

THE FINAL FORTY EIGHT



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Cast of Characters

Father Andrew Sullivan

Javier Leblanc

Warden Burke

Patty Graham

Governor Richards

Various members of the deathwatch team

Act I

Scene 1

Scene: The warden's office in Florida State Prison. It is a simple room decorated with a large oak desk full of papers in the middle. A file cabinet takes up the back right corner and a stand up fan is in the back left corner. Warden Burke sits behind his desk filling out paperwork.

Enter Father Andrew Sullivan. Father Sullivan is Irish Catholic. He is in his early thirties. Warden Burke looks up

Warden Burke: How are you Father? You don't look so hot. Take a seat.

Father Andrew: *(sitting)* I didn't get much sleep last night.

Warden Burke: Thinking about him aren't you?

Father Andrew: How did you know?

Warden Burke: Unlike you this isn't my first rodeo. Two days until the execution the stress gets to you. You realize that soon your pal won't be around anymore. I can assure you though; he slept like a baby last night. Don't worry Father, it's always like this the first time with all you chaplains and priests.

Father Andrew: How's he dealing with it?

Warden Burke: Same as always. In pretty good spirits. He's looking forward to your daily chat.

Father Andrew: I wish I could say the same.

Warden Burke: What's wrong, don't enjoy your time with him?

Father Andrew: It's not that. He's very intelligent and well read for someone who had his upbringing. But he doesn't believe. Here I am, trying to show him the Lord's way and prepare his soul for death, and I just can't seem to reach him. You know, yesterday he told me that there was no such thing as free will or moral responsibility. He refuses to repent for his sins.

Warden Burke: What can I say? The guy's a cold-blooded killer.

Father Andrew: I can't let him go out like this. He's not ready for passing.

Warden Burke: Father, there are some people in this world that are just plain evil. I've been in this business for thirty years and I have never seen a murder quite as gruesome as this one. I know you are a man of faith and I respect that, but I am pretty confident when I say that his soul is past saving.

Father Andrew: I don't believe anyone is past saving.

Warden Burke: Just look at his crime.

Father Sullivan: I actually don't know the details of the murder. I refused to look at them before I agreed to advise him. I didn't want anything to bias my opinion as I tried to help. I just hope I'll be successful.

Warden Andrew: Well, you better hurry. Whether his soul is ready or not, Javier LeBlanc has a date with the electric chair in less than forty-eight hours.

Scene 2

Scene: Prison visiting room. There is a glass pane that separates the prisoner from his visitor. On one side of the glass sits a plastic chair. This is where the prisoner sits. On the other side is a wooden stool for the visitor. A phone one each side of the pane is how the two communicate.

Father Sullivan starts on stage when the lights come up.

Enter Javier LeBlanc. A large man in his mid-40s

Javier: *(sitting)* Good thing you came. After our last talk I thought I was gunna have to spend my last two days by myself, without any more of our enlightening discussions.

Father Andrew: I want to share a very special verse from the Scriptures with you today. Mark chapter 8 verses 22-26.

Javier: Go for it.

Father Andrew: *(reading)* “And they came to Bethsaida; and they brought him to a blind man, and they besought him that he would touch him.

And taking the blind man by the hand, he led him out of the town; and spitting upon his eyes, laying his hands on him, he asked him if he saw anything.

And looking up, he said: “I see men as it were trees, walking”

After that again he laid his hands upon his eyes, and he began to see, and was restored, so that he saw all things clearly.

And he sent him into the house, saying: Go into thy house, and if thou enter into the town, tell nobody.”

Javier: (*applauding*) Bravo, Father. What a wonderful read.

Father Andrew: Now Javier, would you like to reflect upon the passage’s meaning?

Javier: Yeah, some dude had something in his eyes and Jesus got it out for him.

Father Andrew: Javier-

Javier: I see what you’re trying to do Father and it just won’t work. I’m not going to repent. I’m not going to “see the light”. Those words you read are simply that, words. They have no meaning. To be honest with you, nothing really does. I’ve been on death row for fifteen years now. I’ve seen how dozens of men react before they got fried. Some sob. Some put on a tough exterior, but look as white as ghosts when they get taken from their cell. Not me. I feel no guilt.

Father Andrew: But you took another human life-

Javier: Yes, I did, but I’m still not guilty.

Father Andrew: What do you mean?

Javier: Let me put it to you this way. Let's just start with the notion that our actions result out of who we are. That seems like a pretty uncontroversial premise. In order to be responsible for our actions, we need to be responsible for how we are, mentally, you know. How can that be, Father? Who we are is to some degree made up out of our genetics and where we grew up. How can I be responsible for my DNA, or for who my parents were, or for the fact that I was born and raised in bumble-fuck rural Florida? The quite simple answer is that I can't be. My character and desires stem from these factors. If that is the case, than I am not responsible for the actions that arise from them. I am not guilty. Fate is.

Father Andrew: What about self-restraint?

Javier: Degrees of self-restraint all depend on character, which one has no control over.

