

FACTS ABOUT THE MOON

Written by

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"It wasn't a war story.
It was a love story.
It was a ghost story."

--Tim O'Brien,
How to Tell a True War Story

ACT I

FADE IN:

EXT. JUNGLE - VIETNAM - DAY

Just past dawn.

Pale sunlight filters down through the canopy of the jungle, falling across wide leaves, vines, tree trunks coated with wet green moss. Frogs SING their frog songs from the shadows.

This place is ancient. Primordial. Wholly wild and alive.

The leaves RUSTLE, and here it is: the thing that doesn't belong. JESSE LEWIS (24, Black) steps forward silently, slowly, eyes fixed ahead. Dressed in late 1960s American Army combat greens.

CHYRON: "NINH BINH, VIETNAM, SEPTEMBER 1967"

Jesse creeps through the undergrowth until the jungle gives way to an abandoned RICE PADDY, sunrise mirrored in the still water.

He crouches down at the edge of the jungle. He reaches into his thigh pack and pulls out an M26 HAND GRENADE.

A moment of quiet tension, and then he throws it.

EXT. RICE PADDY - CONTINUOUS

The grenade lands with a soft THUMP in the paddy grass, bounces, and rolls. It comes to a rest just a few feet from the water.

Right next to LIEUTENANT DEAN WALKER (25, All-American white boy). Dean's lying on his belly, dipping a blade of grass into the water. Calm, zoned out.

He notices the grenade.

He stares at it for a split second, shocked, disbelieving, then he YELLS and scrambles backward on his hands and knees, already HYPERVENTILATING--

JESSE (O.S.)
Morning, sunshine!

Dean whirls around, wide-eyed. Jesse jogs toward him from the jungle.

DEAN
GET AWAY, GET AWAY!

He gets to his feet and sprints at Jesse, grabbing his arm and dragging him away from the grenade. Jesse just LAUGHS.

JESSE
Hell of a wake-up call, right?

Dean looks from Jesse to the silent grenade and back again. Then he figures it out.

DEAN
(crossing himself)
Jesus Christ. Oh, Jesus Christ.

JESSE
Pure adrenaline. Better than coffee, I'd say. You're welcome.

Jesse goes back and scoops up the grenade.

DEAN
You fucking goddamn asshole.

JESSE
If it makes you feel any better, now we know you got pretty quick instincts.

DEAN
You goddamn crazy motherfucker, oh Christ. I'm gonna piss in your bedroll. I'm gonna shit in your fucking pack.

Jesse passes him, heading toward the Squad Camp.

JESSE
Will you hurry up? We're missing breakfast.

DEAN
I hate you. I'm gonna kill you.

But he catches up to Jesse and falls into step beside him. Silence, and then:

JESSE
(sotto)
Skinner says we'll be camping in the jungle tonight.

DEAN

Great. I'm gonna hide your bug
spray and watch you get eaten
alive. Can't wait.

Jesse grins at him. They reach the Squad Camp--a few tents
and a weak campfire--and Jesse jogs ahead, leaving Dean
staring after him.

Dean SWEARS, shakes his head, and follows.

EXT. SQUAD CAMP - CONTINUOUS

SHORTSTACK (O.S.)

Trench foot. That's what the guys
called it back in the Great War.
It's a serious medical condition.

Dean catches up to Jesse. They both flop down around the
campfire, where the rest of the SQUAD (Delta Company, 3rd
Platoon, 2nd Battalion, 12th Infantry)--

- SERGEANT WES SKINNER ("SKINNER"), 25, football jock type,
bit of a bully

- SERGEANT EUGENE DONNELLY ("SHORTSTACK"), 23, never shuts
up, germaphobe

- LIEUTENANT LEO MCGILL ("MCGILL"), 28, the oldest, bookish,
nervous

- DOUG BEDFORD ("BAMA"), 23, supplier of marijuana, strong
Alabama accent

- SAM BROKEN ROPE, 24, Pine Ridge Sioux, quiet, keeps to
himself

- DANNY MOORE, 18, the youngest, reedy, innocent

--sit in a circle, wolfing down their B- and C-rations.
Instant coffee, franks & beans, pressed biscuits.

Shortstack carefully tugs off his boots, putting them neatly
aside.

SHORTSTACK (CONT'D)

I know a guy in Charlie Company who
didn't air his feet out. Eight
hours humping it through swamp and
the dumbass didn't air his fuckin'
feet out. Know what happened to
him?

He looks around at the Squad. Starts to peel off his socks.

