

THE DUEL

Written by

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EXT. DUELING GREEN - DAY

Two men approach each other and shake hands.

OSCAR DUNRAY (30s) is the human equivalent of a struck match. Weathered and ruggedly handsome. He carries himself like a man with a reputation, chews the end of a pipe and dresses a bit more aristocratically than one would expect.

CARTER BAINES (30s) looks like a soft skinned romantic. Horn rimmed glasses under a cream bowler which matches his slim fitting attire. With a cocked eyebrow and half smile, he bears the concern of a man out for a Sunday stroll.

They appear friendly toward one another. Beside the men, on a small, hip height wooden table, TWO ORNATE DUELING PISTOLS rest within a presentational glass top box.

Oscar claps Carter on the shoulder and leads him over to a small canopy. Carter moves to his chair with purpose, while Oscar saunters up to the remaining open seat.

EXT. CANOPY LOUNGE

An open sided tent providing shade for two wooden chairs flanking a richly carved oak table, whereupon we find a carafe of water and decanters of dark caramel liquors.

The men sit. Oscar takes the bottle closest him and pours himself a whiskey, and motions the bottle to Carter, who rejects with a wave of his hand. Oscar drinks.

A quiet beat.

OSCAR
(gruff)
Thanks for doing this.

CARTER
(eloquent)
No bother at all. A true test of
skill is a boon too rare to reject.

OSCAR
Right.

Oscar drinks. Refills his glass.

CARTER

Oscar Dunray. A strong name, to be sure, and the entirety of the western isle is absolutely steeped in your reputation. You look exactly as I imagined.

OSCAR

(searching for pretty words)

Well. Carter Baines is a good name too.

Beat.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

I ain't much for fluffy...hand holds and back rubs, but, I've heard you can hold your own.

An awkward beat. A bird passes.

CARTER

(charmed)

Ah. A Charmed Yellow Split-wing. Beautiful bird. Rare to these parts. Do you watch?

OSCAR

(somewhere else)

Hmm?

CARTER

The Yellow Split-wing.

OSCAR

Oh, sure, yeah, delicious.

Beat.

CARTER

(laughing)

Delightful.

Another silence. Oscar drinks.

CARTER (CONT'D)

I feel, to be a man of the world, that is, a man in tune with the experiences of the land, politics, commerce, the gun. One must unfurl themselves, as a flower to the sun, and embrace the varied teachings that the world presents.

Beat.

OSCAR

I find...all due respect if I
offend, that shutting one's mouth
and dealing blows when needed is a
fine way to be a man in the
world...if a bit, unflowerlike.

Beat.

CARTER

I enjoy you Oscar Dunray.

OSCAR

(downing his drink)
Shall we get to it then?

CARTER

I should very much enjoy breaking
bread through story, before
shedding blood through barbarism.

OSCAR

Hunh?

CARTER

I would like you to regale me with
one of your numerous exploits?

Beat. Oscar shifts in his seat.

OSCAR

Why are you acting like this?

CARTER

(taken aback)
I beg your pardo--

OSCAR

Nobody sounds like you.

CARTER

I--

OSCAR

I'm not sure if you're trying to
sell me on who you are, or trying
to convince yourself...but I ain't
buying it.

Beat.

CARTER

I see.

(then)

We all have reputations to uphold.

OSCAR

Sure.

Beat.

CARTER

Well.

Carter removes his hat and glasses, tossing them on the table.

CARTER (CONT'D)

No more masks to hind behind. Shall we--

OSCAR

I'll tell you a story.

CARTER

Please. Enjoy your beverage. I would very much prefer to go first. If we're setting aside costumes and courtesies I must insist on...cutting you off.

Beat. Oscar nods.

Carter pours himself a water. We see he wears a shining SILVER WEDDING BAND. Oscar notices.

CARTER (CONT'D)

Understand, Oscar. Every life I've taken, every shoot out, every duel, every situation I found myself in where no discernible exit was likely...I fought. I fought for my family...against all odds. I had to return home to my wife and child. I *had* to.

Beat. Carter drinks his water. He places his cup down on...

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. DUELING GREEN - AFTERNOON (FLASHBACK)

...A different wooden table. Carter wears black knickers, a white dress shirt, black suspenders, and an eye patch. He sits with a different man.

PHILIP MANVILLE (40s) is a distinguished looking gentleman. He looks like he owns railway. Handlebar mustache, horn rimmed glasses, a cream colored coat with tails. He screams wealth and wears a shining silver wedding band.

The two men guffaw at jokes, sip water and eat strawberries.

CARTER (V.O.)

Philip Manville had answered my call to a duel. A respected duelist who held lands in the western isles and stock within Credit Mobilier in the Americas. A wealthy man.

Carter and Philip clink glasses. Philip acknowledges the flight of a bird, Carter is genuinely curious in his reaction. They discuss the majesty of nature. We focus on Carter as he somberly gesticulates.

CARTER (V.O.)

Philip was without wife and child, though he wished very much to one day settle down. He had the money, and the land...what he longed for was family.

