

Table Twelve

By

Mark Holder

FADE IN:

INT. 24 HOUR DINER - EARLY MORNING

Two men, CALVIN LAROUCHE and JERRY HUBBARD, dressed in security guard uniforms, are eating breakfast after working the night shift. A THIRD GUARD passes their table, waving as he leaves.

CALVIN

Man, I hate night shift.

JERRY

Get used to it, it's the most common work shift for a security guard.

CALVIN

I didn't mind it when I started. I stayed up all night most of the time anyway. Now it's just boring, all I do is work and sleep.

JERRY

Have you thought about putting in for a transfer? You might get an earlier shift at the mall.

CALVIN

No way, I don't want to work at the mall. Get paid half as much to chase shoplifters all day. Forget that. If I'm going to chase people, I might as well be a cop.

Jerry laughs.

JERRY

You want to be a cop? I don't think you've got what it takes.

CALVIN

(offended)

Why do you say that?

JERRY

No offense, but you don't have the attitude for it. On the force, you start low and work your way up. You don't have the patience for that. You want to start at the top.

(CONTINUED)

CALVIN

I've got ambition! What's wrong with that?

JERRY

It's a lack of discipline. And going to sleep on night shift doesn't help.

CALVIN

I only sleep during designated breaks.

JERRY

And then you walk around like a zombie for the rest of the shift.

The two men eat quietly for a moment before resuming the conversation.

CALVIN

How about you, ever thought about doing something else?

JERRY

Nah, I like what I do. Almost 35 years in the field.

CALVIN

Damn, with the same company?

JERRY

No, I've worked for a few places. I started at the correctional facility, back when they still called it the workhouse.

CALVIN

(incredulously)

You were a prison guard?

JERRY

(between sips of coffee)

Not a guard. I did the mail.

CALVIN

You did what?

JERRY

The mail, I received it each day, sorted it and delivered it to the prisoners.

(CONTINUED)

CALVIN

You were the prison mailman? That's a hoot!

JERRY

It was a start. I didn't last long. I wanted out of there as soon as possible.

CALVIN

Yeah? Why is that?

JERRY

I saw human nature at its worst, kid. And everything is black & white on the inside.

Calvin mulls over Jerry's words.

CALVIN

So a lot of race stuff, huh?

JERRY

No, well yeah but not black & white like that. I mean, when I delivered the mail, they didn't see a man keeping them sane by bringing them letters from home, you know. They didn't see a man helping them learn by bringing them magazines to read, They saw a uniform. And they hated anyone in uniform.

CALVIN

Wow.

JERRY

Yeah. With all the fights and turf wars going on inside, a guy wearing a uniform is just another target, whether he's the cop that beat the shit out of them last week or the guy who delivers mail and books for them to read. (pauses) I fell out of love with the job when I realized I was just a bellhop in a rundown hotel frequented by society's worst.

CALVIN

Have you always worked night shift?

(CONTINUED)

JERRY

Mostly. Like I said, you get used to it.

CALVIN

What does your wife think of you working nights?

JERRY

It works for us. I'm home during the day to look after our grandson, she's home in the evening and night. That's a full time job in itself.

CALVIN

You babysit, huh? How old is he?

JERRY

He's 15. Cerebral palsy, can't take care of himself.

CALVIN

Shit. Sorry, man, I didn't know.

JERRY

It's OK, we deal with it. Genetics, you know. Luck of the draw.

CALVIN

Your wife must be a saint.

JERRY

She's a good one, heart of gold. And not a bad looker.

CALVIN

Yeah?

JERRY

Yeah, she's still attractive. A knockout back in the day. But so was I. (laughs)

CALVIN

All my friends are settling down and having kids. Scares the shit out of me. Makes me think maybe I should too.

JERRY

Not until you're ready. It's too expensive to do more than once.

(CONTINUED)

CALVIN

I know that's right. I got this friend, Ronald. He's 24 and going through his second divorce.

JERRY

Whoa, what's he trying to do, set a record for most divorces before 30?

