

Night of the Living Dead – Audition pieces

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1. Barbra and Johnny

Cemetery. Daytime. A gravestone and a small tree.

Barbra

They ought to make the day the time changes the first day of summer.

Johnny

What?

Barbra

Well, it's eight o'clock and it's still light.

Johnny

A lot of good the extra daylight does us. Now we've still got a three-hour drive back. We're not going to be home until after midnight.

Barbra

Well, if it really bugged you, Johnny, you wouldn't do it.

Johnny

You think I wanna blow Sunday on a scene like this? You know, I figure we're either gonna have to move Mother out here, or move the grave into Pittsburgh.

Barbra

She can't make a trip like this.

Johnny

I don't know that she can't. Is there any of that candy left?

Barbra

No.

Johnny

Look at this thing. "We still remember." I don't. You know, I don't even remember what the man looks like.

Barbra

Johnny, it takes you five minutes.

Johnny

Yeah, five minutes to put the wreath on the grave and six hours to drive back and forth. Mother wants to remember, so we trot 200 miles into the country and she stays at home.

Barbra

Well, we're here, John, all right? Which row is it in?

Johnny

Gee, there's no one around.

Barbra

Well, it's late. If you'd gotten up earlier...

Johnny

Oh, look, I already lost an hour's sleep when the time changed.

Barbra

I think you complain just to hear yourself talk. There it is.

(They approach the grave.)

Johnny

(Placing the wreath) I wonder what happened to the one from last year. Each year we spend good money on these things. We come out here, and the one from last year is gone.

Barbra

Well, the flowers die, and the caretaker or somebody takes them away.

Johnny

Yeah, a little spit and polish, he can clean this up—sell it next year. Wonder how many times we bought the same one.

(BARBRA kneels by the grave to pay her respects as JOHNNY stands and watches awkwardly. Thunder sounds in the distance and continues throughout the scene.)

Johnny

Hey, come on, Barb, church was this morning, huh?

(A particularly loud crack of thunder and a big flash of lightening as the GRAVEYARD GHOUL enters through the house doors and very slowly staggers towards them down the 'cemetery path' from the back of the audience. JOHNNY notices him but BARBRA does not.)

Johnny

[Putting on his driving gloves] Hey, I mean, praying's for church, huh? Come on.

Barbra

I haven't seen you in church lately.

Johnny

Hehe, well... There's not much sense in my going to church. Do you remember one time when we were small, we were out here? It was from right over there—I jumped out at you from behind the tree, and Grandpa got all excited, and he shook

his fist at me, and he said, "Boy, you'll be damned to hell." Haha. Remember that? Right over there. Well, you used to really be scared here.

Barbra

Johnny!

Johnny

You're still afraid.

Barbra

Stop it now, I mean it!

Johnny

(Teasing. Puts on a slow, spooky mock-English accent) They're coming to get you, Barbra.

Barbra

Stop it! You're ignorant!

Johnny

They're coming for you, Barbra.

Barbra

Stop it! You're acting like a child!

Johnny

They're coming for you. Look! *(Gesturing to the GRAVEYARD GHOUL)* There comes one of them now.

Barbra

He'll hear you!

Johnny

Here he comes now. I'm getting out of here.

Barbra

Johnny!

2. Harry and Helen

The cellar.

Harry

Well, we're safe now. It's boarded up tight.

Helen

What about Tom and Judy?

Harry

They wanna stay up there, let them! ... There are...two other people upstairs, a man and a girl.

Helen

(Annoyed at HARRY) We heard the screaming.

Harry

Yeah, but I didn't know who they were, and I wasn't about to take any unnecessary chances.

Helen

(Sarcastic) Of course not, Harry.

Harry

(Touching KAREN's forehead) Is she all right?

Helen

I don't know what it is. She feels warm. Maybe it's shock.

Harry

Where'd you get the bandage?

Helen

Some laundry in the basket. I tore a sheet. *(Pause)*

Harry

Let them stay upstairs. Let them. Too many ways those monsters can get in up there. We'll see who's right. We'll see, when they come begging me to let them in down here.

Helen

That's important, isn't it?

Harry

What?

Helen

To be right—everybody else to be wrong.

Harry

What do you mean by that? (*Pause*)

Helen

Does anyone up there know why we're being attacked?

Harry

Whatever it is, it isn't just happening here. It's some kind of mass murder. It's going on everywhere. The radio said to stay inside...

Helen

Radio?

Harry

Radio, upstairs, I heard the end of a news bulletin.

Helen

There's a radio upstairs, and you boarded us in down here?

Harry

I know what I'm doing.

Helen

What did it say?

