

No Man's Land

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Made in Highland

NOTE: This film is in the style of a mysterious, black and white *Twilight Zone* episode.

The screen is black but we hear the staticky voice of a RADIO HOST on a car-radio.

RADIO HOST (O.S.)
America, we've got a surprise for you. Her voice is almost as good as her looks, and lord, I wish all you boys out there in Radioland could see what I'm seein' right now. Please welcome, Miss America!

FADE IN

EXT. CANYON ROAD - SUNSET

A classic Ford Thunderbird emerges from a canyon tunnel.

INT. FORD THUNDERBIRD - SUNSET

ON: 1950s CAR RADIO

Through the static, MISS AMERICA (a rich female voice like Barbara Streisand's) sings the national anthem a cappella.

Driving the car is JOHN ROANOKE (40s), reminiscent of Cary Grant, wearing a Panama hat and smoking a cigar with the car windows down. Hooked in his shirt pocket is a PEN WITH A BRASS EAGLE ATTACHED AT THE TOP. Just as Miss America sings:

MISS AMERICA (V.O.)
(singing on the radio)
For the land of the --

John shuts off the radio.

JOHN
Bullshit.

EXT. CANYON ROAD - SUNSET

The car coasts off into the sunset.

TITLE CARD: "NO MAN'S LAND"

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EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD STREETS - NIGHT

Driving through the dark neighborhood streets, John sees PATTY (15), walking alone on the sidewalk.

He pulls up to the curb, clicks a button on a TAPE RECORDER, and talks to her through the open passenger's seat window.

JOHN
Excuse me, miss.

The girl stops. She looks at him like he is some extinct species. She bends her knees a bit to peer into the open window.

PATTY
Good evenin'.

JOHN
Good evening. Someone's expecting me and I'm all turned around.

PATTY
(with teenage attitude)
Who in the world is expecting you?

JOHN
...I'm looking for the Gallaghers.

Patty's jaw drops open. Then, she composes herself with a polite smile.

PATTY
They're down the street to the left. Such a sweet family...

JOHN
Doesn't your daddy have something to say about you being out alone so late in the evening?

PATTY
(insulted)
My daddy don't have nothin' to say, sir.

JOHN
It's dangerous out in the streets at night.
You'd best go home to your daddy.
He'll protect you.

The girl's face fills with anger, but then:

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PATTY
(Politely)
Enjoy your stay.

She struts away. John turns off his tape recorder.

EXT. GALLAGHER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A grand house, lights on, is flanked by two humble homes, lights out. A gentle breeze rustles the trees. John's car, engine powerful and loud compared to the quiet of the neighborhood, pulls into the driveway.

John takes a puff from his cigar and walks up the pathway, past a handrail, with a Sam Spade swagger. His tape recorder sticks out of his pants pocket.

The front door swings open to reveal NANCY GALLAGHER (30s), dressed like a 1950s housewife. She has a suspicious smirk.

NANCY
You must be Mr. Roanoke - may I
call you John?

JOHN
Is the man of the house home? I'd
like to speak to him, please.

NANCY
(joking)
I can chat about the weather just
as well as he can...please, come
inside.

Nancy politely smiles. She eyes the cigar. From a cupboard by the door, she picks up a coffee tin and holds it up to him. She smiles through disgust as John smothers his cigar in it. Then John enters, taking off his hat.

INT. DINING ROOM - EVENING

Once John enters, Nancy locks the door behind him. John notices it with a raised eyebrow...but says nothing.

John follows Nancy into the dining room. Sitting at the dining room table are a man smiling like a TV personality but sweating like a dog (BILL GALLAGHER (30s)), and a sickly preteen wearing a HOSPITAL MASK over his mouth (WILSON GALLAGHER (12)). Bill plays finger puppets, forming a dog shape with his fingers as Wilson watches.

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NANCY

(to John)

I read your latest column, and I must say, your bravery astounds me. As soon as I read it, I told myself, 'I must get my hands on this journalist so he can write something on my town!' So, long story short, I called your editor to get you over here.

Arriving at the table, Nancy pulls out a chair for John. He ignores her offer and keeps his attention on Bill -- who is not paying attention.

NANCY

(getting their attention)

Bill, Wilson...

Bill, still making finger shapes for his son, drops his hands to his side and smiles at John. Wilson's attention drifts to the side, where he stares absent-mindedly.

NANCY (CON'T)

John, meet my family.

(gestures to Bill)

This is my husband Bill...

(gestures to Wilson)

...and this is our darling son Wilson.

Nancy walks into the kitchen and scoops peas and meatloaf onto some glass plates.

John reaches over the table to give Bill a handshake.

JOHN

John Roanoke, here to conduct the interview.

Bill's eyes dart back and forth between John and Nancy. He rejects the handshake.

BILL

(laughing nervously)

That's nice.

JOHN

It's nice to meetcha, Mr. Mayor.

BILL

It's nice to meetcha too, John!

(MORE)

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BILL (CONT'D)

But I'm not - she's - well, we
don't get a lot of guys around
here...not that I miss 'em!