Father Andrew: Javier, guilt is not something you can just think or reason away. It's something you feel in the pit of your stomach when you know you've done something wrong. Guilt just happens. It is painful and nobody wants to feel its pangs, but it exists whether you logically can wrap your head around it or not. The only way you can alleviate guilty feelings is to repent and seek out punishment.

Javier: That would be very arrogant of me, father. How can I apologize for something that results from nature, or from that wise and just God you preach

about? Maybe “guilt just happens” for weak people, but not for me. I know the truth. I understand.

Father Andrew: You understand nothing. If you don’t believe in God, why did you ask to see a priest anyway?

Javier: And waste away in my six by nine foot cell without talking to anyone? No way! This is much more interesting. Anyway, it’s not that I don’t believe in God. I just reject his existence. There’s a difference. I can’t worship something that would claim that we as humans are made in His image, and then allow the likes of myself, or poor Natalie Byrd’s family to suffer.

Father Andrew: But, don’t you remember when we read the Book of Job together. We are incapable of understanding God’s divine intentions. Even our suffering has a purpose in the eternal scope of things.

Javier: How can you accept that?

Father Andrew: Faith.

Javier: Well that’s where you and I differ, Father. I can’t live like that.

Father Andrew: But can you die the way you are; without faith? Look at yourself, Javier. You face execution in less than two days. Are you prepared to exit this world with all this hate and doubt in your heart?

Javier: I plan on going out like a man; on my feet. I could never understand these guys that walk quietly with the deathwatch team to the chamber. No, not me. Are you familiar with the poet Dylan Thomas, Father?

Father Andrew: Yes, I am.

Javier: Well I'm going to take his words to heart.

“Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rage at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.”

No matter how disillusioned I get behind these walls, Father, anything is better than turning into dust beneath that cold, dead ground. I'm going to rage against death and maybe take an officer or two out with me.

Father Andrew: You don't have to think that way! There is something beyond this life that awaits all of God's children. When you die, even though, as you say, your body will be laid in the cold ground your soul will live on. It is a thing immortal. You will reach paradise, and you will be welcomed by a choir of angels in heaven. All the suffering you bore on this earth will be trivial, for you will inhabit, for all eternity, the kingdom of God.

Javier: Look at the facts of my crime, Father.

Father Andrew: What?

Javier: You don't know the facts surrounding the murder I committed. Talk to the warden. I want you to know why they're getting that cozy little chair in the death chamber ready for me. Look at the facts of the crime and it'll tell you my whole life story. It'll show you that this faith that you talk about is nothing more than a lot of hot air. Someone like me is not going to inhabit the kingdom of God.

Father Andrew: Javier-

Javier: I think we're done for today Father. I'll see you tomorrow for my going away party.

Scene 3

Scene: The Warden's Office

Enter Father Andrew

Warden Burke: How'd it go, Father?

Father Andrew: Not so great. Listen, Warden, can I talk to you about Javier LeBlanc's crime?

Warden Burke: I thought you didn't want to know about it until he was gone.

Father Andrew: I've changed my mind. Actually, it was his idea. He doesn't really think I understand him. I realized he's right, I don't. He told me that if I looked at the facts of the murder he committed I would know the facts of his life.

Warden Burke: Let me grab you his file. *(Gets up from his desk to go to the file cabinet)*

Father Andrew: There's no way he can believe what he says. He must feel guilty. It's just part of our human nature.

Warden Burke: Well, Javier LeBlanc is not a normal guy. Just take a look at the file. Here's the story: It was a cool spring evening sixteen years ago. After a night on the town Javier Leblanc and Natalie Byrd returned to Leblanc's apartment. The last people who saw them at The Dugout Pub said it appears that they had met for the first time that night. They thought Leblanc was a real smooth guy, a charmer. After a few drinks he convinced Natalie to go home with him. The next morning police spotted a car that was reported stolen the night before. Leblanc was driving it a few blocks away from his apartment. In that neighborhood it stood out like a sore thumb. Here's a word of advice for you Father; if you want to steal a car make sure it's not a bright red '55 Cadillac El Dorado. You'll be caught in no time. Anyway, police pulled the car over and asked Javier to step out. In the passenger's seat sat a suspicious looking cardboard box. One of the officers grabbed the box, opened it up, and vomited instantaneously. Inside was Natalie Byrd's decapitated head. Leblanc cut it off with a handsaw. An autopsy would show that Natalie and Leblanc had engaged in sexual intercourse. No doubt he had raped her. Her body was full of bruises that indicated he had tortured her before he took her life. I heard from one of the officers who responded to

the incident that all Leblanc said as they led him away in handcuffs was “oops.” That’s it. So Father, what do you think of your buddy now?

Father Andrew: I can’t...I’m speechless.

Warden Burke: Well, there you go.

Father Andrew: Do you think he deserves to die?

Warden Burke: Generally speaking, I support capital punishment. I wouldn’t have this job if I thought the death penalty was unjust or immoral. With that being said, this crime is perhaps the worst I have ever seen. Not only do I think Javier LeBlanc deserves to die, I think he should burn in hell for what he did to that poor girl.

