

CLEVELAND GHOST

Written by

Jeff Hare

Bad Bunny Pictures/Roxy Pictures Inc

INT.--CLEVELAND BROWNS STADIUM--DAY

Snow swirls. Exhausted CLEVELAND BROWNS and DENVER BRONCOS PLAYERS swallow the cold January air. Cleveland has the ball on Denver's 2-yard-line. ONE SECOND LEFT.

TELEVISION ANNOUNCER (O.C.)

This is it. Cleveland down by five. The Browns first-ever Super Bowl birth on the line. Time for one more play...

CLEVELAND'S HUDDLE

The QUARTERBACK looks over tired troops. One running back stares back with steely determination. This is BIG CHUCK TUCKER (23). The quarterback turns to him.

QUARTERBACK

Tucker. You ready, rook?

BIG CHUCK TUCKER

(confident/cocky)

Let's go to the Super Bowl.

The quarterback smiles. Turns to the others.

QUARTERBACK

X split, 35 draw on two. Break!

The Browns run to the line of scrimmage. Big Chuck's eyes gleam with intensity. The quarterback leans into the CENTER.

QUARTERBACK (cont'd) (CONT'D)

71... Blue, 49. Hike, HIKE!

The QB drops back. MAMMOTH LINEMAN slam into each other. It's like trains colliding!

Big Chuck Tucker drops to PASS BLOCK. The Denver MIDDLE LINEBACKER sees...

MIDDLE LINEBACKER

Pass! PASS!

The ruse is working...

A HUGE DENVER LINEMAN bursts past a BLOCKER, grabs the Cleveland quarterback and lifts him off his feet.

TELEVISION ANNOUNCER (O.C.)

They've got it stopped in the backfield. (beat) But, wait!

The quarterback slides the ball into Tuckers's waiting arms!

TELEVISION ANNOUNCER (O.C.) (cont'd)
(CONT'D)

It's a...

MIDDLE LINEBACKER
DRAW! DRAW!

Too late! NO ONE stands between Tucker and the goal line!
His cleats fling mud as he sprints to the five...

The four... The three... The two... THE ONE... TOUCH...

Wait! Tucker's ARM rips backwards. THE BALL TEARS FREE and
drops to the soupy ground! A DENVER LINEMAN falls on it!

TELEVISION ANNOUNCER (O.C.)
Tucker didn't get in! Game over,
Denver wins! Denver wins...

The DENVER PLAYERS erupts in celebration...

The Cleveland quarterback throws his helmet in disgust...

Big Chuck Tucker can only stare at his hands. Crushed...

FACE after FACE of shocked CLEVELAND FANS appear. Then, a
VOICE sounds...

VOICE (O.C.)
OK, get ready. Now!

The IMAGE freezes on the face of a ONE-YEAR-OLD BOY. His
mouth wide in a huge, anguished scream.

PULL BACK TO:

INT.--HARRY KOZAC'S BEDROOM--DUSK

BROWNS MEMORABILIA hangs, stands or drapes everywhere.

An old TV flickers. HARRY KOZAC (65) and his grandson
RUSSELL (12) stare at the frozen image.

RUSSELL
That's me?

HARRY
Size of the mouth doesn't give it
away?

RUSSELL

I am told I take after my Grandpa.

HARRY

You wish. That's the image the Plains Dealer used on the front page. (BEAT) I swear, sometimes I think this team is cursed.

RUSSELL

Serious?

Harry thinks about his answer. A beat.

HARRY

No. No such thing as curses. Forget it.

Harry pulls himself from his LAZY BOY. Crosses to the door.

HARRY (cont'd) (CONT'D)

But, I do think we should get downstairs for dinner before your mom lets some other kind of curses fly.

RUSSELL

A second. I wanna see something.

HARRY

A second, boy. Don't make her nuts.

Harry EXITS. Russell plops into Harry's chair. Remote in hand, he goes frame by frame. Tucker with ball, Tucker's arm jerks, Tucker drops ball. Over and over. Russell freezes on Tucker's horrified face.

RUSSELL

No such thing as curses. Yeah, right...

EXT.--ST. LUKES SCHOOL/CLEVELAND STREETS--DAY

A bell blares. Russell tears through the schoolyard and out onto the streets. He sprints past the bulb-steepled churches and corner bars of his Cleveland neighborhood.

INT.--RUSSELL'S HOUSE, KITCHEN--LATER

The door opens and Russell bolts in, startling his great-grandmother GG (90). She tosses her wooden spoon. Paprikash chicken splatters the walls and ceiling.

RUSSELL
Paprikash smells great GG!

GG curses in Hungarian as Russell darts from the room.

INT.--RUSSELL'S HOUSE, DINING ROOM--CONTINUOUS

Russell's mom DOROTHY, (30's) pays bills at the dining room table as Russell storms in.