We shift now to Philip who fingers his ring and speaks longingly while gazing off into the setting sun.

CARTER (V.O.)

Then I told him of my family. How much they meant to me. The long nights spent by a fire warmed hearth, drinking cocoa and retelling the days adventures...

(laughing)

Whether the life or death dueling pursuits of the father, or a young boys wistful search for the correct letters in a spelling exam. We had each other. We were complete.

Philip wipes a tear from his eye. Carter looks on. Both men exchange pleasantries while finishing drinks and cleaning hands with silk napkins.

CARTER (V.O.)
 I believe Philip knew he had
 already lost before we stepped onto
 the green that day.

A quiet moment for both men. Philip gestures to the dueling green and the table on which two pistols rest. Both men agree it's time. They stand back to back.

A small pearl handled derringer slides out of Carter's sleeve and into his hand. The men begin to walk away from each other down the pitch...

4...5...6...7...

Carter turns early and raises his derringer.

8...9...

CARTER (V.O.)
 We both missed our first shots...

BANG!

Carter shoots Philip through the back as he turns. Philip stumbles and drops to his knees.

CARTER (V.O.)
 I truly believe it was the good
 lord who allowed me the quickness
 to reload, for my second shot found
 its mark.

Carter approaches quickly raises his dueling pistol to Philip's head...Philip tries to speak--

BANG!

Philip slumps sideways, dead.

Carter stows his derringer in his pocket, removes his eye patch and sets about robbing Philip Manville's body.

Carter takes the cream colored clothes. The horn rimmed glasses, the hat, finally setting his sights on the silver wedding band.

Carter makes his way back to the table, sits back in his chair admiring the ring before sliding it onto his finger..,

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. CANOPY LOUNGE - CONTINUOUS (PRESENT)

Carter fingers the ring, quietly. Oscar looks on, not sure if Carter has finished. He downs his whiskey.

OSCAR
I don't got no family.

Beat. Oscar pours himself another drink...

OSCAR (CONT'D)
To be honest, don't know why a man would run the duelin' circuit what has a fam back home to love and care for.

Takes the shot.

CARTER
Well, I--

OSCAR
I'm not much of a braggart, and not keen on glorifying the deeds that lead to a handful of souls for the reaper's wagon. But... Since we're...breaking bread...

He pours another...

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. PUB - DAY (FLASHBACK)

Oscar takes the shot and stands from the table. Before him stand six armed men, at their lead...

CLINTON BLACKTHORN (40s) The kind of man that would hang you for the shade. Greasy black hair tucked behind his ears, held in place by a dark leather hat. Piercing blue eyes.

Clinton's gang looks like five rough drafts of Clinton himself, all resembling him in some way if a little less precise.

Clinton gestures to Oscar that he'd like to see him outside. Oscar nods and starts out the door, stops, and heads back to the table. He takes the whiskey bottle he was drinking from and carries it out the door.

OSCAR (V.O.)
It was a typical showdown. Some
somebody wanting to put me in the
ground. Me not wanting to go.

Oscar stumbles out into the street. Leans back as he swigs
from the mostly empty bottle.

SMASH. The bottle shatters in his hand from a gun shot. The
gun of a Blackthorn thug smokes guiltily.

OSCAR (V.O.)
The man in this scenario wronged
me, and was a notorious blight upon
this specific town.

Oscar examines the shattered glass in his hand and drops the
remaining bottle neck. He turns to the menacing posse, crooks
a finger at Clinton and beckons him over.

OSCAR (V.O.)
So me and this fella go back to
back right out in the green before
God and all.

Clinton and Oscar face off, inches from each other. Oscar
turns his back on Clinton. Clinton does the same.

The two men stand back to back, each of Clinton's thugs fan
out to flank Oscar on his right and left.

Clinton and Oscar begin the ten steps, the thugs keeping pace
with Oscar as he stumbles one foot in front of the next.

7...8...9...

10!

OSCAR (V.O.)
The count was fair and we turned,
my shot landed first, catching the
bugger in the leg.

Clinton and Oscar spin simultaneously. Oscar drops to his
knees while shooting first...

BANG.

One of the thugs fired at Oscar, but since he dropped the
bullet flies over him and hits one of the other thugs on the
other side of the street.

BANG.

Oscar's bullet catches Clinton in the leg dropping him sideways as he shoots sending his bullet into another thug.

Two thugs are down and Clinton is injured. Three thugs remain and the shooting starts.

BANG BANG BANG.

Oscar forward rolls dodging bullets that tear at the grass behind him.

OSCAR (V.O.)
I anticipated the rebuttal and
rolled to avoid it.

BANG.

Oscar shoots Clinton through the arm as he turns to fire. Oscar spins behind Clinton using him as a shield...

BANG. BANG.

Two more bullets hit Clinton in the chest. Clinton, clearly disappointed in his men raises his gun towards his own thugs. Oscar does the same.

OSCAR (V.O.)
My second shot found the mark and
laid the man out for good and
always.

BANG BANG.

Oscar and Clinton fire together, downing two more thugs. The one remaining thug begins running away.