Father Andrew: But what if he repents?

Warden Burke: It’s your job to worry about his soul, not mine. My responsibility is to the state of Florida. I serve without passion or prejudice to ensure that the punishment the state mandates for its criminal element is carried out. Javier LeBlanc violated his social contract with the state. He took one of its citizen’s lives. For that, the state mandates that he must die. I hope you’re successful Father. I hope he repents. But, regardless of whether his soul goes to heaven or is damned to rot in hell, I intend to do my job and go forward with his execution. That is, of course, unless he receives a stay.

Father Andrew: Thank you very much Warden.

Warden Burke: Don't mention it Father.

Scene 4

Scene: Outside the prison. Father Andrew enters stage left and walks away from the penitentiary until a woman in her late thirties calls out to him. Her name is Patty Graham and she is Javier's attorney

Patty: Father Andrew!

Father Andrew: Patty, I gather you just finished wrapping things up with your client.

Patty: Yeah, I told him it doesn't look good. I'm trying my damndest for him, but I don't want to give him a false sense of hope. There have been much more controversial cases that have been denied certiorari by the Supreme Court and I doubt the governor's going to grant clemency. All I can do at this point is try to make a few phone calls and pray for a miracle. I hope you keep Javier in your prayers Father.

Father Andrew: Always.

Patty: How did your conversation with him go?

Father Andrew: Not well. He refuses to repent. I learned all the details about his crime today. I'm going back to the rectory to reflect and pray on them. I can't imagine how you do this for a living. You must hear some terrible things that make you angry. Do you ever have second thoughts about your clients?

Patty: Never.

Father Andrew: I'm really amazed at how you can do this year in and year out without burning out. You put in so much time and effort trying to save a life, knowing that the individual you tried to save may very well be guilty of committing unspeakable atrocities. How do you push yourself through the heartache you must feel when you see the victims' families or lose a client?

Patty: The same way you do when you give aid to those in dire poverty or try to save a condemned man's soul. I believe very deeply that the state should not execute its citizens. This country is supposed to guide the civilized world. We are on a list with Pakistan, Iraq, Iran, and China as the countries that lead the world in executions. These nations don't exactly have the best records on human rights. How are we supposed to serve as an example for treating others with dignity and respect if we continue this barbaric practice? Capital punishment serves as the height of hypocrisy and is a blight on our foreign policy.

Father Andrew: Surely there must be something more that went into choosing your career path than your views on foreign policy.

Patty: Father, you and I have the same motivation for our work. We are driven to help the needy. I am the voice of people who don't have the ability to speak for themselves. These are the individuals the state has forgotten. They're called condemned for a reason.

They already have so much stacked against them, they don't need the law to oppose them as well. People like my clients never really had a chance to be successful or do the right things.

Father Andrew: Now you sound like Javier. Whatever happened to personal responsibility? There are plenty of people that live in poverty and had rough upbringings that don't commit murder.

Patty: I understand that. I'm not excusing Javier for what he did. I just don't think executing him is going to solve anything. It doesn't deter crime. Keeping Javier behind bars for the rest of his life would have the same effect as killing him would. It doesn't make sense to me that the state tries to combat violence by violently taking away a condemned man's own life. Gandhi was right; an eye for an eye makes the whole world blind. Even though I am against the death penalty in principle, what really bothers me is the way the whole legal system works. The process stinks. Sentences are completely arbitrary. Two individuals can commit identical crimes and one will get life and another death. It all depends on the disposition of the jury, the temperament of the judge, and the quality of a lawyer. Did you know there are cases where a defendant's attorney falls asleep in the middle of trial? The fact that most of these clients are poor doesn't really increase their chances of ensuring adequate counsel. Let me ask you a question Father. Is the possibility that my client's sentence depends on whether or not juror number 5 had his coffee in the morning indicative of a fair and just system?

Father Andrew: I suppose not.

Patty: I better get going and start making those phone calls. I'll see you tomorrow?

Father Andrew: Yes

Patty: Goodbye Father.

Scene 5

Father Andrew's bedroom at the rectory. It is a humble room with a small cot and simple dresser. There is a window and the lighting should show the colors of the setting sun entering the room

Enter Father Andrew. He kneels at the bed and begins to pray

Father Andrew: My God, I have dedicated my entire life to doing your will. Ever since I was a small boy, whenever I entered a church I felt your presence within me. Now that I am ordained I see to a greater degree your hand in all of your creation. Take this sunset for instance. This blend of magenta, violet and red is so beautiful, so miraculous. Sure, its cause may be the gravity that makes the Earth spin on its axis and the helium and hydrogen that compose the sun, but there is so much more than that. There's divinity in a sunset. This world may be made up entirely of matter and energy, but I know that ultimately you are responsible for all of its beauty. And it's not just the physical beauties of this world. It's also our relationships. A pleasant conversation, a stranger who smiles as you pass by; these are the little things that

make life worth living. I thank you for providing us with a world where people can strive to be happy. You truly are a just, merciful and good God. Yet, with all the beauty and potential for happiness, there is also ugliness and great suffering in this world. I am thinking about Javier, God. I don't buy his idea that he is not responsible for his actions. After I heard what he did to that poor woman I became angry, not only with him, but with you as well. Why did you give us free will if you knew we would abuse it and hurt one another? Part of me thought that it would be much more comforting if we didn't have any freedom at all. You in your omnipotent wisdom could ensure that your creation was happy. But, what would be rewarding about that life? Yes, we would be comfortable, but life is not just about comfort. It must have a purpose. We give meaning to our own lives by freely pursuing our interests and working to achieve the goals we set for ourselves. I know that I must make Javier see this. Give me strength God. Tomorrow will be my last chance. I can't let him go to his death before he repents.

