

# THE LOVED ONE

*American War Story: Vietnam*

"Pilot"

Written by

Kyle Arrington

Brant Rose & Toochis Rose  
Brant Rose Agency  
6671 Sunset Blvd  
Ste 1584 B  
Los Angeles, CA 90028

(323) 460-6464  
brose@brantroseagency.com  
trose@brantroseagency.com

"The Loved One"

OVER BLACK: The sounds of A MAN breathing heavily.

EXT. SON DOONG CAVE, VIETNAM - DAY

A BLOODY KNIFE. Gripped tightly, knuckles white. A GOLDEN JACKAL lays on the ground. Stabbed to death.

An emaciated VIETNAMESE MAN gazes at the animal. GAUZE over his left eye. Ratty clothes. Let's call him ONE-EYE (40s).

Behind him, a LUSH GREEN FOREST sways. Light shimmers across a silver lake, reflecting onto canyon walls --

We are underground. This is the Son Doong Cave - the largest cave in the world. The sight is out-of-this-world.

But, at One-Eye's feet, we find A ROW OF DEAD ANIMALS:

A BLACK RAT covered in flies.

A COLLARED CROW with both eyes plucked out.

A LAR GIBBON with an awkwardly broken neck.

A BLOOD PYTHON that choked to death on its own tail.

AN INDOCHINESE TIGER, gutted, innards half on the ground.

THE GOLDEN JACKAL lays wide-eyed, fur matted with blood.

Before One-Eye is a mouth to a DARK PORTAL in the rock. One-Eye takes measured steps towards it... Then, *he disappears into complete black* --

INT. DARK CAVE - CONTINUOUS

A SHAFT OF LIGHT illuminates an oasis in the black void: Lush grass surrounding a small POOL OF WATER.

A STALAGMITE grows from the pool, a carving etched into it: a three-cornered design that loops in on itself: **A TRINITY KNOT.**

One-Eye steps out of darkness and onto the grass. He removes the gauze revealing a fresh wound where an eye should be.

Steeling himself, he removes all of his clothes. Naked, he's so skinny he looks like skin stretched across a skeleton.

Then, One-Eye cries... deeply, heavily. Without hesitating, he SLICES open one wrist, trades hands and SLICES the other --

Ignoring the blood flowing free, One-Eye steps into the pool. The blood quickly swirls into ribbons of crimson.

One-Eye shivers, the life leaving him. As he turns pale, the water deepens to a cloudy black. Like he's floating in oil.

He feels it. One-Eye knows he's rapidly dying. He calms his breathing... then *stops*.....

EXT. MOUTH OF THE CAVE - DAY

Absolute silence. The still water of the lake. The peaceful surroundings. The dead animals... Then --

A DROP OF BLOOD FALLS ON THE GRASS. Somehow, blood is SEEPING OUT of the rock, falling from the mouth of the cave.

As the blood drops faster... suddenly, THE JACKAL TWITCHES. Immediately, we hear music: *"I Love You More Than You'll Ever Know" by Blood, Sweat & Tears*

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. DARK CAVE - DAY

*One-Eye's eye OPENS.* He heaves a deep breath, somehow back to life. He looks at his wrists: sliced open, but not bleeding.

OUTSIDE THE CAVE: The blood continues to fall. And, despite their death, the other animals begin to SPASM --

IN THE CAVE: One-Eye pulls himself out of the pool. No more tears. Just determination. He walks back into darkness --

OUTSIDE THE CAVE: Squinting at the light, One-Eye emerges, sees the convulsing animals, **the dripping blood.**

He WALKS through it. Then, THE BLOOD STOPS FALLING.

Suddenly, ALL THE ANIMALS COME BACK TO LIFE. They shake off death, and flee in all directions.

One-Eye smiles, taking in the immense beauty before him. *There's still work to be done.*

**TITLE CARD: THE LOVED ONE**

EXT. VIETNAMESE SKYLINE - DAY

Puffy rain clouds dot an otherwise pristine blue sky. As we travel through the clouds, we see a LAND MASS below.

**CHYRON: Christmas Eve, 1968. Vietnam.**

The arms of the Mekong Delta. The endless rice paddies. A thick-canopied forest. Mother nature at its most wild. Then --

An EXPLOSION disturbs the peaceful jungle. BIRDS fly off as fire crawls up the trees and launches into the sky --

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

FLAMES and DEBRIS shake the trees, sending AMERICAN SOLDIERS to the ground. As they stand, GUNFIRE finishes the job.

Surrounded by the mayhem, a WOUNDED SOLDIER stands with his foot in a ditch, writhing in excruciating pain. He yells out--

SOLDIER

MEDIC --

From a treeline a MEDIC runs out, stops, shaken by the scene before him. This is PRIVATE SIDNEY "BUG" MEECHUM (20s). Baby-faced, small, but a look of fiery determination in his eyes.

Fighting his fear, Bug moves through the cloud of destruction to the soldier. He looks at the soldier's foot --

It's sliced open, impaled with SHARPENED STICKS. A Bamboo trap. Bug tries to help the soldier out --

SOLDIER (CONT'D)

*Don't don't, stop --*

Bug looks up to see another soldier moving to him through the ruin. It's PRIVATE WILLIAM TROY (20s), Bug's best friend.

BUG

*Will, watch your step --*

Will stops, looking down to see COVERED HOLES on the ground.

BUG (CONT'D)

The whole god damn jungle is boobytrapped.

WILL

*Well, shit.*

Then, MUZZLES FLASH as GUNFIRE screams towards them. Leaves and splintered wood fill the air. Will and Bug find cover --

They cower, the sound of gunfire deafening. Then, Bug spots the wounded soldier, struggling to get free as bullets fly by.

Driven, Bug stands, rushing to help the soldier -- but SCHLUNK, a flurry of shots explode through the man. Bug stops, frozen. All around, bullets SLICE THROUGH TREES --

Just as A BULLET GRAZES BUG'S HELMET, Will TACKLES him, SLAMMING him to the ground. Unscathed, they share a look.

WILL (CONT'D)

*You okay?*

BUG

*Yeah... just seeing if you're paying attention.*

Then, they hear the CRUNCH of feet on branches FROM BEHIND --

Startled, they turn to see a SQUAD OF AMERICAN SOLDIERS. At the front is COLONEL ROGER TOWNEY (40s), hardass in charge.

They OPEN FIRE into the trees, trading shots with the Viet Cong. Towney moves swiftly towards Bug, grabs his collar --

TOWNEY  
Come on, Meechum.

EXT. CLEARING - LANDING ZONE - DAY

Towney leads Bug through elephant grass into a clearing. WOUNDED SOLDIERS writhe on the ground, blood everywhere.

TOWNEY  
Patch up the boonie rats, soldier.

Towney pushes Bug towards the bodies. He drops his helmet, wipes off sweat. An impossible task before him.

Will joins Bug, desperately scanning the bodies... then --

WILL  
Bug --

Bug follows Will's gaze to find CAPTAIN ADAM "CHIEF" LIMA (30s), a Navajo soldier and good friend. His face is pale, he squeezes his leg. Bug moves over to him. *It's shrapnel* --

BUG  
Chief, you gotta move your hands now.

Chief locks eyes with Bug, trusting him; he moves his hands. BLOOD GUSHES OUT from his thigh. Bug applies pressure.

Rattled, Will watches, but Towney snaps him out of it.

TOWNEY  
Private, where's your weapon?

Will checks. His is gone. Stupefied, he stares back. Furious, Towney rips a rifle from a dead soldier's grasp.

TOWNEY (CONT'D)  
If you're intent on dying, do it protecting the LZ. Hueys in-bound.

He thrusts the rifle in Will's hands, and drags him off into the elephant grass. Chief grabs Bug's arm, pulling him close.

CHIEF  
The last thing I see can't be your ugly mug.

Bug grabs tools from his kit, RIPS open Chief's fatigues, and digs his hands into the wound, trying to stop the bleeding.

BUG

Teach me some more Navajo. *Diigis* means idiot right? How do you say, "don't die you fucking idiot"?

CHIEF

It nicked my artery, man.

BUG

Yeah, that's why I'm three fingers deep in you.

Bug winks at Chief -- He SCREAMS in pain. Bug concentrates, pulls a CLAMP out and shoves it in the wound. As he does --

BUG (CONT'D)

I ever tell you about that girl Penny from Joelton? I drove her sexy ass all the way to D.C. for a Velvet Underground show. My luck as it is, halfway through she gets her hands on some LSD and disappears into the night.

Bug sees that Chief is listening in, fighting the pain.

BUG (CONT'D)

So, I got hammered and snuck into the green room. Pushed my way past some roadies, acted like I was John Cale's old buddy, and guess what?

(then)

I walked in on Nico changing. I saw that golden goddess topless.

Cold sweats and fading fast, Chief is entranced by this story. Then, Bug grits his teeth. HE'S FOUND THE ARTERY --

BUG (CONT'D)

GOT IT.

Bug pinches down, Chief cringes.

But then he sees something just past Bug... In a flash, he grabs his rifle, points it right past Bug's head AND FIRES --

Bug shudders, ducks. Behind him, A VIET CONG SOLDIER stands DEAD, riddled with bullets. He flops to the ground.

Relieved, Bug turns back -- to see Chief drop his rifle and go limp. Bug checks his pulse, praying for a beat...

He closes his eyes, listens, tuning everything out... Then, Chief's chest expands with a shallow breath. Bug smiles.

BUG (CONT'D)

Good God, you're hard to kill.

Bug turns to the other soldiers. They're all dead. *Fuck.*

But then Bug sees something nearby. FLIES swarm in and out of a lone helmet. He leans closer, fascinated -- then, A BLACK RAT emerges, unaffected by the flies crawling all over it.

It's the same rat from the cave. And he stares back at Bug.

Disturbed, Bug hears CHAKK-CHAK-CHAK from above -- He looks up to see TWO DUSTOFF HUEYS descending. They're saved --

EXT. SKIES OF VIETNAM - DAY

From high in the sky, we look down on ravines, gorges, fast moving rivers, waterfalls, steep cliffs, valleys of bamboo.

Then, in an isolated clearing, surrounded by triple canopied jungles, thick wall of wilderness -- the 27TH HOSPITAL UNIT.

EXT. 27TH SURGICAL HOSPITAL - DAY

A RIVER runs around a cluster of TENTS and SHACKS with a central quad, all protected by BUNKERS and GUARD POSTS.

At the LANDING ZONE, the Hueys land and the wounded are put on gurneys and wheeled inside the hospital --

INT. OPERATING ROOM - DAY

DOCTORS and NURSES lift Chief onto the operating table. At the entrance flap, Bug and Will step inside --

The stoic Chief Surgeon, MAJOR DENNIS HARON(40s), halts them.

DENNIS

Get out of my OR.

Bug and Will freeze. Dennis heads to the operating table. He checks the wound on Chief's thigh... and shares a worried look with his team, then grabs equipment.