(nudges Wilson)

Ha!

Turning to his father, Wilson's cheeks stretch out in an attempted smile -- but he quickly winces and stops.

John, looking around the room, pulls out his tape recorder -- clicks record, then pulls out his pen and a small journal.

Then, he sits down like a man: with a grunt and legs spread for comfort.

As Nancy stares Bill down, Bill eyes her like a guilty dog.

She comes over to Wilson's side to place in front of him a plate of meatloaf, then kisses the boy's forehead and straightens his shirt collar for him.

She returns to the kitchen where she fills glasses with water.

Wilson watches his mother. Though he holds a fork and knife in his hands resting on the table, his plate of food is completely untouched. John examines the boy.

JOHN

Well? Isn't she, kid?

Wilson meets John's eyes. From underneath his mask, he grunts a bit, but it's muffled as though he hasn't even opened his mouth.

Nancy, in the kitchen, glances over at Wilson longingly...but then shoots her eyes back down as she pours water into glasses.

Dropping his unused knife, Wilson raises a shaky hand to point to his own mask.

NANCY

(Turning around to see)

Wilson! You know better.

Wilson immediately drops his hands to the table.

NANCY (CON'T)

(to John)

My apologies, he had a long day.

John clicks his pen to write something. Nancy sets a plate of food on the table in front of her own seat.

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JOHN

What's his illness?

NANCY

Illness? John, I raised my son to be respectful and kind. Just because he doesn't spread his legs whenever he sits doesn't make him ill.

John shuts his legs. He shifts to face Bill.

JOHN

(all business)

Mr. Mayor, would you care to explain the mask?

Nancy hastily sits down and spreads a napkin on her lap.

NANCY

You'll have no luck asking a man for help. Last time I asked Bill to do a simple task, all of our white sheets turned pink.

JOHN

Please, ma'am. Save the chitter chatter for a Tupperware party and let me speak to the mayor.

NANCY

So ask the mayor a question.

His gaze alternating between Nancy and Bill, John's eyes widen when he realizes who the real mayor is.

JOHN

My editor told me, uh - he certainly likes to keep his employees on their toes.

BILL

Well, I cain't say I ain't flattered! Silly little me, mayor...I'd be a disaster, wouldn't I be, honey? I cain't even open a pickle jar without yer help -

NANCY

That's enough, Bill.

(to John)

So? Ask me a question, John.

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As Bill sweatily shovels food into his mouth, John watches Nancy suspiciously.

JOHN
(sighs)
Fine.

John reorients the tape recorder and scoots his chair so it all faces Nancy. He reviews his notes in his journal.

JOHN
I've heard that Engelberg hasn't had a documented crime in four years. How in the world did you do that?

NANCY
It's simple. We don't coddle bad behavior. And in this little town, young girls have a bright future ahead. We tell the girls that they can be whatever they want to be, and we tell everyone else too. And it's my mission to send that message to the non-believers...the ones from the rest of America, who say...do...write horrible things.

BILL
(chewing)
I'm sure yer one of the good ones!

Nancy shoots a glare at Bill, who leans over his plate of food again. Nancy gets up and grabs glasses of water from the table.

NANCY
Your article didn't tell me that you're 'one of the good ones'. In fact, it told me quite the opposite. I brought you here to change your mind. To fix you.

JOHN
To 'fix me'? I'm a journalist. My job is to state the facts, no matter who it will offend, sweetheart.

At the word "sweetheart", Nancy squeezes the glass in her hand until her knuckles turn ghost-white.

NANCY
Facts? That 'women who want jobs are asking for harassment'?

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JOHN

Am I wrong? I was clear in my article, Mrs. Gallagher. Fairness aside, women who get jobs get harassed. That's how things are, and it's not pretty, but that's what they sign up for -

Wilson shakes his head and grabs John's hand to get his attention.

NANCY

Wilson, dear, I don't like how this man is influencing you. It's time for another dose of your medicine.

Wilson, fear in his eyes, obediently nods.

BILL

Didn't he have his dose this morning? I could have sworn he had it this morning...but you know me, I misremember things.

Quietly, Nancy pulls a SYRINGE from a drawer and fills it with light, opaque liquid. Bill looks back at his dinner...he knows not to push.

She gently lifts Wilson by the shoulders and guides him through a door near the dining room. We hear the door shut behind them.

Bill's nervous television personality smile vanishes.

JOHN

What the hell is she doing to him?

BILL

Investigate and you're next.

JOHN

What's his illness?

BILL

Illness! It's called a punishment.

Nancy enters behind them, smiling perfectly. Bill puts his smile back on and continues eating.

NANCY

He gets like that when he's tired. He had a long day. I hope you two are still hungry for some dessert.

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She walks into another room. When John hears a door shut, he gets up.

BILL
(looking for Nancy to return,
whispering)
Well, I warned you.

John still gets up, putting his tape recorder in his pocket, and enters through the door.