JESSE

Point 'em the other way, man. I'm downwind.

SKINNER

'Cause you smell like fuckin' Aqua Velva, right, Lewis?

Jesse flips him the bird.

SHORTSTACK

Would you let me finish?

DANNY

What happened to him?

SHORTSTACK

Woke up the next morning, took his feet outta his socks, and his toes stayed right where they were.

McGill looks at one of his frankfurters, makes a face. Skinner rolls his eyes. Jesse and Dean look at each other, trying not to laugh.

DANNY

No way that's true.

SHORTSTACK

Everybody in Charlie calls that guy "Pigs in a Blanket."

SKINNER

Man, I'm fuckin' eating.

Shortstack OINKS defiantly.

SKINNER (CONT'D)

Jesus Christ.

BAMA

Hey, cool it. Skinner's got delicate sensibilities.

Skinner shoves him.

SKINNER

Fuck you.

JESSE

Hush up and eat up. The coffee's getting cold.

SKINNER

Coffee's been cold my entire
goddamn tour.

JESSE

So you should be used to it by now,
missy.

A short pause. Forks SCRAPE the inside of the ration cans.

SHORTSTACK

If we ever got stranded with no
food or water, who do you think
we'd eat first?

They all GROAN. Dean throws a biscuit at Shortstack. It hits him right in the forehead. Skinner grabs it and stuffs it in his own mouth, spewing the crumbs into Shortstack's lap, and the guys CRACK UP.

Jesse's grinning, wide and toothy, his eyes lit up with it, and--

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. VETERANS AFFAIRS MEDICAL CENTER - EXAMINATION ROOM -
BOSTON - DAY

Jesse lies on his back on a padded table, physical therapist DR. EICHTEN (50s, stern) standing over him.

Dr. Eichten has one hand on Jesse's right leg, moving the knee up toward Jesse's chest and then back down straight.

Jesse winces, HISSES, unable to hide his pain.

LEGEND: "BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, FEBRUARY 1968"

One more rep, and Dr. Eichten lowers Jesse's leg. Jesse sits up stiffly. His face is empty. Dead.

DR. EICHTEN

Do you have someone at home to help
you with your daily exercises, Mr.
Lewis?

JESSE

Yeah.

DR. EICHTEN

Good. It's extremely important that
you maintain flexibility in the
joint.

Jesse nods. Dr. Eichten helps him off the table and into a wheelchair. He wheels Jesse out of the examination room.

INT. VETERANS AFFAIRS MEDICAL CENTER - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

They wheel down the hallway. Jesse keeps silent.

DR. EICHTEN
I've raised your dose of
hydrocodone for the next month to
ease your settling in. Your aunt
has the prescription.

No response from Jesse. They reach the front doors of the Medical Center, where a middle-aged Black woman waits nervously: Jesse's AUNT IVY MAE.

She spots Jesse. Smiles tightly.

Dr. Eichten wheels Jesse to a stop in front of her.

AUNT IVY MAE
Thank you, Doctor.
(to Jesse)
You ready to get outta here, honey?

JESSE
Yes ma'am.

DR. EICHTEN
Ms. Lewis--a word?

The two of them walk back down the hallway, SPEAKING in low voices. Jesse barely reacts.

A cardboard box labelled with his full name sits on the Receptionist's desk along with a pair of crutches.

Dr. Eichten and Aunt Ivy Mae return.

DR. EICHTEN (CONT'D)
(to Jesse)
We'll see you back here every
Friday, yes?

JESSE
Yessir.

An awkward pause.

DR. EICHTEN
Well. He's all set, Ms. Lewis.

AUNT IVY MAE

Yup. You have a nice day, Doctor.

Dr. Eichten leaves. Aunt Ivy Mae looks down at Jesse, at a loss.

EXT. VETERANS AFFAIRS MEDICAL CENTER - DAY

Aunt Ivy Mae and Jesse walk toward a beat-up car at the curb. Jesse struggles with his crutches, lopsided and slow. Clearly in pain.

Aunt Ivy Mae carries his box of stuff and opens the car door for him.

INT./EXT. AUNT IVY MAE'S CAR - CONTINUOUS

Aunt Ivy Mae drives through Boston toward Roxbury. Jesse looks out the window, watching the winter-gray city slide by.

AUNT IVY MAE

I put a couple casseroles in the fridge. They're beef and potatoes, mostly, but I snuck some greens in there. Lord knows boys never eat enough greens.