CALVIN

I don't know what he's doing. Don't think he does, either. His first wife was a good girl, had a good job, a really nice girl. Not very pretty, tho. He cheated on her with the one who's divorcing him now. She's a doll but has the morals of an alley cat, you know.

JERRY

Yeah, that happens a lot. Plain first wife, knockout second wife. Same thing with Patterson, he left his wife for a beauty about half his age.

CALVIN

Patterson??? That fat prick has a hot wife? The guy who just left?

JERRY

Yeah, she's a babe. He met her when she was fresh out of college. I don't know what she did but it put a spell on him. He left his wife and moved in with her in no time.

CALVIN

Patterson?

JERRY

Patterson.

CALVIN

Damn, who would've thunk it?

JERRY

What, you don't think an old guy can get a nice girl?

CALVIN

Movie stars, yeah. Bank managers, yeah. But not Patterson.

(CONTINUED)

JERRY

He's not a bad guy. I kinda feel sorry for the guy, he's in the same boat as your friend.

CALVIN

How so?

JERRY

You know, that alley cat thing.

CALVIN

His wife's a cheater?

JERRY

Yeah. She got bored with him after the thrill was gone.

CALVIN

Hmm. Too bad.

An awkward silence as the men pause for a moment.

CALVIN

How do you know about his wife?

Jerry grins mischievously, saying nothing more.

CALVIN

No way! You and fat Patterson's hot wife???

JERRY

Finish your coffee, it's time to go home.

Satisfied that his younger colleague thinks he's having an affair with a beautiful, much younger woman, Jerry tips the waitress and the two men leave.

INT. 24 HOUR DINER - LATE MORNING

EDDIE DAVIS and LUCIOUS "WILLIE" WILSON, two elderly friends, are eating pie after a morning of playing chess in the park.

EDDIE

Willie, how many more years do you think I've got?

(CONTINUED)

WILLIE

Huh?

EDDIE

How many more years do you think  
I've got to live?

WILLIE

What the hell kind of question is  
that?

EDDIE

Because I feel like I could live  
forever after beating your ass at  
chess this morning! (laughs)

WILLIE

Keep crowing and the next beating  
is going to be about your head and  
neck.

EDDIE

Now, you don't mean that.

WILLIE

Don't tell me what I mean. And  
don't tell me you weren't cheating.  
I know you moved those pieces when  
I wasn't looking.

EDDIE

That ain't so, Willie. I never  
cheated at nothing in my life.

WILLIE

That is so, I saw it. Those pieces  
don't move themselves, you know.

EDDIE

I can't believe you'd accuse me of  
cheating to win. I thought you knew  
me better.

WILLIE

No matter. As of tomorrow, you'll  
lose like you always do. Willie's  
making a comeback!

Giggling with excitement, Willie looks down to eat his  
spoonful of pie only to notice a large black hair is stuck  
on it.

(CONTINUED)

WILLIE  
Whoa, what's this?

Willie lifts the hair and holds it between his fingers.  
Eddie peers closely.

EDDIE  
Lord have mercy, that's a big one.

Willie calls a waitress over and asks for another piece of pie, which she promptly delivers with apologies.

WILLIE  
Now, where was I?

Willie picks up a spoonful of his new slice of pie only to find another hair.

WILLIE  
(angrily)  
Hey Cookie! Where's all this hair  
in my food coming from?

The COOK shrugs and mumbles "I don't know" while scratching his very hirsute arm.

INT. 24 HOUR DINER - NOON

DAVE FARMER, father of 3, is seated at Table 12 with his children, 4 year old Justin, 5 year old Ashley, and 8 year old Lauren, having just won full custody in Family Court.

DAVE  
Come on, kids. Settle down and tell  
daddy what you want for lunch.

JUSTIN  
I want a Happy Meal!

ASHLEY  
Me too!

LAUREN  
Me three!

DAVE  
Uh, this place doesn't have Happy  
Meals, do you want a burger?

JUSTIN  
Yeah!