KELLY (O.S.)

Hold that open, Bug.

Bug steps aside, holds the flap: a hard-working, fearless nurse, PRIVATE KELLY DIAZ (20s), carries equipment in.

A young nurse follows Kelly, BLOOD BAGS in hand. This is the gentle and ever-flustered SERGEANT GLORIA HARON (20s).

DENNIS

Where are those units?

Dennis PULLS the clamp out -- Blood SPRAYS on his scrubs.

Gloria freezes -- the sight of blood stopping her. She goes pale. Kelly clocks this, worried.

KELLY

*Gloria.*

Gloria's eyes roll back. A blood bag falls out of her hand and SPLAT -- It bursts on the ground.

Kelly moves to Gloria as she FAINTS.

Bug and Will RUSH to action, grabbing the blood bags and supporting Gloria. Dennis looks up from the surgery --

DENNIS

*We need that blood.*

As Will sits Gloria down, Kelly takes the bags over, putting one on an IV. Nervous, Bug watches the well-oiled machine work quietly, only asking for tools and deftly passing them.

One-by-one, the doctors step back as Dennis continues working, covered in blood, hands deep in Chief's wound.

A silence takes over the room. Bug and Will hold their breath, waiting... and then -- Dennis pulls his hands out.

He nods to Kelly. She checks Chief's pulse... and smiles.

Relief fills the room. Dennis rips his gloves off and goes over to Gloria. Embarrassed, she smiles up at him.

GLORIA

*I'm sorry, honey.*

Dennis eyes her, disappointed. Dennis turns to Bug.

DENNIS

*You're the one who clamped his artery?*

BUG

*...Yes, sir.*

Dennis considers the likelihood of this. Then, relents --

DENNIS

*Nice work, Private.*

As Bug smiles, we hear *Jimi Hendrix's "Crosstown Traffic"* --

EXT. HOSPITAL QUAD - DAY - LATER

Will walks down a gravel path through the camp, food from the mess hall in hand. He spots Toney making PFCs do push-ups.

Walking next to Will, Kelly grabs his bread and takes a bite.

KELLY

The Colonel's not going to kill you.

WILL

You don't know shit. 'A soldier without his rifle is as useful as a dead gook.' His words exactly.

KELLY

Then stop being a shitty soldier.

WILL

Doesn't matter what I do. He wouldn't save my ass if I paid him.

Just then, they round a shack to see a GROUP at the Men's Quarters surrounding BUG. Will hesitates, sighing.

KELLY

Story time already?

With that, Will moves closer, Kelly right behind him.

EXT. MEN'S QUARTERS - DAY

SOLDIERS watch as Bug talks, animated. They clean weapons, pluck leeches off feet, and patch up their boots.

Among them is CORPORAL ROMAN CARNEY (30s), hard, macho, angry. He snarls at Bug as he speaks.

BUG

God damn Bouncing Bettys turn the Cong into paste. Fourth of July shit, Jackson Pollack madness, a cloud of rice paddie dinks decorate the jungle.

(then)

By the time I can hear anything, "medic" is coming from so many directions I got dizzy deciding.

Roman scoffs.

BUG (CONT'D)

I make it to what's left of the platoon, find Will, and bullets start flying. Trees explode around us, booby traps in all directions. Will and I are done, you know?

(darkening)

Five seconds to heaven and all I'm thinking about is rib-eye. I can taste the iron... But that's 'cuz I'm chewing on my damn tongue.

ROMAN

Jesus, Bug. You're ruining the story. Stop with the fucking embellishments.

Bug keeps talking as he flicks Roman off.

BUG

But for some God-known reason we survive, so Will and I hoof it to the LZ. And I find the goddamn Chief of the Navajo bleeding out.

(proud)

So I grab the clamp from my kit, dig my hands in and find his artery. Stop him from bleeding out on the spot.

Bug spots Will, a sour look on his face.

BUG (CONT'D)

But then I hear it... rustling. A gook appears at the treeline, eyes screaming "KILL." So... One hand on Chief's artery, I grab my rifle, turn... and I swear his eyes go clear. Prayers to God about to be answered, finally saved from hell.

Bug sits, getting serious.

BUG (CONT'D)

Crazy, you know? The feeling of taking one life while saving another.

Roman can't take it anymore.

ROMAN

So you're god damn superhuman? Where you hidin' your other arms?

BUG

God's honest truth, Roman.

ROMAN

Half of what you say is bullshit. Like that time you saw a VC levitate through barb wire without a scratch.

That stops Bug for a moment. He swallows, nervous. Nods.

BUG

This place is upside down. Half the shit that happens should be impossible, but here it's real.

ROMAN

As real as your supermodel  
girlfriend. The photo in your  
wallet... I saw that slut in Playboy.

The troops laugh. Bug looks hurt, annoyed. Will shakes his  
head at him - he knew this would happen.

ROMAN (CONT'D)

Guess we'll just have to wait and  
ask Chief if he wakes up.

BUG

When. *When* he wakes up.

Roman doesn't like Bug's tone. The tension between them taut.  
Will steps forward, grabs Bug and drags him away --

WILL

All right, story time's over.

EXT. HOSPITAL QUAD - DAY

Will scoffs, pushing Bug down the gravel path.

WILL

That go as planned, huh?

BUG

He's always running his damn mouth.  
He can't talk to me like that.

WILL

Considering he almost died saving  
your ass last week, I think he can.

That stops Bug. Then, defensively --

BUG

That wasn't my fault.

WILL

Why don't you tell Squad Two it's  
their fault you got lost on patrol.

Bug tenses. Then calms, coming clean.

BUG

I need them to take me seriously. I  
can't do that until they like me.

WILL

You're doing it wrong... They all know  
you haven't killed. You talk about  
killing as if you picked up a goddamn  
twenty dollar bill at the arcade.

Bug takes in his friend's look, dejected. Will softens.

WILL (CONT'D)

They'll get over it, man. You just saved the Chief. So, take five. And let's get drunk and stupid tonight.

Bug smirks. Then, they hear A HUEY. They look up to find it descending towards the hospital LZ --

INT. HELICOPTER - DAY

A YOUNG NURSE stares down at the 27th Surgical. Her eyes are dulled, traumatized. She wears a long-sleeve white shirt under fatigues. This is PRIVATE CHRISTIE "CHRIS" DOAKS (20s).

She looks at a row of SHELL CASINGS on the PILOT's dash, each etched with a different LOONEY TUNES character.

CHRIS

What's on the docket for your last two days, Corporal?

PILOT

I've been too lucky on my tour to think about tomorrow.

CHRIS

I can't stop thinking about my bed... And I have three hundred days left.

The Huey BUCKS, landing hard -- Chris grabs her PACK, holding it close to her. The pilot takes his headset off, looks back.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Can I take one of those?

The pilot scans the casings. Then he zeros in on the one with TAZ the TASMANIAN DEVIL. He grabs it and passes it back --

PILOT

Bring it back home with you.

Chris gives him a gracious look. When the pilot jumps out of the Huey, Chris opens her PACK:

It's FULL of DOZENS of other charms: cards, dogtags, toys, notes, etc. She tosses the Taz shell casing in --

EXT. HOSPITAL LANDING ZONE - DAY

Chris steps out, pack in hand. She takes in the tranquil surroundings, the peaceful people milling about... and almost cracks a smile. Then, Gloria approaches, smiling warmly.

GLORIA  
Private Doaks?

Chris eyes Gloria's insignia, and salutes her.

CHRIS  
Yes, Sergeant.

GLORIA  
Oh God, don't call me Sergeant.  
Gloria Haron. I'm a nurse.

CHRIS  
Yes, ma'am. I've heard about you.  
The Chief Surgeon's wife.

Gloria laughs off the awkwardness, smiles.

GLORIA  
How about I be Gloria and you be  
Christie? We're all equal in God's  
eyes, might as well be in each other's.

Chris nods, touched, and follows Gloria as she moves off --

EXT. HOSPITAL QUAD - MOMENTS LATER

Gloria leads Chris through the quad.

GLORIA  
We're a permanent hospital with  
forty doctors. But since we're in  
the center of I-Corp, the Cong see  
us as a prime target. If they take  
us out, the American War Machine  
bleeds. So we have seventy soldiers  
keeping us safe around the clock.

They pass the RECREATIONAL AREA with a basketball half-court  
and dead weights. Gloria points past them at SHACKS.

GLORIA (CONT'D)  
Including you, there are only nine  
women in this whole unit. We have a  
microscopic hootch over there.  
(then, pointing nearby)  
The men's quarters start here.

As they pass, Roman notices Chris and stands, leering at her.

ROMAN  
All right, a Donut Dollie. You  
wanna come over here, sing some  
tunes, make me feel warm inside?

He holds a baseball bat like a cock, stroking it as other soldiers laugh. Chris ignores it. Gloria rolls her eyes.

GLORIA

The Neanderthals are grunting because we just confiscated enough cans of Thirty-Three to drown the whole battalion. They're calling tonight a Christmas Bacchanal. Booze. Reefer.

Gloria thinks for a moment, finding the words.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

And since you're the new girl, and we're surrounded by animals... you have three options tonight --

CHRIS

-- be prude, be a slut, or scare the dick off the biggest Joe in camp. I know the drill. I chose option three.

Gloria smiles, impressed, leading Chris towards the CHAPEL.

GLORIA

I thank God I'm married to the Major every day.

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

Chris follows Gloria into the Chapel. A dozen pews and a makeshift altar at the front. There's a solemn silence.

Gloria dips her hands into a HOLY WATER FONT, crossing herself. At the altar is FATHER LAWRENCE MCLEAN (50s), the beloved chaplain. He prays quietly with a kneeling SOLDIER.

GLORIA

Father McLean, is a saint.  
(then, without judgement)  
Do you...?

Chris shakes her head. Gloria nods, covering.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

"Better a patient person than a warrior, one with self-control than one who takes a city."  
(re: chapel)  
In here, there's no war.

Gloria smiles, and leaves, waving Chris along. Privately, Chris dips her hand in the font and crosses herself --

EXT. EDGE OF CAMP - SOUTHSIDE - DAY

Gloria stops at tangled rolls of concertina wire. Chris eyes the bunkers and firing positions at staggered intervals.

GLORIA

(pointing)

We stay away from the mountains -- indigenous people, the Degars. But they're pacifists. Da Nang is fifty miles that way. Ocean's thirty that way. Battalion-size Viet Cong camp, twenty-three miles that'a way.

Chris scans the narrow river below, on the other side is a dense jungle. Then --

She sees an INDONESIAN TIGER in the ticket. Gazing right back at her: Its guts are hanging onto the ground.

CHRIS

What the hell is that?

BUG (O.S.)

That's the Cu De river.