(beat)

You know your mama woulda picked you up, honey, it's just her back is hurting again. She can't hardly move today. Just how it is.

He doesn't reply.

AUNT IVY MAE (CONT'D)

Oh, and there's a chicken pot pie in the freezer. You'll need to let that defrost before you put it in the oven so it don't get soggy.

(beat)

But it's your Gramma's recipe, ain't that nice? Your favorite. Extra gravy and extra-thick crust, just how you like it.

No reply. Aunt Ivy Mae takes a deep breath. Fakes cheer.

AUNT IVY MAE (CONT'D)

Let's see what's on the radio.

She reaches out and turns on the car radio. SOUL MUSIC STARTS TO PLAY--something like "Baby, Now That I've Found You" by The Foundations.

A bouncy, upbeat song, all sax. Aunt Ivy Mae and Jesse listen in stone cold silence.

INT. JESSE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - HALLWAY - ROXBURY - DAY

Old, cheap, and musty. The rickety elevator doors open with a SCREECH.

Aunt Ivy Mae leads Jesse out, repeating their hobbling walk.

She fiddles with a pair of keys outside B and lets them in.

INT. JESSE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS

A matchbox apartment. Water-stained walls. There's a tiny kitchen, a bedroom, a living room the size of a stamp. A ratty couch.

The previous tenant's posters still hang on the walls.

AUNT IVY MAE

Here we are. Home sweet home.

She puts the box on the kitchen counter, surveys the place.

AUNT IVY MAE (CONT'D)

Sure was nice of Donald's mama to let you move in so quick, huh?

When she says Donald's name, she crosses herself.

AUNT IVY MAE (CONT'D)

Bit small, I guess. Cozy. I could freshen the place up a bit if you like. Maybe some slipcovers.

JESSE

It's good. Thanks.

Another moment.

AUNT IVY MAE

Well, I gotta run some errands. And I'm sure you need rest.

She turns to go, then stops.

AUNT IVY MAE (CONT'D)
Your mama and daddy are worried
sick.

JESSE
I'm home now. What else do they
goddamn want.

AUNT IVY MAE
Don't you take that tone with me,
Jesse Lewis. Honey, don't you dare.

She collects herself.

AUNT IVY MAE (CONT'D)
Give them a call. Tell 'em you got
settled in safe. And you best be at
your mama's house for dinner
tomorrow night. I love you, boy,
but if you don't show up? Lord help
me, I will tan your hide.
(beat)
Remember to read the instructions
for the pot pie.

With that, she leaves, closing the door quietly behind her.

Silence fills the room like water. Jesse stands there for a
moment, soaking it in, leaning heavily on his crutches.

Then he limps toward the bedroom, exploring.

BEDROOM

A small bed, a night stand, a lamp. Arranged carefully on the
night stand: a photo of Jesse and his PARENTS (CHARLIE and
ALICE LEWIS), a photo of Jesse in his US Army uniform.

An envelope. He looks inside: it's full of CASH. He closes it
again and puts it back.

He takes both photos and puts them in the top drawer of the
night stand.

Then he takes TWO SETS OF DOG TAGS from around his neck and
puts them in the drawer, too.

The first set of dog tags belongs to him. The second belongs
to Dean Walker.

He leaves the bedroom.

LIVING ROOM

He goes to the phone. Dials a number.

JESSE
Hey, Ma. It's me.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

DURING the following VOICEOVER:

JESSE (V.O.)
(into phone)
Ivy Mae got me all set up in
Donny's old place. Said I should
give you a call, so I guess I'm
giving you a call. I'm doing real
good, Ma. Doc Eichten says I better
slow down, 'cause I'm makin' the
other patients look bad.

Jesse takes an entire casserole from the refrigerator and
sits down on the couch, digging into it with a fork.

A moment later he moves to sit on the hardwood floor in front
of the couch. He begins to eat the casserole with his hands.

Then he can't eat anymore, and he just closes his eyes.

JESSE (V.O.)
I hope your back's not hurting you
too bad. Anyway. That's all I got.
See you tomorrow.

EXT. SQUAD CAMP, MOUNTAINS - VIETNAM - DAY

Evening. The sun sinks into the horizon, red and orange,
catching the whole sky on fire. The mountains are covered in
green growth and brown grass. Tiered farms. Abandoned huts.

The guys lay around, resting. Stretching their sore muscles.

Jesse sits a few yards away, airing out his feet. A square of
CHOCOLATE FUDGE lands suddenly in his lap. He looks up: Dean.