Act II

Scene 1

Scene: A small room that only has a table and 4 chairs. Javier and Patty are sitting at the table and a member of the death watch team is standing. Javier is eating his last meal.

Enter Father Andrew

Javier: Good, Father Andrew is here, we can start eating now. Would you like some food, Father?

Father Andrew: No, that's quite alright.

Javier: I insist. It's my last meal. I want to share it with people.

Patty: I have to admit, your choice of food is unique.

Father Andrew: (*sitting*) What have you got there?

Javier: Some corndogs, funnel cake, chicken tenders, you know, boardwalk food.

Father Andrew: Any particular reason for picking this as your last meal?

Patty: Javier's family ran a snack stand at the beach.

There's a knock on the door. A prison guard enters.

Guard: Patty you have a phone call.

Patty: I should get that, enjoy your dinner Javier.

Patty Exits

Javier: So Father, did you read about my case?

Father Andrew: Yes I did.

Javier: Do you think I should be put to death?

Father Andrew: The Catholic Church is absolutely clear that it opposes the death...

Javier: I didn't ask about Church's view Father. I asked what you thought.

Father Andrew: *(pause)* I do not think you should be executed.

Javier: You're full of shit.

Father Andrew: I don't know. I just...*(losing it)* You cut off her head Javier! How could you cut off her head and still go about your day as if nothing happened. You are about to be executed for committing a terribly brutal murder and you can't even show remorse. You just sit there eating your food as if it was any normal day. What is wrong with you?

Javier: It's very tasty food and I'm pretty hungry.

Father Andrew: There you go joking again!

Javier: Seriously though, Father. Knowing that this is my last meal reminds me of my favorite novel. Would you like to guess what it is?

Father Andrew: I have no idea.

Javier: It's Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Ironic, isn't it?

Father Andrew: I guess...

Javier: There's this excerpt from the novel that has always struck me, but I feel it is exceptionally meaningful at this moment. The protagonist, Raskolnikov, briefly contemplates suicide after the weight of a murder he has committed begins to overcome him. He moves through the city and experiences the sights and smells of St. Petersburg. Some of them are pleasant and some are not. Yet he cannot help thinking to himself the following: "Where is it I've read recently," Raskolnikov says "That a man condemned to death says or thinks, an hour before his death, that if he had to live on some high rock, on such a narrow ledge that he'd only room to stand, and the ocean, everlasting darkness, everlasting solitude, everlasting tempest around him, if he had to remain standing on a square yard of space all his life, a thousand years, eternity, it were better to live so than to die at once! Only to live, to live and live. Life, whatever it may be." Dostoyevsky knew what he was talking about, Father. You have spent these past few months trying to prepare my soul for death. Let me tell you something. I'm not ready for death and I never will be. This final meal makes it absolutely clear to me. The sensation of tasting this food is enough. Just do me a favor and shut the hell up about my soul and remorse, and let me enjoy my last few hours... Eat something, I insist.

Father Andrew*(looks down at the floor silently. After a long pause):* Why did you order this as your last meal?

Javier: I enjoy this food.

Father Andrew: It's an odd choice. Is it true that your parents ran a food stand on the boardwalk?

Javier: Yeah, what of it?

Father Andrew: I think that may be why you chose your last meal.

Javier: Don't try to psychoanalyze me. I had enough of that during my trial.

Father Andrew: I'm not...I just want to understand you Javier. I can't believe you are as cold-blooded as you want me to think. Beneath the exterior that looks like a monster lies a real human being. I can see it in your eyes. The pain of loneliness. For God's sake, just answer my questions honestly.

Javier looks Father Andrew in the eyes and doesn't say anything. There's a slight pause and then Javier inexplicably starts laughing

Javier: O.K, Father. I'll humor you. Yes, my parents ran a boardwalk food stand.

Father Andrew: Is that why you chose this to be your last meal?

Javier: I don't know. I just felt like having corndogs tonight.

Father Andrew: I think your childhood had something to do with it.

Javier: You can think whatever you damn well please.

Father Andrew: What was your childhood like?

Javier: Don't ask questions you don't want the answer to.

Father Andrew: I wouldn't have asked it if I didn't want to know the answer. What's the worst you can say? That it made you want to kill a young woman and cut off her head?