Chris turns back startled -- Bug and Will have sidled up, chests puffed. Chris turns back to the tree line --

CHRIS

No --

*But the tiger is gone.* Chris blinks, mistaken. Will puts his arm around Gloria. She removes it, grossed out.

WILL

At ease. We'll give the newbie the non-bible school edition of the tour.

GLORIA

Please go away.

Bug steps up to Chris, leans close, points out to the river.

BUG

Every time we scout the jungle beyond the Cu De, we find nothing - no trace of life. As if there were no war.

WILL

But each scout a soldier goes missing. Next morning we find body parts scattered along the river.

(then, simplifying)

This side good. That side death.

Gloria rolls her eyes. Bug smiles at Chris, points to Will.

BUG

This is Private William Troy and  
I'm Private Sydney Meechum -  
everyone calls me Bug.

(then)

I'm one of the few who've come back  
from the other side. You'd do right  
to stick by me, Private...?

CHRIS

Chris Doaks. And I'm curious if  
this kind of come-on ever worked on  
your cousins back in Nashville.

Bug is dazed by this. He cocks his head. Chris explains.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

There's a "10 I C" on your helmet.  
Plus you talk with the nervous  
energy of a city boy.

Will scoffs. The jig is up -- Bug's demeanor deflates.

BUG

All right, you got me. Where are  
you from, Christopher?

CHRIS

If you figure it out on your own,  
I'll give you the best pity sex of  
your life.

Bug's eyes go wide. He can't help but laugh. He bows,  
playfully. Chris can't help but smile. Then --

TOWNEY

*Privates.*

Bug and Will snap to attention as Towney strides up to them,  
sneering in their faces, spit flying off his lips.

TOWNEY (CONT'D)

Am I interrupting girl time? Meechum,  
patrol started three minutes ago.

(to Will)

Private Fuckbucket, you're on  
latrine duty until you earn your  
god damn service weapon back. *Move.*

Bug and Will rush off. Chris watches, a soft spot for both.

GLORIA

Enough of their side of the sandbox.

Gloria walks off towards the Hospital tents. Chris follows --

INT. HOLDING WARD - DAY

Cheerful, Kelly laughs with a patient in a FULL BODY CAST and then moves to the next. It's Chief, still passed out. She pauses, heavy-hearted... and squeezes his hand.

Chris and Gloria walk in. Chris scans the room seeing Kelly with Chief. Other NURSES treat SOLDIERS with malaria, trench foot, and heat prostration.

GLORIA

Do you have surgical experience?

CHRIS

No. Mostly receiving and holding.

GLORIA

Same for me. Most of the time I don't know what's going on around here.

CHRIS

Didn't you do Red Cross basic?

GLORIA

Only part. My husband fast-tracked me so we could be stationed together.

Butting into the moment, Dennis steps up to Gloria, offering an unnaturally warm smile. He drinks Chris in.

DENNIS

Everyone listens to a Major.  
(then)  
You must be the new nurse.

CHRIS

Private Doaks, sir.

DENNIS

I've heard great things. We're glad you're here. Especially after what you've been through.

Chris takes this in. She hates a pity party. She avoids --

CHRIS

Can I see the crispy critters I came in with?

Clocking Chris' avoidance, Dennis nods towards a nearby flap. Chris turns, staring at the flap, gathering herself...

INT. BURN WARD - DAY

A stoic look on her face, Chris steps in. She finds A DOZEN BURN VICTIMS, silent other than soft moans of pain.

Chris walks the room, pausing at a SLEEPING MAN with terrible second degree burns. She reads the name on his chart: TREVOR.

Chris takes a moment, touching his leg. Glad he's okay.

Then, at the end, Chris sees a man with every inch of skin burned, wrapped up like a mummy. An oxygen mask over his mouth. This is the CHARRED MAN.

Chris studies him, unable to make out features. She checks his ID -- he has none. He's GROANING, trying to speak.

Chris gently removes the mask, leans down, hearing --

CHARRED MAN

...my love...

Determined, Chris opens a nearby cabinet. She fishes out a pad of paper and pen. Pained, the Charred Man turns to her.

CHRIS

I'll write a letter to your love.  
What do you want it to say?

As the Charred Man expels pained whispers, Chris writes --

CUT TO:

EXT. 27TH SURGICAL UNIT - NIGHT

Night has fallen. At the perimeter, GUARDS peer out from bunkers, scanning the sinister jungle across the Cu De.

Lanterns illuminate the gravel path through the quad. FESTIVE SOLDIERS make their way to the Mess Hall. "*I Got the Feelin'*" by James Brown PLAYS from there. The party has begun --

The revelers drop their rifles in a LAUNDRY BIN full of guns and enter the Mess Hall. A sign reads: **NO FRIENDLY FIRE** --

INT. MESS HALL - NIGHT

Christmas lights. Candles. Makeshift mistletoe. DEATH TO VC is written in white paint on the tent wall.

Soldiers ransack a table covered in CIGARETTE PACKS, BEER, and a HUNCH PUNCH soldiers pour LIQUOR and KOOL-AID into.

Sweaty bodies gyrate. Smoke hangs in the air. Soldiers take shots, joints are passed around.

Men hound the WOMEN on the dance floor, Kelly at the center. They love the attention -- pushing guys away or pulling them closer at their leisure. They're in absolute control.

Shirtless, flexing, Roman parts the crowd and goes to Kelly. They get close, grinding. Roman tries to kiss her but she SHOVES him away, wagging her finger "no". Soldiers laugh.

AT THE RECORD PLAYER: Chris, Bug and Will watch the crowd. Bug is handed a joint. He hits it and passes it to Chris.

Without thinking, Chris hits it and offers it to Will.

WILL

Someone's gotta be in their right mind.

CHRIS

Enjoy that impossible task.

Bug laughs. Chris hits it again. Then, The music stops. The crowd BOOS. But they see that it's TOWNEY and hush up. He's drunk, a cigarette hanging from his lips.

TOWNEY

Don't you moan and groan at me, you ungrateful pricks. Mail call.

Father McLean walks in with a large GREEN CANVAS BAG.

FATHER MCLEAN

Evening, boys and girls. Let us all take a moment to appreciate our loved ones back home who keep us going each and every day. And the grace and glory of God who watches over us in this land of madness.

(then, smiling)

Most importantly: Merry Christmas.

He quickly lifts the bag and turns the contents over, emptying LETTERS and BOXES on top of a nearby table.

As soldiers and nurses head over to grab items, being the opposite of orderly, Fr. McLean finds Bug, waves him over.

FATHER MCLEAN (CONT'D)

Private Meechum.

Bug and Will follow the chaplain into the next room.

INT. SUPPLY ROOM - NIGHT

Fr. McLean pull canvas off a CRATE, hidden here.

FATHER MCLEAN

I knew it'd get picked over.

Bug kneels down: IT'S FULL OF RECORDS. Will sidles up to Bug.

WILL

What've we got here?

Bug pulls out a CARD. He reads it, and smiles.

BUG

It's 1968 in music. Courtesy of  
Nashville's best DJ, my brother Eric.

Bug grabs some records, scanning. He hands one to Fr. McLean.

BUG (CONT'D)

Father McLean, for your continued  
music education.

Fr. McLean takes the record: *"Child is Father to the Man"* by  
*Blood, Sweat & Tears*. He scans the cover: It's surreal.

FATHER MCLEAN

...Thank you, Sydney.

Fr. McLean leaves the room. Now alone, Bug pulls out an  
album, opens it and smiles. Gleefully, he hands it to Will.

BUG

I also asked my brother to help  
loosen you up...

Will takes the LP: *"Waiting for the Sun"* by *The Doors*.

WILL

I can't take this hippie shit  
seriously.

Will opens the album to see A BAGGIE tucked in the liner  
notes: there are two ACID TABS in it.

BUG

That's why you gotta get on the  
same level with it first.

Speechless, Will pockets the baggie. Kelly busts in --

KELLY

You know I love presents, right?

Bug smirks, pulling a record out and handing it to her.

BUG

A little something for the  
sweetheart of the 27th.

Kelly sees the record: *The Byrds "Sweetheart of the Rodeo"*. Her eyes light up. She grabs Bug and pulls him into an kiss.

Will does a spit take. Kelly pulls back, slaps Bug playfully.

WILL

It's from both of us.

Will leans in for a kiss. Kelly pushes him off, laughing. Suddenly, "*Higher*" by *Sly & The Family Stone* comes on.

Will and Kelly share an excited look. Together, they grab Bug and drag him into the Mess Hall to dance.

EXT. HOSPITAL QUAD - BASKETBALL COURT - NIGHT

As the music wafts outside, Chris sits on the basketball court, looking through her pack. She pulls out a CAMEO STONE of a MAN, WOMAN and CHILD. It's partially BURNT.

As she considers it -- CAW -- Chris turns, looking for the source of the noise. Up on top of the Chapel she sees A CROW.

But it's not just any crow. It's THE BLIND CROW. She gazes at the crow, mesmerized. Then... it FLIES OFF.

ROMAN (O.S.)

Whachu got there?

Chris is startled, turning to see Roman plop down next to her. A few of his SOLDIER FRIENDS are nearby.

Roman reaches for her bag. Chris snatches it, stands to go.

ROMAN (CONT'D)

Why you gotta do me like that? I'm tryin'a be nice to ya. Make ya comfortable. Be a friend.

The soldiers snicker. Chris eyes Roman, unimpressed.

CHRIS

Be friends with you and the rest of the Hanna-Barbera crew? I prefer more substance than celluloid.

The soldiers scoff. Roman changes his tune, approaching.

ROMAN

You don't know this yet, but I run this camp. Soldiers march to my beat, nurses wet to my touch. I got the trees swaying when I tell 'em to. So I already own you, bitch.

Chris just stares him down, unafraid.

CHRIS

Little pricks like you only act tough because they were bullied back home. Killing farmers and flexing muscles don't make you a man.

As Chris turns to go, Roman fumes.

ROMAN

Where have you seen tougher men than me? In the warm bosom of a medical tent, giving out oatmeal and handjobs every day?

Roman rips Chris' bag out her of hands, opening it and looking in: toys, painted shrapnel shards, photos, notes.

Chris grabs it back, shoving Roman away annoyed.

ROMAN (CONT'D)

Are those gifts from these tough men you're talking about? I didn't know real men collected Barbies.

Bug exits the mess hall with a record in hand. He spots the scene and rushes over, getting between Chris and Roman.

BUG

You don't think do you? Harassing a woman whose job is to keep you alive. You got a death wish, Roman?

Roman gets right in Bug's face.

ROMAN

You say something, it don't mean shit. I say I'll tear you apart, bet your ass I'll get rippin'.

Roman walks off, his boys following. Chris eyes Bug.

CHRIS

I don't need you to stand up for me.

BUG

I came to give you this.

He hands her the record: *"Oracle and Odyssey" by The Zombies.*

BUG (CONT'D)

I was going to keep this for myself by you strike me as a Zombies fan.