DOROTHY
SLOW DOWN!

Russell skids to a stop.

DOROTHY (cont'd) (CONT'D)
Better. Hello, mother.

RUSSELL
Hello, mother.

DOROTHY
Hello son. Now, I assume there's a reason for the expeditious gait?

Russell stares blankly. Finally...

DOROTHY (cont'd) (CONT'D)
Where's the fire, sparky?

RUSSELL
Oh... Mail here?

Dorothy hands him a stack of envelopes. Russell rifles through. Finds... one embossed with an ORANGE HELMET.

RUSSELL (cont'd) (CONT'D)
YES! Grandpa!?

Russell sprints from the room and up the stairs.

DOROTHY
(calling after him)
I love you, mother!

RUSSELL (O.C.)
I love you, mother!

INT.--HARRY'S ROOM--MOMENTS LATER

A scratchy LP plays on an old Hi-Fi. Harry reclines in his chair, lost in the friendly VOICE coming from the speakers.

VOICE ON ALBUM

And look out Katie, it's gonna be a humdinger...

Russell throws the door open.

RUSSELL

They're here!

Russell hold BROWNS SEASON TICKETS in his hand.

HARRY

Of course they're here. Wednesday before the first game. Like clockwork.

RUSSELL

Thought you'd be excited.

HARRY

Be more excited if you'd learn to knock.

RUSSELL

Where's the excitement in that?

Russell crosses to Harry.

RUSSELL (cont'd) (CONT'D)

What are you listening to?

Harry shoot Russell a look. "Really"?

HARRY

Sometimes I forget how little culture America's youth has. This... is Ernie Oliski, original voice of the Browns.

Harry hands the album cover to Russell. He turns it over to see the warm, round face of ERNIE OLISKI. A PHOTO falls out of the cover. Russell catches it and stares, transfixed.

HARRY (cont'd) (CONT'D)

Lake Erie Ernie they used to call him. The best ever.

CUT TO:

1940's NEWSREEL FOOTAGE PLAYS

In glorious black & white, Ernie fires up the crowd. Introduces JUGGLERS, DANCING BEARS, BEAUTY QUEENS and FIRE-EATERS at halftime.

HARRY (V.O.)

You never saw anyone work a crowd like Ernie. And he always used to say, 'look out Katie, it's gonna be a humdinger!'

RUSSELL (V.O.)

Where is he now?

HARRY (V.O.)

Ernie? Dead. Years ago.
(a sad BEAT)
Died a sad, bitter man.

BACK

RUSSELL

Why?

HARRY

The league decided they didn't want the sideshow anymore. That meant no more dancing bears. No more jugglers. And no more Ernie.

RUSSELL

That sucks.

HARRY

Yeah... I read an interview with him just before he passed. Seems the thing he regretted most was never calling a title game. To be at the mic when the clock clicks down and scream, 'Browns Win!, Browns Win!' (beat) Kind'a know how he feels.

RUSSELL

Is this my Dad?

HARRY

What?

Russell hands Harry the photo. A YOUNG MAN who looks to be the perfect combination of both of them, smiles...

HARRY (cont'd) (CONT'D)
 We'll, I'll be... Yeah... that's
 him. Where'd you get this?

RUSSELL
 Fell out of the album cover. How
 old was he here?

HARRY
 Don't know, eighteen, nineteen
 maybe? Your dad always loved that
 album.

A BEAT.

RUSSELL
 Did you love him?

HARRY
 What kind of a question is that?
 Of course. Still do. He's my son.

Russell's eyes drop to the floor.

HARRY (CONT'D) (cont'd)
 What is it, kiddo?

RUSSELL
 I guess... (beat) Last thing I
 remember, he tried to teach me to
 catch a football. I was six.

HARRY
 I remember.

RUSSELL
 I dropped it every time. (beat)
 So I promised myself I'd practice
 after school. Surprise him. That
 Thursday he went to the hospital.
 I never got to...

HARRY
 Got to what?

Russell doesn't respond. Harry pushes the GLASSES down his
 nose. Stares at Russell.

HARRY (cont'd) (CONT'D)
 He was always proud of you,
 Russell.

RUSSELL
(not so sure)
I guess...

HARRY
Russell, I knew him better than
even your Mom did. He was always
proud of you. Remember that.

A BEAT. Then... a TEAR dribbles down Russell's cheek.

RUSSELL
You think he still loves me?

HARRY
Hey... Come here.

Harry lifts Russell up onto the chair with him.

HARRY (cont'd) (CONT'D)
Of course he still loves you. And,
he's with you all the time, you
gotta know that. All the time.

Harry pulls Russell close as the words of Ernie Oliski drift
out the window on the chilly September wind.