DEAN
Got a treasure in my B-unit.

He sits down beside Jesse. Looks out over the mountains.

DEAN (CONT'D)

Shortstack and Skinner are going at it again.

JESSE

What is it this time? Sun's too hot?

DEAN

Air's too wet.

Jesse SNORTS, breaks the fudge in half. They share it.

JESSE

It *is* too damn wet. Feel like I need gills.

DEAN

Feel like if I jumped off a cliff I'd just swim to the bottom.

JESSE

I had this dream last night. I was sitting there eating an ice cream sundae, but it never got any smaller. Big ol' scoops just kept popping up in the bowl, like, chocolate, vanilla, strawberry, rum raisin, mint chip, whole Baskin-Robbins lineup. Better'n any wet dream I ever had.

DEAN

Cold lemonade. Cold beer.

JESSE

A whole pool full of ice cubes.

DEAN

Snow inside your coat. Never thought I'd miss that. When I get back Stateside I'm gonna jump naked in a pile of snow.

Jesse finishes off his fudge. Dean bumps their shoulders together for just a moment, then leans away.

EXT. JESSE'S PARENTS' HOUSE - ROXBURY - DAY

Cold blue evening. Jesse stands on the front porch of his parents' tiny, shabby house. After a moment, he RINGS the doorbell.

FOOTSTEPS from inside, then the door swings open to reveal his mother, ALICE LEWIS (50s). Aunt Ivy Mae's bright-eyed, mouthy little sister.

An awkward moment. Alice visibly holds herself back from hugging her son.

ALICE
Come on in before you freeze.

She ushers him inside.

INT. JESSE'S PARENTS' HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

ALICE
I just can't even believe how cold it is. Lemme get you some coffee.

She leads Jesse into the

KITCHEN

which is small but warm. She bustles around the sink, the stove, heating up water in a kettle.

ALICE (CONT'D)
Oh, I'll get this. You go into the dining room, say hello to your daddy. Ivy Mae ain't here yet, but she's bringin' cobbler.

JESSE
I coulda picked up some ice cream.

Alice raises her eyebrows and opens the freezer, which is stocked with two brand new cartons of vanilla ice cream.

ALICE
Have you even *met* me, baby? My God. Now shoo.

She swats at him. He goes into the

DINING ROOM

The table's set up for dinner. Seated at the head: CHARLIE LEWIS (50s), Jesse's father. An old soul. Still waters, but they do run deep.

WILMA JONES (20s, Black, pretty) sits next to him.

They look up when Jesse enters. He stops short.

WILMA
Hi there, Jess.

JESSE
...Wilma.

A pause.

CHARLIE
Go on, siddown, kid.

Jesse sits across from Wilma.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
How you been.

JESSE
All right.

CHARLIE
Now you ask how I been.

JESSE
How you been, sir?

CHARLIE
Can't complain. Now you ask how she's been.

JESSE
How you been, Wilma?

WILMA
(playing along)
Very good, thank you.

CHARLIE
Now we take a drink.

He sips his beer. Wilma sips her coffee. She smiles apologetically at Jesse.

Alice enters, Aunt Ivy Mae in tow. They set down a casserole, boiled carrots, Jesse's coffee. They sit.

Aunt Ivy Mae meets Jesse's eyes, gives him a small nod.

They all join hands for grace.

ALICE
Bless, O Lord, this food to our use
and us to thy service--

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

After dinner. Alice washes dishes at the sink.

Jesse slips in from the dining room, limps up to her.

ALICE

You dry.

He picks up a rag and starts drying dishes.

JESSE

Why'd you bring her, Ma?

ALICE

She loves my cooking and I thought it'd be nice. We always got leftovers anyway.

JESSE

That's what Tupperware's for.

She fixes him with a look.

ALICE

You wanna try that again?

JESSE

(chagrined)

I wasn't expecting her is all.

ALICE

She came 'round a lot after you shipped out, you know. She brought food, she helped me keep house. That girl was a miracle.

JESSE

I'm not looking for a girl, Ma.

ALICE

Maybe not now.

JESSE

Oh, Christ--

She stops washing. Turns to face him completely, her voice SOTTO but fierce.

ALICE

I went to Donny's funeral. It was a closed casket.

(MORE)

ALICE (CONT'D)

There wasn't nothing in there because there wasn't nothing left of that boy. Do you understand that?

JESSE

Ma--

ALICE

And you know, all I could think about during the service was how your head smelled when you was a baby. Like milk and you and me all mixed up. The first time I smelled you I cried. And I kept thinking, did Donny's mama remember how he smelled? Well, I'm sure she did. You don't forget.