Chris slings her bag over her shoulder and takes the LP.

CHRIS  
How'd you figure that?

BUG  
You got a Union Jack on your bag  
and I watched you cringe when Will  
put the Beatles on.

CHRIS  
They're overrated.

BUG  
You're wrong.

Chris studies Bug, impressed.

CHRIS  
You mocking me, or have you really  
figured me out already?

BUG  
Well... I do know where you're from.

CHRIS  
Bullshit.

Bug points at a book sticking out of Chris' bag.

BUG  
A well-worn copy of *All the King's  
Men*? You're a southern belle. And  
from the accent you're failing to  
hide...

Bug studies her for a second. Chris looks back, interested.

BUG (CONT'D)  
...You're from Atlanta, Georgia.

Chris can't believe it... she nods.

CHRIS  
Right outside. Decatur.

Chris is silent, something dawning on her. Bug smiles.

BUG  
Don't worry, I don't expect you to  
pity fuck me like you promised.  
(then, casually)  
Besides, I read your profile on  
Doctor Haron's desk.

Chris just looks at him... and laughs. Just then --

WILL (O.S.)

Bug --

Bug turns to see Will run outside of the Mess Hall, urgent. They lock eyes. Worried, Bug rushes to his feet --

INT. INTENSIVE CARE WARD - CONTINUOUS

Bug and Will rush in. Dennis and Gloria check Chief's vitals. Groggy, Chief turns his head to his two friends, smiles.

CHIEF

You gonna get me a beer?

Bug and Will laugh. From outside the flap, Chris watches.

GLORIA

No alcohol or reefer until you're off the antibiotics.

DENNIS

If you're not shipped out with the next mail run, you'll be battle ready in three weeks.

Chief nods. Dennis and Gloria exit, walking past Chris. Chief weakly hits Bug's shoulder.

CHIEF

You didn't finish telling me how Nico's tits were.

Will rolls his eyes, gives Bug a look. Bug sighs --

BUG

...It was just a story.

CHIEF

Well... your bullshit brought me back to the light.

Just then, A SONG comes on in the Mess Hall. "*Santa Claus is Comin' to Town*" by *The Beach Boys*. Chief sings along. Suddenly, an idea hits Will. He slaps Bug on the back.

WILL

You wanna get on everyone's good side? Bring 'em Santa.

Bug looks at Will... and smiles. Chief looks at Bug.

CHIEF

The fuck is he talking about?

CUT TO:

INT. MESS HALL - NIGHT

As people sing along to The Beach Boys, Bug and Will push a wheeled bed in. On it is Chief dressed as SANTA CLAUS --

CHIEF  
Ho Ho Ho! Merry Christmas, you  
vicious warriors.

From BAGS, they bestow candy, cigarettes, and Nudie pics to revelers as they welcome Chief back to the land of the living.

EXT. HOSPITAL QUAD - NIGHT

On the basketball court, Towney shaves a soldier bald. When he's done, he SLAPS his head and Roman sits.

Nearby, Fr. McLean speaks with Dennis. Bug, Will and Chief burst outside, bags raised. Fr. McLean smiles, calls out.

FATHER MCLEAN  
Lazarus, my friends.

CHIEF  
Merry Fuckin' Ho Ho!

As everyone notices Chief, they cheerfully swarm over to get presents. As Chief and Will pluck CHOCOLATE BARS out of bags and toss them, Bug cradles some records, eyeing the crowd --

Bug spots Dennis and approaches him, steeling himself.

BUG  
Merry Christmas, sir. For you. And  
the lovely Miss Gloria.

Bug hands him *"Live at Folsom Prison"* by Johnny Cash and *"The Papas and the Mamas"* by the Mamas and the Papas.

Unwilling to show appreciation, Dennis looks to see Will and others raise Chief off the bed and above their heads.

DENNIS  
If you're trying to kill Captain  
Lima, you're doing an bang-up job.  
If he ruptures a stitch, he'll die.

As Dennis walks away, Bug rolls his eyes. Then, he sees Roman on the basketball court, head half-shaven. He glowers at Bug --

INT. WOMEN'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

A small hootch. Sweaty from dancing, in a bra, Kelly takes shots with DRUNK NURSES.

Suddenly, the flap opens and Bug and Will wheel Chief in. The girls back away, startled --

KELLY  
Get the hell out --

CHIEF  
We come bearing gifts.

Kelly's eyes beam. *It's Chief.* Overjoyed, she runs and falls onto the bed, smothering Chief with a big hug. He cringes.

CHIEF (CONT'D)  
Ow, shit, Kel.

A nice moment as the others in the room watch this - there's real emotion between Chief and Kelly.

KELLY  
You can't die yet. I'm not done with you.

Then, Kelly kisses Chief deeply. Will's eyes go wide. Kelly shoves her hand in Chief's pants, his mouth opens --

KELLY (CONT'D)  
This still works right?

Immediately awkward, the nurses exit. Bug looks back to see Will, watching dazed as Kelly takes her bra off.

BUG  
Will.

WILL  
She doesn't mind.

Bug grabs Will and drags him out of the quarters --

INT. NURSES' STATION - NIGHT

On her knees, Gloria prays with a furrowed brow. Father McLean has a hand on her shoulder, praying along. They finish. *Amen.*

Gloria exhales deeply... and then begins to cry. Gently, with compassion, Father McLean holds her hand.

FATHER MCLEAN  
"If your time to you is worth saving,  
then you better start swimming or  
you'll sink like a stone."

GLORIA  
Is that from Proverbs?

FATHER MCLEAN

Bob Dylan.

Father McLean gives her a sincere look.

FATHER MCLEAN (CONT'D)

Every day is a test of our faith.

GLORIA

I feel guilty every day that I  
don't want to be here.

FATHER MCLEAN

Then you're astoundingly normal.

Gloria cracks a smile, touched. But Chris walks in with her charm bag, seeing Gloria's tear-stained eyes.

She wipes them away and turns her back to Chris, modestly.

CHRIS

Sorry... I didn't mean to...

GLORIA

You should enjoy yourself, get to  
know everyone. I'll do your rounds.

Gloria moves off to the Burn Ward. Fr. McLean follows. Alone, Chris moves to a cabinet, and tucks the bag behind it --

EXT. HOSPITAL QUAD - BASKETBALL COURT - NIGHT

Adorned in the Santa hat on bleachers, Bug eyes the Women's Quarters. Will dribbles a basketball, follows his gaze.

WILL

You think Chief's dead yet?

BUG

He'd be so lucky.

They notice Chris approaching. She raises her hands for the ball. Will hesitates, then passes it. As she dribbles it --

CHRIS

What's the deal with Gloria?

WILL

You mean beyond that fact that she  
doesn't belong here and her  
husband's a Grade-A prick?

BUG

The old head nurse, Nancy, tried to  
send Gloria home for her own good.

(MORE)

BUG (CONT'D)

Dr. Haron didn't like that and took note of Nancy's motion sickness.

(then)

Now she's on the USS Chipola in the gulf of Tonkin.

Chris shoots. Money. Bug and Will try not to be impressed.

CHRIS

Poor thing needs a friend that ain't a priest.

BUG

Knock yourself out.

WILL

Speaking of, we're not drunk enough.

Snatching the Santa hat off Bug's head, Will walks off --

INT. MESS HALL - NIGHT

People slow dance to "Baby" by Os Mutantes. Towney stands at the open flap to the outside smoking a cigarette.

Will walks past, ignoring Towney's cold gaze. Through the crowd, he spots the drink table is nearly empty: Only a few 33 BEER CANS left. He walks over and takes them all.

TOWNEY

Private Troy.

Cans in hand, Will sees Towney eyeing him. After a moment, Will sighs and walks back. Towney takes the beers.

TOWNEY (CONT'D)

Carry on, soldier.

Towney opens a can, drinks. Frustrated, Will walks outside.

EXT. HOSPITAL QUAD - BASKETBALL COURT - NIGHT

Bug and Chris watch Will stomp out of the Mess Hall, annoyed. Bug catches Chris' eyes, an idea forming.

BUG

Wanna help me cheer him up?

EXT. MEN'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

With clenched fists, Will walks up to the Men's Quarters and PUNCHES the side of the tent hard. From inside --

SOLDIER (O.S.)

The fuck?

As Will seethes, Bug and Chris step up to him.

BUG

What's going on, buddy boy?

WILL

Might as well shoot me now before  
Towney does it.

Bug turns to Chris, informing.

BUG

William here is convinced our  
Corporal wants him dead. To be fair,  
I've seen him be nicer to dead Cong.  
(then)  
But I think all he needs to do is  
tame the beast.

Will looks at them, confused. He senses something.

WILL

...I don't like surprises.

BUG

You wanna be scared of him forever?  
Fine. Or you could appeal to his ear.  
(then, explaining)  
What's the *one* thing we actually  
know about Colonel Towney?

Will looks at Bug, confused. Chris reveals an LP from behind  
her back: *Miles Davis' "Nefertiti"*. Will smirks, getting it.

WILL

The old fart loves Jazz.

EXT. EDGE OF CAMP - SOUTHSIDE - NIGHT

Towney stands near a bunker looking out at the Cu De river  
and the moonlit forest beyond, drinking the can of 33. Then,  
Will walks up. Towney turns, but does not acknowledge him.

Will steels himself and hands Towney the LP.

WILL

Merry Christmas, Colonel.

Towney looks at the cover, curious.

TOWNEY

...Is this with his fourth quartet?

WILL

I have no idea. All I know about Miles  
Davis is what my father told me.

TOWNEY  
And what'd he say?

WILL  
That Blue Moods is the reason I  
have a sister.

Towney smiles, cracks a laugh. Will is surprised.

TOWNEY  
When Debut Records launched in  
Fifty-Two, my wife and I spent a  
week in Brooklyn. Went to see  
Charles Mingus play with Clifford  
Brown eight times.  
(then)  
That's the reason I have a daughter.

Towney offers the beer to Will. Will can't hide his smile --

INT. BURN WARD - NIGHT

Gloria and Fr. McLean pray with Victims. Chris comes in, sees  
Trevor struggling to sit up.

Smiling, Chris puts another pillow behind him, propping him  
up. He sighs, relieved. She spots a tremor in his leg.

CHRIS  
How's the pain?

TREVOR  
You won't hear me whine about it.

Trevor hears a song come on: "*Feelin' Alright*" by *Traffic*. He  
taps his feet. Chris smiles.

TREVOR (CONT'D)  
When I get out of this bed, I'll  
show you how good of a dancer I am.

Chris looks at the next bed: The Charred man wheezes out  
shallow breaths. Next to him is the LETTER Chris wrote.

CHRIS  
Trevor, do you know who that is?

TREVOR  
I don't think *he* knows.

Then, Trevor remembers something. He reaches behind his  
pillow and pulls out a KEY with a SAILFISH CHARM.