(CONTINUED)

LAUREN

No. I want a Happy Meal.

Ashley looks around the diner curiously.

DAVE

Lauren, you can't have a Happy Meal. Look at the menu, they have kids plates.

ASHLEY

I want french fries.

DAVE

See how easy it is, guys? What do you want with your french fries, sweetie?

ASHLEY

A Happy Meal.

WAITRESS

(smiling)

What can I get everyone?

DAVE

I think we're still deciding. I'll have a Coke. Do you have juice for the kids?

WAITRESS

Yes, apple or orange.

DAVE

3 orange juices, please.

WAITRESS

I'll get your drinks and come back.

DAVE

Thanks. (turning to the children)  
Now, what do we want? Lauren, help your sister with the menu.

LAUREN

Why do I have to?

DAVE

Because you're older, a good reader and closer to her than I am.

(CONTINUED)

ASHLEY  
Daddy?

DAVE  
Yes?

ASHLEY  
Does this restaurant have a  
playground?

DAVE  
No, sweetheart. It doesn't.

ASHLEY  
Then why did we come here?

The other children ask as well.

DAVE  
Why? Because we're celebrating.  
You're living with me from now on.  
Isn't that great?

JUSTIN  
Yay!!! Daddy!

LAUREN  
But why here?

DAVE  
Well, kids, this was your grand  
dad's favorite restaurant when he  
worked in the building across the  
street. He used to bring me here  
when I was young, and now I'm  
bringing my kids.

ASHLEY  
Did it have a playground when you  
were a kid?

DAVE  
No, Ashley. It's never had a  
playground. You go to a restaurant  
to eat, not to play. So let's put  
our thinking caps on and decide  
what we want to eat. OK?

LAUREN  
Daddy?

DAVE  
(frustrated)  
Yes, Lauren?

LAUREN  
Why isn't Mom having lunch with us?

This is the question Dave hoped he wouldn't have to answer.

DAVE  
Your mom has a very busy life. She  
couldn't come to lunch today.  
That's why she wasn't at the court  
house, either. So you're living  
with me from now on.

LAUREN  
Does Mom still love us?

DAVE  
Of course she does, sugarplum.  
She's just got a lot on her mind  
lately and when she feels better,  
she might get in touch.

ASHLEY  
Can we go see her after lunch?

DAVE  
(reluctant to answer)  
Not today. Maybe some other time.

LAUREN  
Dad, where is Mom? Do you know?

DAVE  
No, honey. I don't. But I'm sure  
wherever she is, she's thinking of  
you.

LAUREN  
Really?

DAVE  
(nodding)  
Really.

LAUREN  
I miss her.

ASHLEY  
Me too.

Dave hesitates to speak for a moment, unsure of what to say about the mother of his children.

JUSTIN  
(clapping hands)  
I'm hungry!

DAVE  
That's the spirit! Girls, make up  
your minds.

The waitress returns with drinks, prepared to take their order.

WAITRESS  
Are y'all ready to order?

DAVE  
Justin wants a hamburger. Girls, do  
you want hamburgers too?

Both girls nod in agreement.

DAVE  
OK, three kids meals, and I'll have  
a grilled chicken sandwich, please.

WAITRESS  
I'll get those right out to you.

DAVE  
Thanks.

Dave breathes a sigh of relief and checks the time.

ASHLEY  
Daddy?

DAVE  
Yes, sweetie?

ASHLEY  
Can we go to the playground after  
lunch?

DAVE  
Yeah, I think we can do that. And  
when we're finished playing, we'll  
go home and get your rooms in  
order. Grandma will be there!

INT. 24 HOUR DINER - MID AFTERNOON

Local eccentric FRANCIS stands before the cash register, a baseball cap pulled low over his eyes, a fanny pack around his waist, and a backpack slung over his shoulder as he fondles the emergency whistle he wears on a string around his neck. The DAY SHIFT MANAGER running the cash register asks if he'd like to place an order.

FRANCIS  
Can I get a donut?