Harry

Nothing! Nothing! They don't know anything yet. There's mass murder everywhere, and...and people are supposed to look for a safe place to hide.

Helen

Take the boards off that door!

Harry

We are staying down here, Helen!

Helen

Harry, that radio is at least some kind of communication. If the authorities know what's happening, well, they'll send people for us, or they'll tell us what to do. How are we going to know what's going on, if we lock ourselves in this dungeon?

(HARRY turns and stares at HELEN). We may not enjoy living together, but dying together isn't going to solve anything. Those people aren't our enemies! (Pause as HARRY sulks.)

3. Radio announcers

Radio announcer #1

Late reports reaching this newsroom tell of frightened people seeking refuge in churches, schools, and government buildings, demanding shelter and protection from the wholesale murder which apparently is engulfing much of the nation. Law enforcement officials are at a loss to explain or, even at this hour, even to theorize about the reasons for this wave of murder. Chief T.K. Dunmore of Camden, North Carolina, is quoted as saying, quote—"Tell the people, for God's sake, to get off the streets. Tell them to go home and lock their doors and windows up tight. We don't know what kind of murder-happy characters we have here,"—end quote. That's Chief Dunmore, of Camden, North Carolina.

Radio announcer #2

So far the only descriptions—the only clues—anyone has of the killers, come from frightened witnesses of some of the slayings. These eyewitness accounts variously describe the murderers as "ordinary-looking people," "misshapen monsters," "people who look like they're in a trance," and "things that look like people but act like animals." Some eyewitnesses tell of seeing victims who look as though they had been "torn apart." This whole ghastly story began developing two days ago with the report of the slaying of a family of seven, in their rural home near North Carolina. Since then, reports of such senseless killings began snowballing in a reign of terror. Efforts to keep track of the murder reports, by the placing of markers on a map, seem to indicate a general spreading from the extreme southeastern United States, north and west. Our newsmen, who have been on the telephone talking with officials of other cities, have determined that none of this kind of mass murder has yet been reported west of the Mississippi River, except in the extreme southeastern portion of Texas.

Radio announcer #1

Civil defense officials in Cumberland have told newsmen that murder victims show evidence of having been partially devoured by their murderers.

(The RADIO ANNOUNCERS begin to get more frantic and animated in their delivery)

Radio announcer #2

Consistent reports from witnesses, claiming that people who acted as though they were in a kind of trance killing and eating their victims, prompted authorities to examine the bodies of some of the victims.

Radio announcer #1

Medical authorities in Cumberland have concluded that in all cases the killers are eating the flesh of the people they murdered.

Radio announcer #2

Repeating this latest bulletin just received moments ago from Cumberland, Maryland: Civil defense authorities have told newsmen that murder victims show evidence of having been partially devoured by their murderers.

Radio announcer #1

Medical examination of victims' bodies shows conclusively that the killers are eating the flesh of the people they kill.

Radio announcer #2

And so this incredible story becomes more ghastly with each report. It's difficult to imagine such a thing actually happening, but these are the reports we have been receiving and passing on to you, reports which have been verified as completely as is possible in this confused situation.

Radio announcer #1

It is happening. It would appear that no one is safe from this wave of mass murder...

4. Sam and Barbra

A typical living room of an American farmhouse in the 1960s. BARBRA is frozen in shock.

Sam

You know a place back down the road called Beekman's—Beekman's Diner? Anyhow, that's where I found that truck I have out there. There's a radio in the truck. I had jumped in to listen to it, when a big gasoline truck came screaming right across the road. Well, there must have been ten-fifteen of those things chasing after it—grabbing and holding on. Now, I didn't see them at first. I could just see that the truck was moving in a funny way. And those things were catching up to it. The truck went right across the road. I slammed on my brakes to keep from hitting it myself. It went right through the guard rail. I guess...I guess the driver must have cut off the road, into that gas station by Beekman's Diner. It went right through the billboard, ripped over a gas pump, and never stopped moving. By now it was like a moving bonfire. Didn't know if the truck was going to explode or what. I could still hear the man, screaming. This thing is just backing away from it. I looked back at the diner to see if there was anyone there who could help me. That was when I noticed that the entire place had been encircled. There wasn't a sign of life left, except... By now, there were no more screams. I realized that...I was alone, with 50 or 60 of those things, just...standing there, staring at me. I started to drive. I...just plowed right through them. They didn't move. They didn't run, or... Just stood there, staring at me. I just wanted to crush them. They...scattered through the air, like bugs.