TREVOR (CONT'D)  
Before the morphine hits --  
(hands her the charm)  
(MORE)

TREVOR (CONT'D)

-- Doubt I'll be doing any sailing again, so you should add this to your collection.

CHRIS

If this is your attempt to get me to run away with you on your boat --

TREVOR

-- Palm Beach would look good on you, I swear it.

Touched, Chris takes it.

INT. NURSES STATION - CONTINUOUS

Sailfish charm in hand, Chris pulls the cabinet from the wall... BUT HER BAG IS NOT THERE.

Stunned, she pulls out the drawers, searching. It's no where to be found. Her heart races, breathing intensifies. Then... something dawns on her --

EXT. MEN'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

Bug whistles to "*Feelin' Alright*", making his way to the Men's Quarters with the record crate. Then, CRUNCH --

He checks under his foot, seeing THE BURNT CAMEO STONE. Confused, he scans the ground and sees MORE TRINKETS --

INT. MEN'S QUARTERS - NIGHT

Chris' charm bag is wide open in Roman's lap. He pulls out a WIZARD TROLL DOLL and tosses it to A DRUNK SOLDIER nearby.

Other soldiers eye charms of their own, laughing. Then, Bug walks in, killing the mood. He narrows in on Roman.

BUG

Real classy shit, Roman.

Bug shoves past Roman and rips the Troll out of a soldier's hand. He goes down then line, stealing charms back.

BUG (CONT'D)

For a Christian, you have a fucked up way of celebrating Christmas --

The Drunk soldier SHOVES Bug. Roman sweeps Bug's feet out from under him. The charms fly out of his hands --

Bug SLAMS to the ground, the charms CLATTER around him, just as Chris enters. She fumes, glaring at Roman.

ROMAN

If you're gonna be so mysterious, you asking for it. Come on, mama. Play nice. Show me everything you got.

A long beat... then Chris pulls up her long sleeves to reveal TERRIBLE BURN SCARS. The men immediately go silent, stunned.

CHRIS

Look at it. And while you're fantasizing, guess which quarter of my body looks the same.

Roman looks away, ashamed. Chris grabs her charm bag.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

These belonged to doctors and nurses of the 121st surgical unit.

Chris pulls out a SILVER DOLLAR with a bullet hole in it.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

Sergeant Benson Crawford taught me everything I know about wound care. After he pulled me from the fire, he ran back in five times. I watched the skin fall from his cheeks.

(pointing out the flap)

Everyone he saved is in that burn ward.

Bug watches as Chris picks charms up off the ground.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I remember them all. I have to... or else what's the point of surviving.

The soldiers are silent. Roman stares back, embarrassed.

ROMAN

I'm sorry.

CHRIS

Don't tell me shit I already know.

Helping, Bug hands Chris a charm and shoots a look at Roman.

BUG

You're all a bunch of animals.

As Bug and Chris go to leave, Roman scoffs at Bug.

ROMAN

Like a rat, nibbling on the scraps no one wants.

Unable to hold back, Chris turns to Roman.

CHRIS

Do me a favor: cross the Cu De and see if you can make it back. I hear cowards are a delicacy to the Cong.

Chris turns to leave. Roman smirks, narrows in on Bug.

ROMAN

Did Bug tell you he crossed?

Chris looks at Bug. He blushes, embarrassed. Roman laughs.

ROMAN (CONT'D)

You went to face pure evil in the gook forest? News to me. Please, tell us all about it.

BUG

I was following tracks.

ROMAN

So you're a tracker now?

BUG

A Ruff and Puff went with me.

ROMAN

No. *I* make their patrol schedule. Tell me: when you crossed, did you skip over the minefield in sector three? Remind us all which quadrant we found the Cong tunnels.

Bug is silent. Roman turns to a dumbfounded Chris.

ROMAN (CONT'D)

If you want to be impressed, ask him about the time he dead lifted three soldiers and ran up a muddy hill.

(then)

Or the time he kicked a grenade out of Sarge Winters foxhole while hanging from a Huey.

BUG

Cut it out, Roman.

ROMAN

*You're a joke.* The Jester of Da Nang. Everyone loves to watch you dance and tell your bullshit fairy tales. Because it reminds us all that at least we'll live longer than a waste of space of you.

Enraged, Bug KNEES Roman in the crotch, sending him doubling over. Bug winds back and CRACKS Roman across the chin.

Everyone watches anxiously as Roman dabs blood off his lip. Bug stands back, dread rising. Chris holds her breath.

Roman looks up at Bug, fury in his eyes --

INT. CHIEF SURGEON'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Dennis is at his desk. "You're All I Need to Get By" by Marvin Gaye and Tammi Terrell plays from nearby.

Gloria walks in, sheepishly. She forces a smiles, listening.

GLORIA

Will you come dance with me?

(no answer)

Honey, don't you wanna have some fun?

Dennis reaches for something near his feet and raises it: The Mamas and the Papas LP. Gloria studies it, confused.

DENNIS

Have you been flirting?

Gloria can't believe her ears.

GLORIA

What? Of course not.

DENNIS

Bug seems to think this is acceptable. You must have given him a reason to.

GLORIA

No, Bug is a friend. He's giving gifts to everyone --

DENNIS

-- Do you know how hard it is to have a wife that everyone wants to bed?

Gloria steps back, suddenly embarrassed.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

You don't understand men. They could be bleeding out on my table and reaching under your skirt at the same time.

Dennis tosses the LP into the trash.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

Do not embarrass me, Gloria.

He gets back to work, not looking up. Stunned, tears well up in Gloria's eyes. She goes to exit, then -- CRASH --

Gloria is startled. CHEERS echo down from the Mess Hall --

INT. MESS HALL - CONTINUOUS

-- Bug CRASHES to the ground as Roman marches in.

ROMAN  
*Motherfucker.*

Bug cowers on the ground. Roman KICKS him hard. CHEERS.

Chris rushes in, sees Roman circling Bug as he stands up. Roman winds up and PUNCHES Bug hard in the face --

EXT. EDGE OF CAMP - SOUTHSIDE - NIGHT

Towney casually lights another cigarette, laughing. Will studies him in disbelief.

WILL  
You and your twin brother served together in *three* wars?

TOWNEY  
Three.

WILL  
How is that possible?

TOWNEY  
Fifty-one in Korea. Fourty-Four in god damn Bastogne. We had just turned eighteen.

Will shakes his head as he lights a cigarette of his own.

WILL  
How do you survive three wars?

TOWNEY  
Stubbornness.

Will laughs. Then, they see soldiers running off towards the Mess Hall. CHEERS from inside as the fight continues. Duty calling, Towney sighs, flicks his cigarette away --

But suddenly, there's a RUSTLING nearby. They spin to find --

THE GOLDEN JACKAL. It trots over, blood matted on its fur, and stops. And just stares at them.

Confused, Towney and Will share a look...

A KNIFE slashes Will's throat. Blood SPRAYS. His eyes flare, then fade. He drops to his knees. Behind him is ONE-EYE.

One-Eye LUNGES for Towney. He raises his hand -- One-Eye's knife goes THROUGH IT.

But he rips the knife out and STABS Towney in the GUT. As he drops to the ground, One-Eye looks towards the Mess Hall.

Then starts sprinting towards it. Helpless, Towney screams --

TOWNEY (CONT'D)

CONG --

INT. MESS HALL - NIGHT

*"You Ain't Goin' Nowhere"* by The Byrds begins to play as Roman PUMMELS Bug. Blood. Spit. Cheers from the crowd.

One-Eye BURSTS in. He STABS an unsuspecting doctor. SLASHES the face of another. Before anyone can process, One-Eye is in the middle of the crowd, SLASHING. It's a BLUR OF MAYHEM --

A SOLDIER raises a knife and attacks. Quick and easy, One-Eye parries, breaks his hand, and stabs him with his own knife.

As people run from the scene, terrified, Roman knocks a table over, protecting himself. Blood in his eyes, Bug scoots away.

BUG

*Chris --*

In a corner, Chris watches as One-Eye SLICES open a NURSE'S stomach. SCREAMS OF PAIN fill the air. Chris begins to hyperventilate, the room goes silent. A BUZZ takes over.

One-Eye steps over the nurse's body and moves into the Holding Ward. Chris runs outside, away from the scene.

Bug wipes the blood from his eyes and takes in the rest of the Mess Hall: BLOOD AND BODIES EVERYWHERE.

But the cheerful music continues to play --

INT. HOLDING WARD - NIGHT

One-Eye steps into the ward, blood splattered. Protecting, Dennis stands before a group of terrified Nurses and Doctors.

But, One-Eye turns to a HELPLESS PATIENT, and STABS him. As he moves to the next patient, Dennis and his staff back away--

Then, RIP -- Dennis turns. Behind them, A KNIFE SLICES THROUGH THE TENT. The trapped Doctors and Nurses watch, worried to see what's on the other side coming for them.

A pair of hands TEAR the flap open. *It's Chris.*

CHRIS

*Come on.*

Quickly, Dennis pushes his staff towards the opening. They grab as many patients as they can, saving them --

Chris holds open the rip, vigilantly watching One-Eye.

Dennis reaches to grab the last DOCTOR, but One-Eye grabs the man and SLICES HIS THROAT. Trembling, Dennis retreats --

But Chris stops him at the exit. He follows her look: One-Eye is now suddenly still. Listening... He looks over his shoulder to a nearby flap. He walks into the next ward --

DENNIS

We have to go.

CHRIS

*...Gloria...*

Dennis goes pale, suddenly terrified.

INT. BURN WARD - NIGHT

Fr. McLean moves the Charred Man behind a curtain, hiding him with other burn victims. Trembling, Gloria cowers near Trevor.

FATHER MCLEAN

Everything will be fine.

Calmly, he turns, standing guard over Gloria and the rest. He closes his eyes, and recalls Psalm 25:11-13.

FATHER MCLEAN (CONT'D)

Keep your promise, Lord, and forgive my sins, for they are many.

Then, One-Eye enters the room. Gloria CRIES OUT. Fr. McLean steps forward and raises a KNIFE, holding it uneasily.

FATHER MCLEAN (CONT'D)

See how many enemies I have. See how much they hate me. Protect me and save me. Keep me from defeat. I come to you for --

Before he can finish, One-Eye LEAPS forward and swipes his knife up -- SCHLUNK -- right into Fr. McLean's chin.

Silence. Breathless, Gloria watches Fr. McLean open his mouth--

THE KNIFE IS JAMMED UP INTO HIS PALETTE, blood fills his mouth and seeps out. Wide-eyed, he tries to talk --

One-Eye RIPS the knife down. Blood spills. Fr. McLean flops to the ground. He grows pale... then stops moving. He's dead.

Before Gloria can scream, One-Eye PULLS her from hiding and THROWS her on the ground, FALLING on top of her.