Javier: I had an O.K childhood. My family wasn't very wealthy. We lived in a small apartment by the beach. My parents never went to college. They were high school sweethearts. My mom got pregnant with me their senior year. My grandparents threw her out of the house and refused to support her and her "bastard child." My dad was a bit of a rebel. His parents died when he was pretty young. He lived with his uncle and earned some money working at his garage after school. Pops was never a great student. He got into a lot of fights and had trouble respecting authority, but he loved my mother with every fiber of his being. He married her. His uncle told him that he couldn't afford to feed two more mouths. He told my father that if he was man enough to knock up a girl he would have to be man enough to provide for her. It's not that he didn't care about my dad, he did. He just thought it was time to teach Pops a lesson about responsibility. He gave my dad a \$5,000 loan. My dad used that, plus what he had saved from working at the garage to start a modest snack stand out of the back of his truck. We lived in that truck for the first couple years.

Father Andrew: Sounds rough.

Javier: It was alright. I don't really remember that part of my life. By time I was three, dad was able to afford a mobile snack stand. He repaid his uncle and was actually making a small profit. He had a knack for talking to customers and mom turned out to be a hell of a cook. "Best corndogs on the beach", patrons would tell us. You know what, Father, eating this stuff reminds me of her. She was just so gentle. I don't think I ever heard her raise her voice.

Father Andrew: It seems to me like she overcame a lot to raise a family at such a young age. She must be a strong woman.

Javier: Oh, yes she was, she was...well, emotionally. She suffered from cardiomyopathy. She died of a weak heart when I was 12.

Father Andrew: Oh, I'm sorry.

Javier: Oh, what for? It happened over 25 years ago. I'm over it.

Father Andrew: Where's your father?

Javier: No clue. He began drinking heavily after mom died. Left me and my sister alone when I was 13. We moved in with his uncle afterwards.

Father Andrew: I never knew you had a sister.

Javier: That's because I never told you about her.

Father Andrew: Are you O.K Javier? You look pale.

Javier: No, I'm fine.

Father Andrew: Are you sure?

Javier: I'm fucking fine O.K! I just haven't spoken about Jane in a long time. Just mentioning her makes me feel like I'm looking at a god-damned ghost.

Father Andrew: What do you mean?

Javier(*going back*) Jane was born when I was five. My parents actually wanted me to name her. I was going through this whole Tarzan phase at the time. I thought Jane was perfect. She was definitely the favorite, but I didn't mind. I loved her so much. She had the gentleness of mom and the mischievousness of Pops. And she had my determination. I remember staying up late at night telling her of all the things I wanted to accomplish. I was going to go to college. I was going to be a writer. My first book was going to be called "The Tarzan and Jane of Florida," and I was going to base my heroine on my Jane.

Father Andrew: Are you sure you're alright? You're sweating.

Javier (breathing heavily): The memories of the two of us at the beach are what keep me sane in this hell-hole. No... "memories" isn't the right word. Father, you wouldn't believe it, but I actually go back to when I was little. I don't mean I remember or daydream, I'm actually there. I can taste the salt from the ocean

on my tongue. I can feel the sun beating down on my back as Jane and I build sand castles. We build the best sand castles. It's a real operation. Our castles usually have four towers. We compete to see who could make the highest tower without it collapsing. Most of the time I win because I'm taller and older, but I let her win a lot. When she beats me she is so happy and her chest puffs out with pride. After we're done we knock the castle down and race back to the snack stand. Oh God, am I crazy?

Father Andrew: I don't...what happened to Jane, Javier?

Javier: One night after our dad left us we got a call from a friend that Pops was in jail. Uncle Bill went to get him. He asked me to babysit Jane. Jane was eight at the time. I had a really bad headache and wanted to go to bed. I told Jane it was time for her to go to sleep, but she refused. She wanted to go to the beach. I told her it was late and that I was tired, but she thought it would be fun to go swimming in the dark. I wasn't in the mood for an argument so I just ignored her and locked myself in my room. She kept banging on the door for about five minutes before I opened it, yelled at her, and shoved her away. She fell down. I think she may have started crying, but I'm not sure. I just closed the door and went to bed.

There's a pause. Javier gets choked up.

The following morning Uncle Bill woke me up. He asked me where Jane was. I told him that I thought she was in bed. He said that she wasn't and we

searched all over his apartment. When he called the police I was real scared. She washed up on shore the next day. She had gone to the beach after I yelled at her and must have drowned. Father, I can't begin to explain the pain I felt after I lost her. I...I don't think I was ever the same after that. I couldn't sleep for months after she died. I felt responsible, like it was my fault. You know I dream about her in here. I have dreams where I re-live killing that Natalie girl and when I lift up the head its Jane's face I see.

Father Andrew: Oh my God, Javier...

Javier (*shaking*): What is even more painful than remembering Jane is the fact that it's becoming increasingly more difficult to recall the sound of her voice or what she looked like. I'm losing my God-damned mind, Father.

Father Andrew: You are tormenting yourself Javier. Jane's death was not your fault.