The bartender runs out from the pub and throws a bottle of whiskey to Oscar. He catches it, spins it expertly before clubbing Clinton across the face, who collapses in a heap.

OSCAR (V.O.)
All in all a fair show of arms. The
pub master dealt up libations for
thanks, which I much appreciated.

Oscar bites the cork out of the bottle and spits it out, hitting Clinton in the face, he hoists the bottle skyward and drinks deeply.

Without looking he raises his gun toward the running thug, now a speck down the road.

BANG.

No more thugs.

OSCAR (V.O.)
And that's that.

Oscar lowers the bottle from his mouth and back onto...

MATCH CUT TO:

EXT. CANOPY LOUNGE - CONTINUOUS (PRESENT)

...the table. Oscar is noticeably inebriated, gently swaying as he rests his eyes. Carter quietly observing.

OSCAR
There now. We've both told a *story*.

Beat.

CARTER
I'm not sure I understa--

OSCAR
We've both told a fascinating
yarn...but we both know they was
lies.

CARTER
(defiant)
I, am not a liar, sir.

OSCAR
(laughing)
I don't know what you are.

CARTER
And what exactly do you mean by
that?

Beat.

CARTER (CONT'D)
I came here for a gentleman's match
between honest men--

OSCAR
You're a liar and a coward!

Silence.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
I heard a rumor about that Manville
Baines duel...

EXT. DUELING GREEN - AFTERNOON (OSCAR'S THOUGHTS)

Philip Manville and Carter Baines stand on the dueling green quietly inspecting the pistols that lay upon the small table.

OSCAR (V.O.)
 ...I heard a gutless coward shot
 Baines in the back...

Once satisfied, the two men shake hands, holster their respective sidearms and stand back to back.

OSCAR (V.O.)
 ...while they was in their starting
 steps from the pitch...

The two men begin their ten step ritual. Carter stops after his first step, turns and draws his pistol, leveling it at Philip as Philip continues stepping.

BANG.

Philip Manville falls face first into the grass.

EXT. CANOPY LOUNGE - CONTINUOUS (PRESENT)

CARTER
 I can assure you, sir, it happened
 in the manner in which I reported
 it--

OSCAR
 Thing is...I knew Carter Baines...

Beat.

OSCAR (CONT'D)
 Real nice ol' fella. Had a wife and
 a couple chillins. Avid bird
 watcher, loved life...and you ain't
 him.

Beat.

CARTER
 (caught)
 I, don't know what you're talki--

OSCAR
 Near as I can tell, you must be
 Manville...or some other cowardly,
 name-stealing fuck about. Point is,
 I don't care.

Pouring another drink.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

See, I'm a liar too. That fable I
laid on you a moment ago about that
bloke wanted me dead?

Downs the whiskey.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Well, he had a posse with 'em. Bout
six all told, each with grit, scars
and experience writ upon 'em...and
I laid each to the grave in a
matter of moments.

Pours another.

Beat.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

You see...my reputation is true. I
am the hard bastard people say I
am.

(leaning in)

And I'm not letting you outta my
sight once we reach that pitch.

(finger in Carter's face)

I came here to put you in the
ground.

Downs the whiskey, takes the bottle in his hand and heads off
toward the dueling green.

OSCAR (CONT'D)

Now come on, coward and --

BANG.

Oscar collapses forward, dead, just two steps from the
canopy.

CARTER

We never made it to the pitch,
Baines and I.

(teaching)

Never wait for the pitch.

Carter places his derringer on the table and begins going
through Oscar's pockets, removing letters, pictures, a pocket
watch, a dried rose.

CARTER (CONT'D)

Good sir, know the man you wish to duel. If he enjoys avian rarities, choose a pitch frequented by gorgeous birds. If he enjoys drink...provide plenty of drink, and of course...never risk losing a duel that can be won before you begin.

Satisfied with plundering Oscar's body. Carter returns to Oscar's chair under the canopy and sits. Carter washes the mouth piece of the pipe in a glass of water before placing it in his mouth.

CARTER (CONT'D)

Of course, I made sure the liquors nearest you were...uncommonly strong.

Carter lifts the carafe near Oscar's seat and gives it a sniff. He turns his head away from the powerful odor before replacing it and grabbing the one nearest to himself. Carter smells it and is satisfied.

CARTER (CONT'D)

You have a very engaging reputation Mr Dunray...and a life I should very much like to experience.

Carter pours himself a shot, takes it, grimaces.

CARTER (CONT'D)

(clearing his throat)
Ello! Name's Oscar Dunray.
(clears again)

Pours another shot, takes it.

CARTER (CONT'D)

Ergh! You's a gutless coward.

Takes the dried rose from his pocket and examines it. Pours another drink, slightly larger than the last two.

Downs the drink. Closes his eyes and smells the rose, slides it across his lips, replaces it in his pocket.

Pours another drink.

CARTER (CONT'D)

(clears throat)
I'm Oscar Dunray.

Drinks.

CARTER (CONT'D)
And I am the hard bastard people
say I am.

END.