One-Eye rears his head back and GAGS -- Gloria SCREAMS. Suddenly, deep, dense oil sprays out of his mouth. The BLACK OOZE covers Gloria's face, gets in her mouth.

Then, BLAM -- One-Eye is shot in his side, blood SPLATTERING on the nearby canvas. He falls off Gloria, turns to see --

Dennis at the entrance, a rifle in hand. Quickly, One-Eye stands and bolts to the closest wall and SLASHES it open.

BLAM -- Dennis fires a shot into One-Eye's gut. *He doesn't falter* as he disappears through the slit into the night --

EXT. 27TH SURGICAL UNIT - NIGHT

One-Eye sprints away. Soldiers round the tent, rifles raised. Bullets SLICE the ground. One RIPS through his arm --

One-Eye deftly jumps over a bunker and down to the river. Roman arrives at the bunker, raises his rifle and FIRES --

Bullets SPLASH around One-Eye as he finds his footing and stumbles through the river and vanishes into the jungle.

Silence. Roman looks down into the bunker below to see THREE DEAD GUARDS, silently killed. He can't believe his eyes.

EXT. HOSPITAL QUAD - NIGHT

Kelly and Chief step out of the women's quarters and take in the scene, fear and confusion awash their faces --

Dazed, Bug steps out of the Mess Hall. Out of the corner of his eye, he sees Towney forcing himself to stand --

TOWNEY

*Medic --*

Bug sees him gripping his stomach. But just nearby is a body: **Will's body.** Without thinking, Bug rushes over --

Bug slides to the ground, grabs Will's neck. Blood still seeps out but Will's eyes are wide, his skin pale.

BUG

No... No...

Bug checks his pulse, beats on his chest, tears falling. Towney comes over, pulling Bug away from Will.

They both just stare at Will's body. The beer can still gripped in his hand. The "Nefertiti" LP on the ground nearby.

And all Bug hears is "You Ain't Goin' Nowhere" still playing.

INT. BURN WARD - NIGHT

As soldiers check on patients, Gloria sobs, covered in black ooze. Dennis lifts her into a hug. She holds him tight, staring at Father McLean's body.

Chris enters to see the bloody scene, the chaplain's body. Surrounded by another atrocity, it takes her breath away...

Then, Gloria's CRYING breaks into a helpless SCREAM --

CUT TO:

EXT. JUNGLE - THE NEXT MORNING

Bamboo trees sway, vibrant leaves dancing. The warm morning sun cuts through the thicket, bathing the jungle floor.

As if this landscape thrives on terrible moments like these --

EXT. MESS HALL - MORNING

A ROW of dead bodies: soldiers, patients, a female nurse... and Will. The rest of the occupants of the 27th stand around them, silently looking down.

Bug stares at Will, hardened, emotionless. Keeping a stoic face, Chris stands back from the group with Chief and Kelly.

Roman and Toney gently lower Fr. McLean's body to the ground. When Toney stands, he cringes. Dennis comes over, lifts his shirt to look at his STAB WOUND.

The bandage is bloody, but Toney stops Dennis from helping. Gloria steps up, staring fondly at Fr. McLean's body.

GLORIA

May the dead escape this land for  
the everlasting, purifying the  
winds as they fly.

Roman and Bug cross themselves. Then, along with other soldiers, they kneel and gather the belongings from the dead.

Chris watches as Bug digs through Will's pockets, putting items in a bag: Rations. Ammo. Family photos. A letter to his parents. A G.I. Joe. Then he pulls out the Acid Tabs.

Bug studies the tabs for a moment... And then pockets them. As he closes his friend's eyes, Toney steps up to him.

TOWNEY

Come with me, Private.

INT. COLONEL'S QUARTERS - DAY

Towney enters his immaculately clean quarters with Bug and Roman close behind. TEN SOLDIERS all turn to Bug.

BUG

What's going on?

Towney calmly raises his bandaged hand.

TOWNEY

This was no regular Cong. He got the drop on three soldiers without making a sound. His hand-to-hand was first-rate. And he looked like a goddamn nightmare doing it.

BUG

All due respect, I don't need a pep talk or sympathy or whatever this is.

TOWNEY

What *do* you want? Freedom to speak.

Bug levels with Towney.

BUG

I wanna bury him up to his neck on the Cu De, let fire ants crawl in his ears, burrow in his skull. I wanna watch the river rise and drown him.

Towney breaks a smile, turns to Roman.

ROMAN

We're going into the bush tonight, hunt that son of a bitch down and erase him.

TOWNEY

After what he did to Private Troy, don't you wanna be there?

Bug steels himself, ready for this. He nods.

INT. BURN WARD - NIGHT

Grinning brightly, Gloria walks up to a burn victim and waves a set of new sheets at him. As she makes the bed, Dennis approaches, taking her hand. Gloria doesn't squeeze it back.

DENNIS

Why don't you go to bed?

GLORIA

I'm not tired. And they need me.

Hesitantly, Dennis nods, then leaves her with the patient.

From across the room, Chris sits with Trevor, watching Gloria make the patient's bed. Trevor follows her gaze.

TREVOR

Poor thing. A whole lot less would shake my faith.

CHRIS

What happened?

TREVOR

That maniac kills the chaplain then knocks her to the ground. He spews this... black oil all over her. Then he's just gone. Lets her live.

Disturbed, Chris looks back to Gloria.

EXT. SONG CU DE RIVER - NIGHT

The river shimmers, peaceful. In full gear, Bug looks out at it. His hand is trembling. Roman approaches. He clocks Bug's shaking hand. He sighs, making small talk.

ROMAN

I remember what it was like before I killed someone. All I thought about was what my wife would think of me when she found out...

Bug shoots Roman a look.

BUG

You're fucking married?

Roman thinks for a moment... and then pulls his necklace out from under his shirt. There's a WEDDING RING on it.

ROMAN

Met her at church. She was in choir, I was slinging thuribles to work on my shot put. Trying to get out of Bethesda on scholarship.

(smiling)

Cookie Myers was the only one who believed in me. So I put a ring on her finger, and enlisted. To make sure our dreams come true.

Bug takes that in.

BUG

How do you shake that and become a soldier?

ROMAN

Love is a mask, Bug. One you wear to look civil, to show you have a heart. But when you're here, all the mask does is obstruct your vision. No... I hate her.

Bug is taken aback by that.

ROMAN (CONT'D)

The space she takes up in my head... I can't shake it. And if I can't see what's in front of me because of her...

Roman catches himself, calms. Tucks the necklace back in.

ROMAN (CONT'D)

Fuck Cookie Myers. I'm married to the war.

With that, Roman leaves Bug to chew on that.

EXT. EDGE OF CAMP - NIGHT

A dozen soldiers in full gear gather around Towney. Nurses, doctors, and other soldiers look on, solemn. Bug steps up and finds Chris. He hands her Will's G.I. Joe.

BUG

Add it to your bag. I can't be the only one who remembers Will.

CHRIS

...Of course.

Bug looks Chris over as if it's the last time he'll see her.

BUG

You know... I'm the youngest of eight boys in a military family. Since we couldn't all be six-two and sturdy, I got to be the smallest. The easiest to crush. The Bug.

(then)

For as long as I can remember, they only ever listened when I was telling stories. Been doing it ever since...

(sincerely)

And I wish I hadn't done it to you.

Chris nods, thankful.

CHRIS  
I'll see you soon.

A long beat. Then, Bug sighs.

BUG  
... all right, then.

With that, Bug joins the soldiers. As Toney turns to the expectant crowd, Chief steps up. Toney nods to him.

TONEY  
Obey the Captain until we're back.  
(to soldiers)  
Squad One on Corporal Carney. Squad  
Two with me. Good luck in hell.

Roman heads off with his FIVE SOLDIERS. Bug stays put. He shares loaded look with Chief. Bug gulps. Chief nods.

TONEY (CONT'D)  
On my six.

With that, they move off. Heart racing, Bug follows Toney down past the bunkers and into the Cu De.

Gripping the G.I. Joe tightly, Chris watches as Bug steps out of the river and vanishes into the towering trees --

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

Carefully, quietly, the soldiers trek through the trees, only moonlight lighting the way.

Bug hears CRACKS and SNAPS throughout the jungle, each more suspicious than the last.

Toney is to his right, slipping out of the moonlight and into the shadows. After a moment, he doesn't reemerge.

Bug looks around, sees no one. He's alone. But keeps moving.

The canopy closes in on him. Vines tangle his feet, elephant grass SLICES his cheek. He can't see feet in front of him --

Then, Bug hears a "HOOO". Startled, he looks up into the trees to find A LAR GIBBON staring down at him. *It's neck twisted in a disturbing way.* BROKEN --

Bug pauses, locking eyes with the gibbon. Surreal.

Prying his eyes away, Bug continues on, hearing the CRACK of branches as the gibbon follows, swinging from tree to tree.

As the moon disappears from sight, so does the gibbon.

EXT. DARK THICKET - NIGHT

Bug moves forward into COMPLETE DARKNESS, his rifle shaking in his terrified hands. Then, SOMEONE GRABS HIM --

Bug turns to find TOWNEY. He shines his light at Bug's feet. Inches away is A HOLE WITH SHARPENED RODS. A bamboo trap.

TOWNEY

We're close.

Bug catches his breath. Towney turns off his light --

EXT. VIET CONG CAMPSITE - NIGHT

Moonlight cuts through the thicket to reveal a small clearing, a CAMPSITE in the center: five lean-tos, a fire.

Towney, Bug and the other soldiers crouch at the tree line.

Bug scans the campsite. No signs of anyone stirring. Then, at the opposite side of the clearing, Roman and Squad 2 appear.

Towney turns to his squad, hand raised. They grip their rifles, ready to attack. Bug takes a deep breath... waiting...

*Towney stands and RUSHES into the camp.* Squad 1 is close on his tail. Across the way, Squad 2 AIMS --

SHOTS RING OUT -- Lean-tos are SPLATTERED WITH BLOOD. Viet Cong soldiers run from tents and are SPRAYED WITH BULLETS --

As the VC return fire, Roman tosses a grenade, OBLITERATING the campfire and sending VIET CONG in the air --

Bug watches the gunfight in awe. He turns his head, shielding from an EXPLOSION... And he sees a lone light deep in the trees. The glow of a warm lantern in an undisturbed tent.

Bug is transfixed. Drawn to it.

EXT. DEEP THICKET - CREEPY TENT - NIGHT

Bug snakes through the trees, closing in on the tent. The entrance flap is open. Inside is a hanging lantern. Draped from it... ARE HUMAN TONGUES.

INT. CREEPY TENT - NIGHT

Rifle raised, Bug wearily steps inside. He sees ONE-EYE laid out on the ground, wounds covered but still bleeding.

With shallow breaths, he looks up at Bug, calmly.

Struck by an awful smell, Bug covers his nose. The overpowering stench of blood, scorched hair, excrement, death.

Around him is burning incense. Soiled clothes. Stacks of bones. Strips of skin dangling from rafters.