MANAGER  
Sorry, we're out of donuts. They're usually all sold by 10am.

Francis begins to sway side to side.

FRANCIS  
You don't have any donuts?

MANAGER  
No, we're sold out. We have bear claws, they're nice.

The Manager points to the bear claws kept in a glass cake display case.

FRANCIS  
You don't have jam donuts?

MANAGER  
No, they go quickly in the morning. The bear claws are good, tho.

FRANCIS  
No powdered donuts?

MANAGER  
No donuts at all.

FRANCIS  
Hmmm. What about cookies, got any cookies? Chocolate chip? Oatmeal?

MANAGER  
No cookies today, Francis.

FRANCIS  
I see. My sweet tooth is acting up.

Francis begins to jingle the collection of whistles he carries in a brown paper bag. Pulling a whistle from the bag, he blows it loudly, startling the other patrons.

(CONTINUED)

MANAGER

(annoyed)

Francis, I've asked you not to blow whistles in here. We're out of donuts and cookies. You can't go wrong with a bear claw, we top them with cinnamon.

FRANCIS

How about brownies? Got any brownies? I like fudge brownies best. The gooey kind.

MANAGER

No, we don't sell brownies at all.

FRANCIS

(nodding)

Right, right. Got any pie? A slice of pie would be nice.

MANAGER

No, Cookie had a problem with the pies this morning.

FRANCIS

I thought you were out of cookies?

MANAGER

Huh?

FRANCIS

(pausing, then excited)

How about muffins? Got muffins? Blueberry is my favorite.

The Manager begins to lose patience as Francis keeps the questions coming.

MANAGER

Muffins sell out faster than donuts. We're out of muffins, we're out of donuts, we didn't bake cookies today, and we don't sell brownies. If you want something sweet, all I can offer is a bear claw. Do you want one?

FRANCIS

(puzzled)

Wait a minute. Are you telling me the only sweets you have are the bear claws on display?

(CONTINUED)

MANAGER

That's exactly what I'm saying,  
Francis. All we have are bear  
claws. Topped with cinnamon.

FRANCIS

(frowning)

I don't like bear claws.

The two men stand quietly, the manager frustrated, Francis in deep thought. Francis looks up as if to ask another question, then mutters "I'll come back tomorrow." before quickly exiting the diner.

INT. 24 HOUR DINER - EARLY EVENING

Seated at the table are an older gentleman and a young lady. The man is Dr. Dexter Talbot, the lady is a journalism student by the name of Leslie Turner. After formalities, Leslie sets up a voice recorder and microphone and begins to interview Dr. Talbot.

LESLIE

Dr. Talbot, thank you for agreeing  
to meet with me and be interviewed.

DR. TALBOT

It's my pleasure. Thank you for  
having me.

LESLIE

Dr. Talbot, would you tell my  
readers a little about yourself?

DR. TALBOT

My name is Dexter Talbot, I have a  
PhD. in American history, and I was  
recently dismissed by my former  
employer for what I view as  
political reasons.

LESLIE

And what precisely were the grounds  
for your dismissal?

DR. TALBOT

My tenure was revoked shortly after  
I wrote and published the book "In  
A Velvet Glove," which notes  
similarities between the current  
administration and brutal leaders  
and regimes throughout history.

(CONTINUED)

LESLIE

Interesting. How were you notified of your dismissal?

DR. TALBOT

Via email, which was clinically worded and very informal. I found it to be quite distasteful.

LESLIE

Have you considered getting your tenure reinstated?

DR. TALBOT

Of course, I have. However, as this is an ongoing consideration, I've been advised by my legal adviser to avoid discussion.

LESLIE

I see. There were student demonstrations over your dismissal, correct?

DR. TALBOT

That is correct.

LESLIE

Did you attend the demonstrations?

DR. TALBOT

For clarification, there was only one demonstration and it was broken up by campus police, but yes, I did attend and speak at the event.

LESLIE

What can you tell me about it?