Javier (*smiling he recovers a bit*): Don't worry Father, I know that. I'm not guilty of anything.

Father Andrew: Stop it Javier! Tell me, what happened to you between Jane's death and your crime.

Javier: Well, after about a year of not doing anything besides crying and staying in bed, I got educated. I read a lot. I focused exclusively on school work and shut myself away from everyone, even Uncle Bill. I felt like reading took me away from reality. I

especially liked philosophy. It rationalized a lot of the emotions I was feeling. That's when I started studying Nietzsche and Galen Strawson. They reassured me I couldn't have caused Jane's death. I couldn't be the cause of anything. I still wanted to go to college. I did pretty well in school, but I couldn't afford to go. I didn't have any money and Uncle Bill was struggling to keep his garage afloat. After I graduated high school I got a job in the garage and got my own shitty apartment. I hated my job. All I wanted to do was read and I even started writing a bit. I got real frustrated with the way my life was going. I never really got into drugs or alcohol though. I saw what that stuff did to Pops and stayed away. I just took my frustration out in my writing.

Father Andrew: Go on.

Javier: One day some guy came into the garage needing repairs on this red Caddy of his. This dude was a real prick. He was one of those people was born into money and thought he had a better pot to piss in than everyone else. His car was sweet though. It was the kind of car that I always dreamed of driving. I started asking him questions and found out where he lived. I spent enough time feeling like I was just a piece of shit under the shoe of guys like him. I decided to finally take something for myself. That night I went to his house and stole his Caddy. I learned how to hotwire cars at my uncle's garage. I guess that place had some value, didn't it?

Father Andrew: What happened then?

Javier: After I stole the car I felt like a new man; like there were endless possibilities in my life. I went to a bar. I didn't really drink much, but I was feeling real good. After a couple of beers I spotted this pretty looking broad. I decided to go for it and offered to buy her a drink. I can be a real charmer if I want. I told her that I was in real estate speculation. That piqued her interest. After a few more drinks we decided to go back to my place. She was blown away by the Caddy. I was blown away at how successful the night had been...and it was only beginning.

Father Andrew: That girl was Natalie Byrd?

Javier: Yeah. When we got to my apartment her opinion of me began to change. She asked how someone who was as successful as me could live in such a place. I told her not to worry about it, but she kept insisting. That pissed me off. I told her that I stole the car, that I worked in my uncle's garage and would probably spend the rest of my career there. She asked me to take her home. Looking back she was really polite about it. I just lost it though.

Working himself into a fervor Javier gets out of his seat

I looked into her piercing blue eyes and I saw judgment. I could see in those eyes everything I ever wanted to accomplish, everything I ever wanted to be, turn to dust. I was a nobody. I would have nothing. I flew into a rage and knocked her unconscious. I just couldn't stop myself. I raped her than beat her until I killed her. Then I cut of Jane's head.

Father Andrew (*Taken aback*): You cut off Natalie's head.

Javier: That's what I said.

Father Andrew: No, you said you cut off Jane's head.

Javier (*pause...then breaking down*) Oh God...What have I done! Oh God, Oh God, Oh God! That poor girl. She was so nice, she really was. Father, what have I done! (*He begins to weep*)

Father Andrew: Javier, it doesn't have to be this way...

Suddenly Patty comes into the room. You can tell by her face that she is the bearer of bad news. The Warden follows closely behind her.

Patty shakes her head

Patty: The Supreme Court denied the appeal.

Javier looks up his eyes swollen. He stares at her as if he does not quite understand the significance of her words.

Warden: Son, I'm sorry. There are some logistical things we need to take care of before the...procedure. It's time to get you ready. You'll have to come with me.

Javier: Like hell I do!

Javier jumps over the table and hits the Warden in the mouth. Two members of the deathwatch team in the room try to subdue him. He resists like a wild animal.

Javier: I'm not going anywhere! Let go!

Father Andrew: Javier, please!

The deathwatch team leads Javier out of the room

Javier: (Screaming as he exits) Father! For God's sake don't let them do this to me! I'm not ready! I'm not ready!

Exits

Warden Burke nurses a bloody lip as he approaches Father Andrew with hostility

Warden: What the hell did you do to him! This is supposed to be a professional environment. My men are here to keep him calm.

Father Andrew: I'm sorry. I just wanted to know about his life; about what motivated him to commit his crime.

Warden: His crime! Jesus Christ, Father, that's the last thing we want him thinking about. Small talk, that's got to be the conversation at this stage. We can't have him going around being violent. That's it. You are done speaking with him. Is that understood?

Father Andrew looks at his feet and nods silently. Warden Burke storms out.

Patty: Are you alright, Father?

Father Sullivan: Yes, I'm fine. You know, for the first time I feel genuinely sorry for Javier.

Patty: Come on, let's get out of here.

They exit.

Scene 2

Scene: The stage is bare except for a stool at the center. The stool is lit by a spotlight. That spotlight is the only light on stage until Javier enters. As he slowly walks to the stool there is another spotlight following him. He is accompanied by two members of the deathwatch team. The deathwatch team is unlit and appears as two faceless shadows following Javier. Javier is much calmer than in the previous scene. As Javier sits on the stool the light narrows so all that is lit is his torso and head. Javier drops his head so that he faces the ground. We hear the sound of an electric razor.