Bug gags. And One-Eye just stares up at him. Furious, Bug pushes rifle's muzzle into One-Eye's forehead.

BUG

I want you to beg for it. Beg me to kill you. *Beg* --

But then, One-Eye smiles and opens his mouth -- he has no tongue. It's been chewed off. Stunned, Bug lowers the gun.

But, One-Eye GRABS Bug's arms. Suddenly, Bug's eyes DILATE -- Discordant CHANTS and thundering DRUMS FILL HIS HEAD --

SLAM TO:

#### MONTAGE OF IMAGES

-Dozens of VIETNAMESE and AMERICANS run, shedding their clothes, right into the entrance of the Son Doong cave --

-In the cave, SCREAMS OF AGONY ECHO as BLOOD DRIPS on grass --

-A shadow rolls across the canyon walls of the cave --

-The shadow covers the jungle. ANIMALS RUN from it terrified--

The CHANTS TURN GUTTURAL, THE DRUMS CACOPHONOUS

-A THICK CANOPY catches on fire, spreading quickly --

-The Cu De River runs red with blood. The forest is ABLAZE. Then... A FIGURE emerges from the river, backlit by the fire.

IT'S A WOMAN. She slowly approaches as the fire scorches around her. A measured, calm gait about her.

She comes into view -- Stark naked. On her head is a CROWN: A HUMAN SKULL draped in TONGUES.

We see her face. IT'S GLORIA.

The guttural chants become clearer. The words taking shape --

CHANTS (O.S.)

THE LOVED ONE.

Gloria raises her arms, the DRUMS CRACK HARDER AND HARDER --

SLAM TO:

INT. CREEPY TENT - NIGHT

Jolted, Bug pulls away from One-Eye's grasp, terrified by what he just saw.

One-Eye sits up, dabs his fingers into his mouth and draws a symbol on his chest in blood. A TRINITY KNOT.

Heart racing, Bug raises his rifle and FIRES --

SHLUNK -- right through One-Eye's head. Blood and brains splatter on the back of the tent. One-Eye slumps back, dead.

Bug's eyes are wide, his breathing strained, shallow. Silence in every direction... Bug's hand is no longer shaking.

EXT. VIET CONG CAMPSITE - NIGHT

A BITTER WIND shakes the remains of the decimated camp. Surveying, Towney fires extra shots into DEAD VC. He finds Roman against a tree, bloody hand on his side. He's shot.

TOWNEY

Medic.

Bug walks into the clearing, dazed. He passes a CRYING VIET CONG SOLDIER, wrist pinned to a tree by a bayonet. Soldiers stand around him, SLAPPING a high five on the bleeding hand.

SOLDIER 1

Nice death, friend.

SOLDIER 2

Solid way to die.

Towney grabs Bug, moving him to Roman. He stares wide-eyed at the gunshot wound in Roman's side. Touches it.

BUG

It went right through.

As he gets tools out, Roman stares at him, curious.

ROMAN

Meechum.

Bug looks up. Roman studies his eyes. He sees something...

ROMAN (CONT'D)

What happened to you?

A glint in his eye, Bug levels with Roman.

BUG

I killed him.

Just then... THE WIND SUDDENLY STOPS. The DIN OF CICADAS fades. Trees settle. *A menacing silence takes over.*

Bug's hair stands on end. The soldiers look around, confused. Wary, Towney steps toward the trees, listening carefully.

ROMAN

What the hell was --

Towney SHUSHES Roman. Everyone listens now, tension rises... The sound of RUSTLING floats in. Getting bigger... closer...

*The trees begin to sway.*

Towney raises his rifle. The other soldiers follow suit. Bug stands paralyzed, watching the forest before him...

Then, DEER and WILD OX COME SPRINTING INTO THE CLEARING.

Soldiers jump out of the way as the animals run frantic, tripping over each other and CRASHING into trees.

Bug sees what they are running from: A deep SHADOW rises from the trees before him, blocking out the lively moon. Soon it towers over him like a suffocating blanket of dread --

Unable to speak, Bug raises his hand, points. Roman and Towney follow his gaze up. Ashen, Towney yells out --

TOWNEY

Run --

The soldiers sprint after the stampede of animals --

EXT. 27TH SURGICAL UNIT - QUAD - NIGHT

A calm, quiet night. Arm around Kelly's neck, Chief struggles to walk. Chris watches, carrying crutches. Chief cringes.

CHRIS

That's enough. Your wassailing last night did a number on you.

CHIEF

One more lap.

KELLY

If you can stand by yourself for five seconds, we'll do another lap.

Kelly lets him go. Chief tries to keep his balance, swaying. As he starts to fall, Kelly swoops in to catch him.

CHIEF

You wanted that to happen.

KELLY

I love being right.

As she sits Chief down, Chris hands him the crutches. Chief regards them, and sighs... Then, a NERVOUS SOLDIER runs up.

SOLDIER

*Captain.* Something's coming.

Concerned, Chief turns to see soldiers running out of their quarters, rifles in hand.

Then they see it. To the east, the trees just across the river... *They are swaying --*

INT. INTENSIVE CARE WARD - MOMENTS LATER

The patients begin to panic. Marching through the ICU, Dennis calls out to his staff. Chris and Kelly watch anxiously.

DENNIS

Nurses, keep the patients safe and calm. Men, grab your weapons and secure the perimeter. *Now. Move.*

As the doctors rush after Dennis, patients begin to panic, yelling and trying to get free.

Chris goes to a SCREAMING PATIENT, removing his IV to stand and escape. Chris tries to hold the man down.

CHRIS

Stop, or you'll hurt yourself.

Chris scans the room for a free Nurse, but they're all busy. Kelly is picking up a patient who crawled off his bed.

Chris turns to find Gloria, composed amidst the panic. She faces the nearby exit, ignoring the chaos behind her.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

*Gloria.*

Ignoring, she just walks out of the ward, leaving them to fend for themselves. Chris struggles with the patient --

EXT. MESS HALL - NIGHT

Gloria steps outside, admiring the surroundings. As people begin to line the entire encampment, she watches.

EXT. EDGE OF CAMP - NIGHT

On crutches, Chief hobbles past a line of men aiming at the treeline; *the swaying expands in both directions.*

CHIEF

Do not waste a single bullet. Hold  
until my command.

Chief watches as the swaying ENCIRCLES the entire camp.

Soldiers across the quad YELL OUT, panicked. Chief staggers  
his way towards them, screaming out --

CHIEF (CONT'D)

*Hold your fire --*

EXT. MESS HALL - NIGHT

Suddenly Gloria cringes. A sharp pain tears through her head.

She hears BUZZING: crickets. The sounds of the jungle growing  
louder and louder. She crumbles to the ground in pain --

INT. BURN WARD - NIGHT

The burn victims all suddenly START TO SEIZE. Arms flailing,  
knocking things over. Pained GURGLING noises.

Chris rushes in, face going pale at the sight. She spots  
TREVOR, foaming from the mouth. She runs over, calls out --

CHRIS

*I need help --*

Chris tries to help Trevor, but he won't stop convulsing --

EXT. EDGE OF CAMP - NIGHT

Dennis tries to calm A TENSE DOCTOR as Chief arrives.

TENSE DOCTOR

They're gonna rush us, man.

CHIEF

On my mark or no shots get fired,  
do you hear me?

DENNIS

(to doctors)

Tell the Captain you heard him.

The line calls out "Yessir". Chief and Dennis look across the  
river at the shaking trees. Waiting, watching --

EXT. MESS HALL - NIGHT

Gloria stumbles around the side of the tent and buckles to  
her knees in pain. She looks up, and sees something before  
her that takes her breath away:

THE BLOOD PYTHON, slithering up to her, poised to strike.

EXT. EDGE OF CAMP - NIGHT

Palm fronds CRASH to the ground, startling the doctors. The Tense Doctor steps forward, goes to squeeze his trigger.

CHIEF

Get your ass down --

DEER AND OX EMERGE FROM THE TREES, running into the Cu De --

The Tense Doctor OPENS FIRE. Activated, the entire perimeter FIRES upon the animals. BLOOD AND METAL paint the river --

INT. BURN WARD - NIGHT

Trevor's eyes roll back in his head. The quaking stops. Chris checks his pulse -- he's dead. She stifles tears, moves to the next man. But he's dead too.

Chris scans the room to watch those remaining die one-by-one--

EXT. MESS HALL - NIGHT

Bullets SCREAM in the air, but Gloria stares at the python, terrified of moving. The python rises, watching her...

But it lowers its head... and bites itself.

Gloria watches, as it begins to swallow its own tail. Suddenly struck by nausea, Gloria reels back and GAGS.

Then... SHE VOMITS BLACK OOZE, the same spewed on her. It soaks the ground. Stinging like hell, Gloria cries out --

EXT. EDGE OF CAMP - NIGHT

Branches fall, dead animals float in the river, others run up the embankment. An ox KNOCKS over the Tense Doctor --

Then, Dennis spots something in the trees. He turns to the rest of the line. At the top of his lungs --

DENNIS

*Friendlylies* --

Then we see it: TOWNEY, ROMAN, BUG and the other soldiers exit the treeline, sprinting for the Cu De.

Shots still SLICE the muddy ground at their feet. Chief echoes Dennis down the line.

CHIEF

*Cease fire* --

The entire line stop firing. Soldiers and doctors perk up, seeing their Colonel trudging into the Cu De.

Bug scrambles through the water, shoving past dead animals --

EXT. MESS HALL - NIGHT

Gloria stops vomiting, grabs her spasming stomach.

Eyes red and shocked, she looks at the pool of ooze below her. She touches it. Thick, slimy. Otherworldly.

*Then she sees something in the center of it...* She wipes the ooze aside to uncover the object --

Gloria covers her mouth, horrified.

**It's A HUMAN TONGUE.** Bitten free from it's owner. A TRINITY KNOT SEARED into the wet flesh.

Unable to breathe, Gloria touches her own tongue, making sure it's there. She moans, the terror of this washing over her...

Despondent, she claws at the dirt, burying the tongue. Then she stands and rushes off towards the Chapel.

As Bug makes his way up to the quad, he spots Gloria. Dread rising, he steps after her, retracing where she ran from.

He rounds the tent and scans the ground. Then, he sees it: BLACK OOZE stains the ground. The mound of dirt, claw marks --

INT. BURN WARD - NIGHT

Chris is huddled over Trevor, heart-broken. Kelly enters, suddenly shocked. The burn victims are all dead: eyes wide, foam dripping from their mouth.

KELLY

...What happened to them?

Chris can't even answer. For a long moment, the terrible scene is deathly silent. Then... the WHIRR of an oxygen tank.

Chris and Kelly perk up, look across the room to see --

The CHARRED MAN laying still on his bed, but the bag of his oxygen mask INFLATES and DEFLATES. *He's BREATHING.*

Chris rushes to him, checks his vitals. She can't believe it.