DR. TALBOT

All I can tell you is that I was there and was arrested along with a group of students by campus police, who used pepper spray as I was addressing the crowd.

LESLIE

So you were arrested?

DR. TALBOT

Yes. That is a matter of public record.

(CONTINUED)

LESLIE

Was anyone hurt during the confrontation with police?

DR. TALBOT

Unfortunately, yes. Several students were injured by pepper spray and police batons.

LESLIE

Dr. Talbot, do you feel personally responsible for the students' injuries?

DR. TALBOT

I'm sorry? I'm afraid I don't understand your question.

LESLIE

I'll ask again. Do you feel personally responsible for the students' injuries?

DR. TALBOT

No, I can't say I do...

LESLIE

Why not? They were there to hear you speak.

DR. TALBOT

Yes, they were, but I don't feel responsible for their injuries. Perhaps your question would be better posed to one of the members of campus police who attacked us.

LESLIE

Let's move on to the subject of your book. You said it draws parallels between the US government and oppressive regimes, correct?

DR. TALBOT

Yes, that is correct. Most notably the striking similarities between 9/11 and the burning of the Reichstag in February, 1933, which resulted in increased governmental powers and curtailing of civil liberties, just as with the passing of the PATRIOT Act, among others.

(CONTINUED)

LESLIE

You actually compare the Bush administration with the Nazis?

DR. TALBOT

Not necessarily. However, the actions of both governments in response to attacks are similar, as is pointed out in the book.

LESLIE

You said campus police attacked you. What would you say if I told you I feel they are justified in doing so because you, through your book, have attacked America?

DR. TALBOT

I'd say you're dreadfully mistaken, Ms. Turner. My book is not an attack on America or its government, it is merely a thesis on similarities between current policy and the policies of other governments in history.

LESLIE

Really? It's not an attack? Dr. Talbot, do you consider yourself a patriot?

DR. TALBOT

Yes, I do. I love my country and its people. And when I see policy or action that runs counter to its constitutional basis, I point it out.

LESLIE

What kind of name is Talbot?

DR. TALBOT

English. My family heritage goes back several centuries.

LESLIE

So you're not an American? Is this correct?

DR. TALBOT

No, it isn't. I was born and raised in America. My parents immigrated shortly after World War II.

(CONTINUED)

LESLIE

I see. Why did they leave England?

DR. TALBOT

My father took a job with an American engineering firm.

LESLIE

What did he do during the war?

DR. TALBOT

He served in the armed forces, like many others of his generation.

LESLIE

So, after the war, your family moved here and your father took a job with an American firm. Took a job from an American worker, I might add.

Stunned by her statement, Dr. Talbot looks at Leslie incredulously.

DR. TALBOT

That could hardly be true.

LESLIE

You said so yourself.

DR. TALBOT

My father was offered a position with a firm through contacts he made while serving in the armed forces. Compare that to another scientist who immigrated shortly after the war. Wernher Von Braun, whose V1 and V2 rockets rained down on London, killing thousands, including my maternal grandmother. A man who was brought into this country through Project Paperclip, a secret program that cleansed leading Nazi scientists' records so that they could immigrate and further research begun under the Hitler regime. A program which, by the way, was kept hidden from President Truman.

LESLIE

Dr. Talbot, that is the most outrageous allegation against the US I've ever heard.

(CONTINUED)

DR. TALBOT  
Look it up. Many records are  
declassified and will confirm what  
I just said as true.

LESLIE  
This interview is over.

DR. TALBOT  
Indeed it is.

Dr. Talbot leaves the table as Leslie scribbles in a  
notebook.

INT. 24 HOUR DINER - LATE NIGHT

A man sits silently at the table, holding a cup of coffee in  
hand. His appearance is unkempt, his eyes red. His facial  
expressions change throughout the scene from blank to  
anguished, sullen, relieved, tearful. The screen fades to  
black.

LONER  
(voice over)  
I'll never see her again.

EXT. 24 HOUR DINER - DAWN

The sun rises and a new day begins.

FADE OUT