Barbra

We were riding in the cemetery—Johnny and me...Johnny! We... We came to put a wreath on my father's grave. Johnny, and... And he said, "Can I have some candy, Barbra?" And we didn't have any. And... Oh, it's hot in here. Hot! And he said, "Oh, it's late. Why did we start so late?" And I said, "Johnny, if you'd gotten up earlier, we wouldn't be late." Johnny asked me if I were afraid. And I said, "I'm not afraid, Johnny." And then, this man started walking up the road. He came slowly, and Johnny kept teasing me and saying, "He's coming to get you, Barbra." And I laughed at him, and said, "Johnny, stop it!" And then Johnny ran away. And I went up to this man, and I was going to apologize.

Sam

Why don't you just keep calm?

Barbra

And I looked up, and I said, "Good eve..." And he grabbed me! He grabbed me!
And he ripped at me! He held me and he ripped at my clothes!

Sam

I think you should just calm down.

Barbra

Oh! Oh, I screamed, "Johnny! Johnny, help me! Oh, help me!" And he wouldn't let me go. He ripped... And then Johnny came and he ran and he had... he fought this man. And I got so afraid I ran. I ran... I ran... And...and Johnny didn't come. We've got... we have to wait for Johnny. Maybe...we'd better go out and get him. We have to go out and get Johnny. He's out there. Please, don't you hear me? We've got to go out and get him. Please! We have got to go get Johnny! Please help me!
Please!

Sam

Look, don't you know what's going on out there? (*Holding her.*) This is no Sunday school picnic.

Barbra

Don't you understand? My brother is alone!

Sam

Your brother is dead.

Barbra

No! My brother is not dead!

5. Sam and Harry

A typical living room of an American farmhouse in the 1960s.

Sam

How long have you guys been down there? I could've used some help up here.

Harry

That's the cellar. It's the safest place. *(He spots the radio and moves towards it.)* A radio!

Sam

(Blocking HARRY and turning the radio off suspiciously.) You mean you didn't hear the racket we were making up here?

Harry

How were we supposed to know what was going on? Could've been those things for all we knew.

Sam

That girl was screaming. Surely you must know what a girl screaming sounds like. Those things don't make any noise. Anybody would know somebody needed help!

Harry

We thought we could hear screams, but for all we knew, that could have meant those things were in the house after her.

Sam

And you wouldn't come up and help?

Harry

The racket sounded like the place was being ripped apart. How were we supposed to know what was going on?

Sam

Now wait a minute. You just got finished saying you couldn't hear it from down there. Now you say it sounded like the place was being ripped apart. It would be nice if you'd get your story straight, man.

Harry

All right, now you tell me! I'm not going to take that kind of a chance when we've

got a safe place. We luck into a safe place, and you're telling us we've gotta risk our lives just because somebody might need help, huh?

Sam

Yeah. Something like that.

Harry

Look! We came up, okay? We're here! Now I suggest we all go back downstairs before any of those things find out we're in here!

Sam

They can't get in here.

Harry

You're insane! The cellar's the safest place!

Sam

I'm telling you, they can't get in here.

Harry

And I'm telling you, those things turned over our car! We were damned lucky to get away at all! Now you tell me those...those things can't get through this lousy pile of wood?

Sam

With all of us working, we could fix this place up in no time. We have everything we need up here.

Harry

We can take all that stuff downstairs with us. Man, you're really crazy, you know that? You've got a million windows up here. All these windows—you're gonna...you're gonna make them strong enough to keep these things out, huh?

Sam

I told you, those things don't have any strength. I smashed three of them and pushed another one out the door!

Harry

Did you hear me when I told you they turned over our car?

Sam

Oh hell, any good five men can do that.

Harry

That's my point! Only there's not going to be five, or even ten. There's gonna be twenty, thirty, maybe a hundred of those things. And as soon as they know we're here, this place is gonna be crawling with them!

Sam

Well, if there're that many, they'll probably get us wherever we are.

Harry

Look, the cellar. The cellar—there's only one door, right? Just one door—that's all we have to protect. Tom and I fixed it so it locks and boards from the inside. But up here—all these windows—why, we'd never know where they were gonna hit us next! The cellar is the strongest place!

Sam

The cellar is a death trap.

6. Television announcer and Chief McClelland

Television announcer

Chief, do you think we'll be able to defeat these things?

Chief McClelland

Well, we killed nineteen of them today, right in this area. Those last three we caught trying to claw their way into an abandoned shed. They must have thought somebody was in there. There wasn't, though. We heard 'em making all kind of noise. We came over and beat 'em off, blasted 'em down.

Television announcer

Chief, if I were surrounded by six or eight of these things, would I stand a chance with them?