CHRIS

...He's stable.

Chris and Kelly study the Charred Man, confused --

INT. CHAPEL - NIGHT

Alone, Gloria sits by the alter, shivering, traumatized. Bug walks in. For a long moment they regard each other.

Bug notes her dirty hands, the black ooze on her scrubs. Nervous, Gloria wipes her hands on her pants. Bug tenses.

BUG  
What's happening to you?

GLORIA  
I just got sick. The shots scared me. I... vomited, if you must know.

BUG  
What did that VC do to you?

Gloria looks at him, confused.

GLORIA  
What? I'm fine.

Bug pulls out a piece of BLOODY CLOTH.

BUG  
I know what you're trying to hide.

Gloria stands, worry rising. As Bug approaches her --

BUG (CONT'D)  
The same man who attacked you had bitten his tongue off before I killed him. And then I find this in the same spot where you spit up.

Bug unveils the tongue. Gloria holds her breath...

BUG (CONT'D)  
Something has its claws in you. And I won't let it destroy us.

Gloria eyes him, disgusted. A deep anger rumbles forth.

GLORIA  
Shame on you.

She moves past Bug, but he GRABS her arm --

BUG  
Don't lie to me.

GLORIA  
(sharply)  
*Get your hands off me, Private.*

Bug lets go of her, startled by her uncommon tone. She looks at him with a hateful smile, making him uneasy.

GLORIA (CONT'D)  
Why didn't you take this directly  
to the Colonel?

Bug eyes her, confused.

GLORIA (CONT'D)  
Because you know he won't believe  
it. An absurd story like this? No  
one will. Especially not from you.

Her mood shifts. Calming. Gloria gently puts a hand on Bug's arms. Her touch is warm, her gaze hypnotizing.

GLORIA (CONT'D)  
What we need right now is grace and  
love. I can offer that to our people.  
After all we've been through... why  
would you deny them?

With that, Gloria leaves Bug, stunned.

CUT TO:

EXT. 27TH SURGICAL UNIT - QUAD - LATER

The entire unit is amassed on the quad. In the middle of the group are Towney and Dennis, addressing the tense crowd.

Drained, Chris stands with Kelly and Chief. Roman stands at attention near an unruffled Gloria.

TOWNEY  
Two soldiers from the patrol have  
gone M.I.A. We're sending a search  
party a oh-six hundred. Corporal  
Carney will make assignments.

Bug steps up next to Chris. He stares forward, stone-eyed.

TOWNEY (CONT'D)  
There is no need to ponder another  
moment about what happened tonight.  
Our enemy is dead. We are safe.  
Plain and simple. We keep our heads  
on straight, we'll stay that way.

Dennis steps forward addressing the group.

DENNIS  
We lost a lot of good people... So  
be there for each other.

(MORE)

DENNIS (CONT'D)

That's how we get through it.

(then)

In Father McLean's absence, my wife  
will be taking on chapel duties.  
There will be a prayer circle  
tonight for anyone who needs it.

Gloria smiles, taking in the faces of the crowd. They regard her with love and care, a canary in the coal mine.

Bug scowls, unable to take it. He steps forward catching Towney's attention. Chris eyes Bug, confused.

TOWNEY

You have something to say, Meechum?

The crowd turns, seeing Bug. He holds the BLOODY CLOTH in his hand. He looks at Gloria, considering what to say...

Gloria stares back, curious. Then, Dennis scoffs --

DENNIS

Now's no time for one of your stories.

Bug turns to Dennis, deathly serious --

BUG

This is no story.

But Dennis raises a hand.

DENNIS

Do us all a favor: Can it for the  
evening. Have some damned  
compassion, Private.

Discouraged, Bug turns to the crowd. They eye him, annoyed.

TOWNEY

Back in line, Meechum.

Bug glares at Gloria, threatened... but then he slides the cloth back into his pocket.

BUG

Yes, sir. Sorry, sir.

Bug steps back next to Chris, head lowered. As the crowd begins to whisper to each other, eyes shifting to Bug --

TOWNEY

All right. Dismissed.

The crowd disperses. Bug watches Gloria walk off, happily leading a growing group towards the chapel. Chris eyes him.

CHRIS  
You all right?

BUG  
Not in the slightest.

Bug heads off, leaving Chris confused.

CUT TO:

EXT. CHAPEL - THE NEXT MORNING

The morning sun rises over the CROSS atop the chapel, casting a shadow on the Cu De below. A serene morning in the jungle.

*"My Wild Love" by The Doors* starts to play.

INT. MESS HALL - MORNING

Bug sits quietly, holding The Doors LP, listening to the gift he gave Will. Chief joins him. He listens for a moment.

CHIEF  
You know what he'd call this?  
Sentimental bullshit.

Bug laughs, but it fades quickly. Silence again.

CHIEF (CONT'D)  
What were you gonna say last night?

Bug rubs his eyes, tired.

BUG  
That's a good question, Adam.

Chief studies his friend's look.

CHIEF  
We lost our friend. You killed someone last night... That shit turns people upside down. Changes the way they think, act.

BUG  
It's not that.

CHIEF  
It is. You just don't know it yet.

Bug looks at him, annoyed.

BUG  
How could you know what I've been through?

Chief sizes Bug up, holds his gaze firmly.

CHIEF

When a soldier is asked how many people he's killed, do you know why he says "I don't know"?

Playing along, Bug shakes his head.

CHIEF (CONT'D)

Because the real question should be "what was the number when you stopped counting?"

(then)

For Miller is was five. Chicago Ben hit nine his first week. Major Wynshaw told me twenty-three was his last tally.

(then, with weight)

It took me forty-one, Bug.

That hits Bug, seeing the serious look in Chief's eyes.

CHIEF (CONT'D)

You do some things that make your eyes go black. But you do them or you die. And you gotta grapple the devil within you or you will lose your soul in the process.

Shaken, Bug sits in silence with Chief.

INT. CHAPEL - MORNING

Gloria leads a prayer, speaking with confidence. She smiles at Roman who grips his rosary.

GLORIA

I am not ashamed to say I struggle every day. I wake and fight the same battle time and time again...

(then)

We are surrounded by evil. We all know it. Americans. Viet Cong. Loyalists. The trees know it. The water is full of it. We're drowning every moment of every day.

Compassionate, Gloria draws all eyes to her. A lovely smile grows on Gloria's face. In the back, Bug watches, suspicious.

GLORIA (CONT'D)

The only thing that keeps me from slipping away... is love. Love of God. Love of family. Friends. All of you.

(MORE)

GLORIA (CONT'D)

(then)

Whatever gets you up every morning,  
you *must* cherish it. That will  
guide you through the madness and  
into God's loving arms.

The congregation eats this up. Bug bristles, and exits.

INT. SUPPLY ROOM - MORNING

Kelly grabs tools, piling them on a tray. Then, Dennis enters  
the room, startling her. Suddenly edgy, Kelly speaks softly.

KELLY

What do you want, Dennis?

DENNIS

I'm grieving. I know you are as  
well. You know I'm here for you.

KELLY

...Thank you.

DENNIS

I hope you're still here for me.

Dennis moves hair out of Kelly's face, touching her cheek  
intimately. Kelly recoils at his touch.

KELLY

I have patients...

With that, Kelly exits, leaving Dennis disappointed.

INT. BURN WARD - DAY

It's barren. Crisp white sheets on a dozen beds. Only the  
Charred Man rests alone at the back of the room. Chris sits  
at his bedside, watching the oxygen bag rise and fall.

Bug enters, taking in the rotten emptiness.

BUG

I'm sorry this happened, Christie.

Gathering herself, Chris takes a deep breath.

CHRIS

Do you know the phrase "blood is  
thicker than water" is misinterpreted?  
It actually means the opposite.

(then)

The saying is "blood of the covenant is  
thicker than water of the womb". Truer  
bonds are made outside of family.

Chris touches the Charred Man's arm gently.

CHRIS (CONT'D)

I don't even know who this is, but he's the only person I have left... So I need to trust you, Bug. You can never lie to me again.

Seeing her hurt look, Bug approaches, speaking calmly.

BUG

I swear it. Because I need *someone* to believe me. And I think you're only one who might.

CHRIS

You earn my trust, you have it for life. I'll always have your back.

BUG

No matter how crazy I might sound?

Chris watches him, standing there nervously. She nods.

BUG (CONT'D)

I saw something evil in the heart of the jungle. It was in that One-Eyed man... and now it's in Gloria.

CHRIS

What do you mean you saw it?

BUG

He made me see things... hear voices. Chanting, screaming, saying the same thing over and over.

(then, catching himself)

And it was all real... something terrible is gonna happen to this unit... but no one'll believe a word I say unless I can prove it.

Chris sees it in his eyes: He's serious.

CHRIS

What were these voices saying?

BUG

(remembering)

The Loved One... *The Loved One*.

Chris is taken aback, the words alarming her. Bug sees worry washing over her. But, before he can speak --

SCREAMS echo in from outside. Alerted, Bug hurries out.

Chris eyes the LETTER on the bedside table. She grabs it --

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. SONG CU DE RIVER - DAY

On the river bed are **BODY PARTS: Arms. Legs. Hands. Feet. Torsos. Heads. Scattered about.** Two Soldiers chopped up and left for all to see. People panic, screaming.

Silent, Dennis and Towney look down at the gruesome scene. Roman turns his head and PUKES. Chief moves people away.

Bug steps up, sees the body parts, and his knees buckle.

IN THE BURN WARD: Rattled, Chris reads the letter. We see:

**"My heart was not full until I found you. And though we may never be together again, you must find someone new. Better."**

AT THE RIVER: Bug is alone amongst the mayhem. Frozen. No idea what to do next. Then he sees something --

Carved into A DISEMBODIED HAND is the Trinity Knot. Bug studies it, suddenly filled with determination.

IN THE BURN WARD: Chris reads on. Suddenly, she steps back, eyes the Charred Man. She's completely shaken --

AT THE RIVER: Bug sees Gloria walking down the embankment without pause, no fear. She looks at the nearest body part.

*A severed head, mouth open, tongue swollen.* Her eyes glow with curiosity. Then, we hear --

MUSIC: *The Mamas & The Papas - "Dedicated to the One I Love"*

IN THE BURN WARD: Chris's hands tremble, the letter falls from her grasp. Then, we see the words that have her rattled:

**"Life is a lie until we are embraced by the loved one."**

Thunderstruck, she looks down, reads it again: *"THE LOVED ONE"*

AT THE RIVER: Bug watches as Gloria kneels down to touch the tongue sticking out. Dennis spots her and rushes over.

He grabs Gloria, taking her away. But she turns and finds Bug. A chill runs down Bug's spine: *Gloria's eyes are hollow.*

Bug glares back, squaring himself to her. He's not backing down. Staring right through him... Gloria smiles --

END OF EPISODE