Guard: I'm going to need you to lift your head.

Javier is unresponsive. The guard waits a moment and then gently lifts Javier's head by the chin. Javier's eyes are swollen and wet. He stares blankly ahead as the deathwatch team shaves his head. Throughout the process he is emotionless. We witness the entire shaving. Then, there is a sudden blackout.

Scene 3

Scene: The death row holding area. This room has a cell with bars and is the location that Javier is taken to after he makes whatever arrangements he needs concerning his personal

belongings and then gets his head shaved. The cell has a cot and toilet and nothing else. Father Andrew and the Warden are standing in the room outside of the cell.

Warden: I can't believe I'm letting you talk to him again after what just happened.

Father Andrew: You can't deny a man spiritual advice as he is about to face his death. Like you said before, you have a job to do. Well, I have obligations of my own. I need to talk to Javier again.

Warden: I'm just warning you Father, any signs of agitation and you are out of here.

Father Andrew: Fine.

Javier enters escorted by two guards. He is a shell of the man he was before the shaving. He is led to his cell and enters it without resistance. He sits on the cot and looks straight ahead. He is silent. Warden Burke exits and leaves Javier and Father Andrew alone with two men from the deathwatch team.

Father Andrew: Javier...

No response

Father Andrew: Please speak to me.

Javier: I'm so tired. Have you ever had the feeling that you were just so exhausted that you wanted to go to sleep without ever waking up again? *(He chuckles without feeling)*

Father Andrew: You look like you've lost thirty pounds from the last time I saw you.

Javier: What time is it?

Father Andrew: 9 o'clock.

Javier: It's a funny feeling once you realize that the sun has gone down and will never rise again in your lifetime. I'm scared, Father.

Father Andrew: I know, Javier.

Javier: I'm just so empty inside. I've had this feeling of emptiness most of my life. I don't want to feel this way anymore.

Father Andrew: I can try to help. That's what I'm here for.

Javier: How the hell did this happen? I wanted to do so much. I wanted to go to college and start a family. I had dreams, just like any young man. I was going to have a legacy. I imagined living a life of fulfillment. When I died I was going to leave behind people who loved and remembered me. Instead, I'm going to die in complete anonymity. I'm the monster that must be slain. I have nothing to offer. Nothing, but anger and resentment.

Father Andrew: That's not true. You can offer remorse. You are not an evil person. Just pray to God for forgiveness and you will be saved.

Javier: What God? There is no God.

Father Andrew: Yes there is.

Javier: Please, Father. I want to believe, I really do. I want to, but I can't.

Father Andrew: Yes you can! Just stop thinking for one second. Stop thinking, and feel. That emptiness inside of you will dissipate once you let God into your heart. Bring yourself back to your childhood. Remember those feelings you had for your mother and sister. Those feelings were love, Javier. Those feelings were God.

Javier: I have such a headache. I just want to go to sleep.

Father Andrew: Javier, just listen...

Javier: Please, Father, just leave me alone.

Javier lays down on the cot and turns his back to Father Andrew. Father Andrew gets up and exists defeated.

Scene 4

Scene: The witness room. Patty and Father Andrew stand with one another awaiting the execution. The time is near. Warden Burke enters.

Warden: Father Andrew, the governor his here. He would like to speak to you.

Father Andrew: The governor?

Patty: He's a bit of an odd duck. He comes to most of the executions the state carries out. I never really understood it.

Warden: Will you see him?

Father Andrew: Sure

Enter Governor Richards. He is a tall, distinguished looking man with salt and pepper hair. He greets Father Andrew warmly.

Governor: It's nice to meet you Father. I hear that this is your first experience as a spiritual advisor.

Father Andrew: Yes it is.

Governor: Would you mind if we spoke in private.

Father Andrew: Certainly.

Patty and Warden Burke exit

Father Andrew: What can I do for you, sir?

Governor: I just wanted to see how you were holding up. I know this can be rough the first time around.

Father Andrew: I'm fine. I don't think I was very successful with Javier though.

Governor: That's a shame. I was pulling for him.

Father Andrew: Pardon me?

Governor: I was hoping that you would be able reach him. I feel like the state has a vested interest in ensuring that it does whatever it can for its condemned prisoners spiritually.

Father Andrew: Really?

Governor: Yes, why are you so surprised?

Father Andrew: I know you are an advocate of the death penalty. Forgive me, but I just thought you harbored animosity towards condemned prisoners.

Governor: Oh, not at all. I hate the crimes they commit. Some of their actions are just plain evil. But you don't have to hate a criminal in order to believe that he should be executed.

Father Andrew: I'm sorry, I don't think I follow.

Governor: Ever since I was young I was always a student of justice. I always got so angry when I saw someone get away with hurting other people. I think that was one of the reasons I became a prosecutor.

