM

Wayne, give me two occlusive dressings, the 4 by 4's in the middle drawer. Hang in there, Jack.

Tom applies the dressings and Wayne wipes more blood from Jack's head, searching for wounds there. Jack opens his eyes.

JACK

I could go for a cigarette, Tom.

TOM

What are you, nuts? All this blood, you couldn't keep it lit.

Wayne finds a long gash and lifts a bloody shard out of it.

WAYNE

Shit, look at this.

JACK

I know the guy, Tom. We worked on him, that double . . . the shooting up in . . . last summer.

Wayne holds up a trauma dressing and Tom tapes it in place.

TOM

Stay with me, Jack. We'll get him.

JACK

Better me than some kid working for college, Tom. . . some old lady couldn't fight him . . . it's better me . . . better . . .

Jack closes his eyes.

TOM

Jack. . . Jack, hang in there.
(into his radio)

Dispatcher, this is 301. I need an
ETA on that ambulance. Where the
hell are they?

DISPATCHER (O.S.)
301, I'm still trying on that.
Ashford says they've got two units
still tied up at Heritage House. No
ETA available yet.

Tom lays two fingers on Jack's neck and searches for a
carotid pulse.

TOM
Jack, come on. Stay with me.

FADE TO A BLACK SCREEN

TITLE: THREE WEEKS LATER

The sound of harsh breathing. Short, quick breaths. Now we hear
a sharp intake of breath, and a straining to hold it in. Then a
raw coughing that doesn't sound like it will stop.

INT. -- FILTHY APARTMENT -- NIGHT

The red glow of crack incandescing in a glass pipe faintly
illuminates a YOUNG WOMAN'S face as she tries to inhale again.
She kneels at an open window, dressed only in a large man's
dress shirt. She can't hold it in this time either, and when she
starts coughing again, she falls against the windowsill and hits
her forehead. A sawed-off shotgun lies on the floor against the
wall, its handle under her knees.

EXT. -- STREET

A gold stretch limo idles in front of the Young Woman's building,
on her side of the street. Its exhaust hugs the ground and
billows in the cold air.

A neon sign that reads WHITE'S GRILL, but with the H burned out,
buzzes on the building across from hers.

TWO MEN and a WOMAN, each dressed in formal wear, stumble out of
White's. The night air hits them, and the Woman pulls one Man
quickly toward the waiting car. The other Man trips and falls in

the middle of the street. As he gets up, he sees the Young Woman above and he waves.

MAN

Hey you up there, Happy New Year.
What you doing, girl?

He begins to dance, sloppily, and sing to her.

MAN (CONT.)

Good morning, lil' school girl. Come
on home . . . won't you come home.

BACK IN THE APARTMENT

The Young Woman shivers suddenly, and drops the glass pipe. It shatters on the wooden floor. She struggles up, dragging the shotgun with her, and holds it up so he can see it. She smiles as the Man below hurries into the limo and takes off.

Around her, it's a mess: dirty plates, empty beer bottles, crumpled potato chip bags, filthy clothes, all of them strewn everywhere. She walks through the mess, not caring what she steps on, and flops onto the couch. She lays the shotgun in her lap. She reaches for a phone on the coffee table.

INT. -- BEDROOM -- NIGHT

An ornately framed photograph of Rosanna Moreno on a dresser, with a palm-wrapped crucifix propped against her. We hear sounds of love-making. A woman is groaning in pain.

WOMAN (O.S.)

Ponfo, what are you . . . Ponfo, the
baby. Get off me . . . get off.

Next to the dresser sits a large, cork bulletin board, covered with news clippings of firefighters at work. In the center of it hangs an Ashford Fire Department calendar.

Ponfo is kneeling on the bed, with the woman we heard, YVONNE, curled in front of him. She is only in her late teens, but weariness is already showing in her face. She looks about five months pregnant. We can see Ponfo's sculpted, prison physique now as he pushes too roughly into her. He's enjoying Yvonne's pain.

The flip phone next to the bed rings, and Yvonne knocks a dirty plate and fork off the nightstand as she hurries to answer it.

When she recognizes the voice, she hands the phone to Ponfo, and tries to squirm away from him. He pulls out of her, but with his free arm he easily holds her legs.

PONFO

Who wants me?

BACK IN THE YOUNG WOMAN'S FILTHY APARTMENT

The Young Woman holds the phone out in front of her.

YOUNG WOMAN

You listening, Ponfo? You listen good. This is for your new baby.

She moves the phone near her stomach, where she is pressing the barrel of the shotgun. She arches her back off the couch so she can look up at the ceiling and pulls the trigger.

INT. -- PONFO'S BEDROOM

Ponfo recoils from the phone and holds it out at arm's length. Then, expressionless, he brings it back slowly to his ear, listens for a few seconds, and then turns it off.

He drops it onto the floor, and tries to twist Yvonne back into a receptive position. She scratches his arms and struggles to get away. He grabs her by the hair, hits her twice in the face, and twists her onto her stomach. Now he pushes roughly into her again. She grips the rungs of the headboard and screams.

After a few seconds, though, Yvonne begins to sob. Ponfo pulls out of her again and sits on the side of the bed.

PONFO

That's enough, Yvonne.

Yvonne keeps sobbing. Ponfo picks the plate up and smashes it against the wall. He glares down at her, and she stops. Now Ponfo picks up the fork and walks to the dresser. He adjusts his mother's crucifix and palm so her face is not obscured, then he moves to the bulletin board.

In one of the clippings there, Jack Coyne is carrying a small, injured boy in front of a tenement. Ponfo tears this picture off and positions it over January 1st on the calendar. He holds the fork poised against Jack's face for a couple of seconds before he slowly pushes it through and into the bulletin board.