INT. WILSON'S ROOM - NIGHT

As John enters, all is quiet. A quilt on a twin bed. He sees the back of Wilson, who is hunched over a desk. John creeps towards him.

JOHN
(whispering)
Wilson.

Wilson does not respond.

JOHN (CON'T)
Wilson, are you alright?

ON: WILSON'S DESK.

Wilson writes lines you'd see on a classroom chalkboard:

"I will not speak, I'm sorry Mommy.
I will not speak, I'm sorry Mommy..."

John yanks the paper away. Wilson looks up at him, a tear rolling down his face.

John pulls the hospital mask off Wilson's face. What he finds: Wilson's lips are sewn together by thick, coarse, black wire. The punctures are swollen and smeared with dark liquid, and they pull and rip at his skin.

Wilson holds a shaky hand up to cover his face. His hand brushes against his mouth -- but he winces in pain.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Up close, we see Nancy's heels click across the floor.

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In her hands is a plate of chocolate cake. She carries it towards:

INT. WILSON'S ROOM - NIGHT

John shoves the note in his pocket and turns to the door -- but stops and looks at Wilson once again.

John slides open a window by the desk. As the sound of heels clicking nears, John lifts Wilson from the armpits and helps him out the window.

ON: THE BEDROOM DOOR

Nancy swings open the bedroom door.

ON: THE EMPTY BEDROOM.

The window is open, curtains billowing in the night wind. Nancy drops the plate of chocolate cake, which shatters against the floor.

Her face contorts with rage.

NANCY
BILL!

EXT. THE GALLAGHER'S HOUSE - NIGHT

John carries Wilson over his shoulders. He staggers across the lawn with Wilson slung over his shoulder.

JOHN
Don't worry kid, we'll get those stitches open.

After John crosses his car to reach the passenger's seat door, he struggles to unlock the door with Wilson over his shoulder. So, he props up Wilson behind the car. As John fiddles with the lock again, he hears the sound of the front door swinging open. He ducks behind the car with Wilson.

JOHN
Stay put here, okay?

Wilson nods. John stands.

Silhouetted in the door frame is Bill, holding a full syringe.

INSERT: He presses the top and a bit of liquid squirts out.

John looks down at Wilson and looks back at Bill, who stalks forward.

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John backs down the driveway towards the street, away from Wilson who is hidden behind the car.

BILL
What did you do with my son?

JOHN
Pal, please, put the syringe down,
would ya?

BILL
(harsh whispering)
I was protecting him just fine
until ya came along. This is yer
fault, ya criminal!

JOHN
Come on, Bill. Are you blind?

Bill's eyes flicker behind John.

BILL
She's right about people like
you...not that I ever disagreed in
the first place.

Bill lunges at John, who backs up...right into Nancy. She sticks a syringe of her own right into John's neck.

John grabs his neck, sways around with dizziness, and tries to stagger off.

Nancy folds her arm and watches.

His tape recorder falls out of his pocket and clatters onto the pavement.

He sees Patty across the street, walking on the sidewalk. He runs up to her and shakes her shoulders.

JOHN
You have to help me! They're
trying to...to...

Resolute, Patty shoves him back. John watches her in double as he collapses back-first onto the street.

PATTY
Mrs. Gallagher! I got him!

Excited, she points at John on the ground.

Nancy approaches.

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NANCY
Thank you dear. Good work.

Patty revels in the compliment, then skips away across the street.

On the ground, John turns his head to see Wilson, who has crawled down the driveway to peek at the scene. Their eyes lock.

JOHN
(mouthing)
Run away.

Wilson recedes behind the car again.

John turns his head away from Wilson.

Nancy leans over John revealing a large, curved, rusty sewing needle in her hand. Black, coarse wire is threaded in the eye of the needle. John grabs her hand in one last desperate effort.

JOHN
I'll change.

Nancy yanks her hand out of John's grip.

NANCY
Don't try to struggle. It'll only
make this worse.

INSERT: Nancy brings the needle to his face.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

We see down the length of the street, which is empty. John's car remains in the driveway. We see feet moving underneath.

EXT. STREET - GALLAGHER'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Wilson gets up from behind the car and stumbles into the empty street. His foot hits something: John's tape recorder. He picks it up. It reads:

"Property of The Daily Post
4456 Cunningham Drive, Pomona, CA
Please return if found."

Then he looks at the house. Then he looks down the street.

He tucks the tape recorder into a pants pocket.

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He stumbles down the street but falls to the ground. Though he tries again and again, he lands on the ground every time.

One more try, and he falls onto the pavement, crushing the tape recorder in his front pocket.

He sits on the ground, examining the broken tape in his hands.

NANCY (O.S.)
There you are! I was worried sick.

Wilson drops the remains of the tape recorder.

Behind him stands his mother.

NANCY
What did that evil man do to you?

She helps Wilson to a stand, and leads him up the front walkway.

As she guides Wilson through the front door, she notices the broken tape recorder on the street. She breaks into a smile.

NANCY
That's my boy.

Nancy shuts the door.

FADE OUT

THE END