Father Andrew: Yes, I knew that. You were quite successful, weren't you?

Governor: That's how I ended up becoming governor. Anyway, I think we can sum up justice in one word; proportionality. That's why I think Hammurabi's Code lives on; not because it was barbaric, but because it was humane. An eye for an eye, but no more. It codified for the first time proportionality in the law.

Father Andrew: Yes, but we still believe that blinding people who commit crimes is too cruel a punishment. Our justice system is much more merciful than those of ancient times.

Governor: That may be true, but you mention something that is very interesting. You just equated justice with mercy. In reality, the two are complete opposites. Mercy means that you are giving someone less than their fair punishment. You violate the principle of proportionality when you show a criminal mercy. Merciful sentences are in their very nature, unjust.

Father Andrew: So you don't believe in a merciful system?

Governor: No, I didn't say that. Of course there is room for mercy in the system. That is why they give me the power to pardon. I'm not unfamiliar with exercising that power. During my first term there was a nineteen year old girl who was sentenced to death for killing her baby. When neighbors complained of a putrid smell coming from her backyard the police came to check up on her. She stabbed a cop and was arrested. They found her child's body in a trash can. When I saw her face in the paper I was taken aback. She looked just like my daughter. When a jury convicted her to death I was shocked. I had trouble sleeping. I knew I had to do something so I showed mercy. I pardoned her. Damn near lost my re-election bid for it too. But I don't regret it for a second.

Father Andrew: Then why not extend mercy to Javier Leblanc?

Governor: I can't do it Father. There are some crimes that just warrant death. The best argument in favor for the death penalty is not that it deters crime, it doesn't. Capital Punishment is expressive of society's collective moral outrage. It's expressive utility is its real value. The people of Florida have decided to codify a truly just system. One that is proportionate. A life for a life if the crime is brutal enough. There is no doubt in my mind that Javier Leblanc's case is a textbook example of when the death penalty is a valid punishment.

Father Andrew: But what about all the borderline cases? Surely the line is not clear one hundred percent of the time. And what happens when we get it wrong?

Governor: That is legitimate point. There are some flaws in the justice system, but I feel that eliminating the death penalty is not the solution. We can improve the system, but the presence of flaws does not change the fact that the death penalty is ultimately a just punishment in some cases. It's been nice chatting with you Father, but I have to go comfort a family that has been mourning the loss of their daughter for years. Even though you have been Javier Leblanc's spiritual advisor I hope you don't forget to pray for the victims. They have been waiting for this moment for what to them feels like an eternity. Natalie was everything to the Byrds and they couldn't even give her an open casket wake.

Governor Richards starts to head out.

Father Andrew: Governor, I just have one question. Why did you come here tonight? Why do you want to witness Javier's execution?

Governor: (contemplative) Well, in some way I feel responsible. This man's life lies in my hands. I am the one who has the choice to pardon him or send him to his death. I feel like if I am entrusted with that sort of power, I should at least witness the consequences of my decision. I'll see you later Father. I hope you were successful in getting him to repent. Believe it or not society has a vested interest in his spiritual well-being.

Exits

Scene 5

Scene: The Death Chamber. The electric chair is at the center of the stage. Four members of the deathwatch team are waiting. Javier enters escorted by two more prison guards. He calmly walks over to the chair. He is strapped in. One of the deathwatch team straps in his left leg, another his right. Two others strap in his arms and another man straps his chest. The final member of the team places the headpiece. Father Andrew enters the chamber. He looks very uncomfortable.

Father Andrew: They told me you wanted to see me.

Javier: I'm not ready Father.

Javier starts breathing heavily. He is having a panic attack. Father Andrew places his forehead on Javier's.

Father Andrew: Just breathe Javier...just breathe.

Javier: If I do see God tonight, I don't know what the hell to say.

Father Andrew(taken aback): Just tell Him...just tell Him what's in your heart.

Javier nods

Javier: Goodbye, Father.

Father Andrew: Goodbye Javier.

Father Andrew starts to exit when Javier calls to him

Javier: Hey Father! Remember when we read about Jesus giving the blind man sight.

Father Andrew: Yes.

Javier: Well, I just want to tell you... "I see men as it were trees, walking."

*Father Andrew pauses. Gives Javier a soft smile and exits.
The Warden enters.*

Warden: Do you have any last words Javier?

Javier: As I sit here I am just so confused. I don't know how I ended up here. All I know is that I spent sixteen years on death row full of resentment. I felt contempt for everyone. Now I am just ashamed. Ashamed that I lived my life the way I did. Ashamed that I hurt so many people. Ashamed that I didn't understand how valuable life was until I was strapped

into this chair. I guess all I can say now is that I am sorry, whatever that's worth. That's all.

There is a moment of stillness. Then all of a sudden the machine smokes and Javier jolts in his seat. He is restrained by the straps. After a couple of seconds he is still. Smoke still fills the room. Warden Burke walks over to the chair.

Warden: This man has expired.

Warden Burke and the deathwatch team exit. There is a moment where all that is on stage is Javier dead on the chair. Then...blackout.

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