

ZERO HOUR

A Radio Scene

By Jeff Dunne

© 2017 by Jeffrey A. Dunne

CHARACTERS

- PORTER An officer who has come to address his troops. He is a tough old warrior, who is ready to be tough on his troops if that's what it takes to help them survive.
- JENKINS A solid soldier, but untried. He is a bit more inclined towards the intellectual than Porter would want a soldier to be.
- MANDELOW A nervous, slightly suspicious soldier, and one that ultimately cracks under pressure.
- MCDUFF Angela McDuff is a practical soldier, smart but with a bit of little girl still left inside.

SETTING

Modern day, presumably taking place inside some kind of barracks.

(We are listening in as an officer is addressing his troops on the eve of a critical battle.)

PORTER

Alright everyone, listen up. I know you're scared. We're all scared. And you have every right to feel that way. Fact is, you should be scared. Should be terrified. What's happening here... well, we've seen it before, some of us. And it ain't pretty. And anyone who tells you otherwise, well... Just watch your back.

JENKINS

Sir?

PORTER

Go ahead, private.

JENKINS

Well, some of us have be—

PORTER

Name, private.

JENKINS

Jenkins, sir!

PORTER

Go on, Jenkins.

JENKINS

Well, sir, some of us have been talking, and... well, sir...

PORTER

You've got questions.

JENKINS

Yes sir.

PORTER

It's alright to have questions, private. You *should* have questions. Every damn one of you should have questions. You wanna know why this is happening. You wanna know how this is all gonna turn out.

JENKINS

Yes sir. Mandelow here thinks it's some kind of secret military coup, and—

PORTER

Mandelow! Step forward!

MANDELOW

Sir yes sir!!

PORTER

Is what Private Jenkins said true? Do you think this is some kind of secret assault?

MANDELOW

(Softly...)

Well, I don't know tha—

PORTER

Speak up, private!

MANDELOW

Sir yes sir!

PORTER

Well you're right! That's exactly what it is. This is war, soldier. War. The enemy is clever. The enemy is fierce. And make no mistake, private, they've been planning this for a very long time.

MCDUFF

But who are they, sir?

PORTER

Name!

MCDUFF

McDuff. Private Angela McDuff. Airborne division, sir.

PORTER

Airborne, is it? You think that makes you special? Well, do you?

MCDUFF

Sir no sir!

PORTER

Good. Because it doesn't. Unless you can fly, private. Can you fly? Well, can you?

MCDUFF

A... a little, sir.

PORTER

We can all fly a little, private. Doesn't mean a damn thing.

MCDUFF

Sir yes sir!

PORTER

So you want to know who the enemy is?

MCDUFF

Yes sir.

PORTER

I said do you want to know who the enemy is!?

JENKINS, MANDELOW, MCDUFF

Sir yes sir!

PORTER

Well that's classified information. Need to know and all that.

MCDUFF

Sir, if we are going to fight the enemy, I think we need to know—

PORTER

Stand down, soldier! No one's trying to ruffle your feathers. I'm going to tell you about the enemy. I'm going to tell you everything you need to know about the enemy.

MCDUFF

Oh. Okay then. (*Awkward pause.*) Thank you?

PORTER

But there are some things that you need to understand first. Can you hear me!?

JENKINS, MANDELOW, MCDUFF

Sir yes sir!

PORTER

As I told you, they've been planning this for a long time. A long, long time.

JENKINS

Sir, how come this is the first we're hearing of this?

PORTER

Secrecy is everything in war. This may be a surprise to you, but command has known about this since the beginning.

MANDELOW

And you're just telling us now?!

PORTER

The time for action has come. We couldn't risk telling you before now. If one of you had gone squawking your mouth off, and the enemy learned that we knew what they were planning, well...

(Pause.)

JENKINS

Well?

PORTER

What!?

JENKIN

Well what, sir?

PORTER

Well what what, private?

JENKINS

What?

PORTER

What?

JENKINS

What?

MCDUFF

So what is the enemy planning, sir?

PORTER

Oh. Right. Now this is gonna be hard for some of you to hear. You like to think that we're living in a free world, where our rights are valued. Where our lives are valued! Where we can count on protection from the people around us. But it's time for you to know the truth. The enemy... our enemy... is planning a sneak attack. And if they have their way, well...

(Slightly shorter pause.)

JENKINS
Well?

PORTER
What?

JENKINS
Well what, sir?

PORTER
Well what what pri—

MCDUFF
(Exasperated, and out of patience)
What will happen if they have their way?

PORTER
We'll all be dead by morning, that's what!

(There's muttering from the troops. "No", "They wouldn't", "Why on Earth" and so forth.)

MANDELOW
But, sir, who *are* they?!

PORTER
That's the worst of all, Mandelbrot.

MANDELOW
Mandelow.

PORTER
Right. Mandelow. That's the worst of all. The enemy... our enemy... are the very people we think are here to protect us.

(There's more muttering among the troops. "No", "It can't be", "Not them", "They're our friends" and so forth. After a few moments...)

I know what you're thinking. No. It can't be. Not them. They're our friends.

MANDELOW

How did you know that that's wha—

PORTER

I was listening just now, you idiot.

MANDELOW

(Softly)

Ooohh.