Chief McClelland

Well, there's no problem. If you had a gun, shoot 'em in the head. That's a sure way to kill 'em. If you don't, get yourself a club or a torch. Beat 'em or burn 'em. They go up pretty easy.

Television announcer

Well, Chief McClelland, how long do you think it will take you until you get the situation under control?

Chief McClelland

Well, that's pretty hard to say. We don't know how many of 'em there are. We know when we find 'em, we can kill 'em.

Television announcer

Are they slow-moving, Chief?

Chief McClelland

Yeah, they're dead. They're...all messed up.

Television announcer

Well, in time, would you say you ought to be able to wrap this up in twenty-four hours?

Chief McClelland

Well, we don't really know. We know we'll be into it most of the night, probably into the early morning. We're working our way toward Willard, and we'll team up with the National Guard over there, and then we'll be able to give a more definite view.

Television announcer

Thank you very much, Chief McClelland. This is Chalie Cardille, WIIC-TV 11 news.

7. Television Announcer and Dr Grimes

Television announcer

An emergency meeting was called this afternoon by the president. Since convening, this conference of the presidential Cabinet, the FBI, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the CIA has not produced any public information. Why are space experts being consulted about an earthbound emergency? So far, all the betting on the answer to that question centers on the recent explorer satellite shot to Venus. That satellite, you'll recall, started back to Earth, but never got here. That's the space vehicle which orbited Venus and then was purposely destroyed by NASA, when scientists discovered it was carrying a mysterious, high-level radiation with it. Could that radiation be somehow responsible for the wholesale murders we're now suffering? *(Pause)* Dr. Grimes, your entire staff, I know, has been working very hard to find some solution to these things that are happening. Do you have any answers at this time?

Dr. Grimes

Yes, we have some answers. But first let me stress the importance of seeking medical attention for anyone who's been injured in any way. We don't know yet what complications might result from such injuries.

Television announcer

Do you feel there is a connection between the radiation on the Venus probe and the phenomenon that we are seeing across the country right now?

Dr. Grimes

(Nervously) I'm afraid I cannot comment on any military action taken with regard to the Venus probe...

Television announcer

In other words, do you feel that the radiation on the Venus probe is enough to cause these mutations?

Dr. Grimes

(Pause) There's a definite connection. It's the only logical explanation that we have at this time. It was an unusual amount of radiation, enough to cause mutation under certain circumstances. *(Pause. Scared.)* In the cold room at the university, we had a cadaver—a cadaver from which all four limbs had been amputated. Sometime early this morning, it opened its eyes and began to move its trunk. It was dead, but it opened its eyes and tried to move. *(Pause)* Therefore, we are advising that the bodies should be disposed of at once, preferably by cremation.

Television announcer

Well, how long after death, then, does the body become reactivated?

Dr. Grimes

It's only a matter of minutes.

Television announcer

Minutes? Well, that doesn't give people time to make any arrangements...

Dr. Grimes

No, you're right. It doesn't give them time to make funeral arrangements. The bodies must be carried to the street and...and...and burned. They must be burned immediately. Soak them with gasoline and burn them. The bereaved will have to forgo the dubious comforts that a funeral service will give. They're just dead flesh, and dangerous. *(Spotlight fades to blackout)*

8. Tom and Judy

A typical living room of an American farmhouse in the 1960s.

Tom

You always have a smile for me. How can you smile like that all the time? (*They embrace*) Come on, honey, we gotta move.

Judy

Tom, are you sure about the phone?

Tom

The phone is dead out. All you get is a recorded message.

Judy

If I could only call the folks. They're going to be so worried about us.

Tom

Everything'll be all right. As soon as we get to Willard, we'll call them. They might even be there.

Judy

I know. Tom... Are you sure we're doing the right thing, Tom?

Tom

What, about getting outta here?

Judy

Yeah.

Tom

Well, the television said that's the right thing to do. We've got to get to a rescue station.

Judy

I don't know.

Tom

Come on, honey. You're starting to sound like Mr. Cooper now.

Judy

But why do you have to go out there?

Tom

Look, I know how to handle that truck. And I can handle the pump. Sam doesn't know anything about that stuff.

Judy

But we're safe in here.

Tom

For how long, honey? We're safe now, but there's gonna be more and more of those things.

Judy

I know. I know all that.

Tom

And, yeah, listen. Remember, when we had the big flood? Remember how difficult it was, for us to convince you that it was right to leave? Remember? Remember we had to go to Willard then? This isn't a passing thing, honey. It's not like just a wind passing through. We've got to do something, and fast.

Judy

I just don't want you to go out there, that's all.

Tom

Hey, smile, honey. Where's that big smile for me? *(Pause)* We've got work to do, honey.