JENKINS

Are you sure of this, sir? It's hard to believe that they would do something like this.

PORTER

You better *start* believing it, soldier, if you want to hear the cock-a-doodle-doo of another morning.

JENKINS

But sir. Why? Why now? Why us?

PORTER

Son, if I knew that, well...

JENKINS

Well?

PORTER

What?

MCDUFF

Don't you even, Jenkins, or I'll...

PORTER

Truth is, we don't know why they've chosen to target *us*. We don't know why they've chosen to attack *tonight*. But...

JENKINS

But?

MCDUFF

I swear I'll end you myself, Jenkins.

PORTER

But we do know why they're doing it. And I'm gonna tell you. But you need to be prepared, because... because what I have to tell you, it ain't pretty.

MCDUFF

We can handle it, sir.

JENKINS

We've been through a lot.

MANDELOW

We're up to the challenge, sir.

PORTER

Are you? Are you, soldier!

MANDELOW

Well, they are, sir. Maybe I should wait outside—

PORTER

You walk out that hatch right now and you won't make it ten steps, soldier, I promise you that!

MANDELOW

Then... I guess I'm ready, sir.

PORTER

The reason those people plan to kill us... secretly... in the middle of the night... is...

MANDELOW

Gahh!! I can't take it!! It's too much!! I don't want to know I don't want to know I don't want to know!! Just let me out! I can't stand being cooped up like this! It's too much!! I need to get out!

PORTER

Soldier! Get a grip on yourself!

MANDELOW

I can't take it! You have to let me out of here!

PORTER

We did *not* train you to behave this way, private!

MANDELOW

I have to get out of here!

PORTER

What are you? A chicken!? Now get back into rank—

(We hear a swinging door flap open, and scurrying as Mandelow rushes outside...)

Get back here soldier! Don't go out—

(We hear a struggle, then Mandelow screams.)

MANDELOW

No! No! It can't be! Why would you—

(He is cut off by a harsh thwack sound made by a cleaver striking a block of wood. There is a moment of silence, then...)

PORTER

Poor bastard. I tried to warn him.

JENKINS

(In shock...)

I... I don't believe it.

PORTER

Terrible way to go.

MCDUFF

(Fear almost overwhelming her...)

Why? Why are they doing this?

PORTER

The reason... for all of this... now this is going to be hard to believe...

MCDUFF

Just tell me, sir! I've got to know!

PORTER

They're gonna eat us.

(Pause.)

What!?

JENKINS

NO!!

MCDUFF

Yes.

PORTER

That's sick!

MCDUFF

I told you it would be tough to hear, soldier.

PORTER

Eat us?! Like, actually eat us!?!

JENKINS

That's right. And the worst part is—

PORTER

There's more!? There's something worse!?!

JENKINS

I'm afraid so. The enemy... those people that we thought were our friends... This has been their plan all along.

PORTER

No!

JENKINS

It can't be!!

MCDUFF

I'm afraid it is.

PORTER

But they love us.

MCDUFF

They feed us!

JENKINS

I know, soldier. I know.

PORTER

The little girl... in the pink dress...
MCDUFF

I know.
PORTER

She used to call me her wuggle snuggly...
MCDUFF

This can't be happening...
JENKINS

I'm afraid it is.
PORTER

This is insanity.
JENKINS

It's a crazy world out there, Jenkins. A crazy world.
PORTER

She used to bring me corn. In little paper cups.
MCDUFF

I can't die this way. I can't. I've got a girlfriend...
JENKINS

I'm not your girlfriend.
MCDUFF

I used to have a girlfriend...
JENKINS

Pull yourselves together, soldiers! Do you hear me? (*Pause.*) Do you hear me!
PORTER

JENKINS AND MCDUFF
(*Weakly*)

Yes sir.

I said DO YOU HEAR ME!?!
PORTER

JENKINS AND MCDUFF
(Now strongly)

Sir yes sir!!

PORTER

What are we gonna do, soldiers?

JENKINS AND MCDUFF

Die, sir!

PORTER

No! No no no! What are we gonna *do*, soldiers?

JENKINS AND MCDUFF

We're gonna fight, sir!

PORTER

That's right! And then what are we gonna do?

JENKINS AND MCDUFF

Die, sir!

PORTER

No! No no no no no!! We're gonna win! And what are we gonna win?

(There is a pause, then...)

JENKINS

Money?

MCDUFF

A cruise!

JENKINS

I always wanted to go on a cruise!

MCDUFF

Me too!

PORTER

Freedom, that's what we're gonna win!

JENKINS

Really? Do you think maybe you'd want to go on a cruise with me?

PORTER

Our lives, that's what we're gonna win!

MCDUFF

Maybe. Are you asking me on a date?

PORTER

Don't lose focus!

JENKINS

Yeah. Yeah I am. What do you say?

MCDUFF

I say...

PORTER

McDuff! Jenkins! It's the zero hour!! What are we gonna—

MCDUFF

I say you've got yourself a girlfriend, mister!

PORTER

Don't go out that door! Private! Private!! Don't go—

(We hear the sudden sounds of turkeys squawking, then silenced by two thwacks of butchers knives against wood.)

Oh, crap.

(End scene.)