JESSE

Mama.

ALICE

I got you back. But baby, it don't feel solid. If that girl in there could make you stay with me--

She breaks off. Jesse just stares, unable to reach out. Alice takes a deep breath and lets it out with a shudder.

ALICE (CONT'D)

Wilma is a *damn* lovely girl. She reads a lot. She makes a good peach pie.

JESSE

I'll bring her some more coffee.

ALICE

That's very nice.

He grabs the full French press and leaves her there alone.

DINING ROOM

Jesse refills Wilma's cup of coffee. She smiles up at him. He gives her a tight smile back.

INT. BAR BATHROOM - NIGHT

LATER the same night.

A disgusting, tiny bathroom. Flickering light, everything dirty and stained.

Jesse PUKES up a night of bottom shelf shit, crumpled over the toilet. Crutches forgotten on the grimy floor.

He GAGS, RETCHES again. GASPS.

Then he wipes his mouth, struggles to his feet, and heads back out.

INT. BAR - CONTINUOUS

Sticky counters, all dark and shadowed. The kind of place that stinks of alcohol, sweat, and piss.

It's clearly late--the bar's almost empty, nobody left but the Barflies and the Bartender (all Black). And Jesse.

Jesse limps to the counter and orders a beer. There's a GUY (40s, Black, plain) a few stools down, slumped over.

He looks up and meets Jesse's eyes.

INT. JESSE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The JANGLE of keys. The door opens. Jesse and the Guy slip inside quietly. They head for the bedroom.

BEDROOM

The Guy shoves Jesse onto the bed and yanks both their pants down. Jesse rolls over onto his stomach, bracing himself.

The Guy pushes into him from behind, starts thrusting. It *hurts*.

PANTING. QUIET GRUNTS.

The piss-yellow light from street lamps cuts across their bodies. Dismembering, disassembling. Jesse becomes a clenched fist, bared teeth. Everything else lost to darkness.

The Guy comes with an ugly MOAN. Flops sideways onto the bed.

Jesse reaches down and pulls up his pants.

INT. JESSE'S APARTMENT - BEDROOM - DAY

Morning. Jesse's still passed out on top of the sheets, fully clothed. Alone.

He wakes like a soldier: asleep one moment, wide-eyed the next. Then the hangover hits. He scrambles out of bed and makes it to the

BATHROOM

just in time to VOMIT into the sink. He goes back into the

BEDROOM

and realizes the Guy ransacked his place. His worthless stuff is strewn across the floor. The envelope of money GONE.

Slowly, he walks over to the night stand. The drawer is open.

But Dean's dog tags are still there.

And here it is: the self-hatred, the humiliation, the absolute terror of loss.

Jesse sinks to his knees in front of the night stand.

INT. PHARMACY - DAY

Jesse stands at the counter while the CASHIER (female, Black, 40s) rings up his little paper bag of painkillers.

Her eyes flick over him, taking in the crutches.

CASHIER

They taking care of you?

He's confused.

CASHIER (CONT'D)

Compensation. My boy got his arm blown off to the elbow and he gets a paycheck every month. They treating you good?

JESSE

Yes ma'am.

She hands him the bag. And a piece of candy from a jar.

CASHIER

Don't you never forget how much they owe you. Thanks for your service. Have a nice day.

JESSE

Yes ma'am.

He leaves the pharmacy. His walk is even worse than usual-- it's not just his bad leg. His ass is sore, too.

EXT. PHARMACY - CONTINUOUS

As Jesse leaves the pharmacy, he sees a Civil Rights march down the street: a group of peaceful Protesters with signs ("END RACIAL DISCRIMINATION," "WE DEMAND EQUAL RIGHTS NOW!", etc. Some printed with the face of Martin Luther King Jr.)

They're CHANTING, taking up the whole street. There are also some anti-war Protesters marching: "BRING OUR BOYS HOME NOW!"

Jesse stares at the signs. They loom big and close, filling his vision. The printed faces of dead Black sons stare back.

INT. BUS - DAY

Jesse sits on a RATTLING, SCREECHING bus, surrounded by a couple empty seats.

Other Passengers eye him warily, because he's Black and he's got crutches and he still looks a little wild-eyed, a little crazed.

He holds Dean's dog tags tight, rubbing them like a talisman. Ignores the stares. He pulls a slip of paper from his pocket and reads his own messy handwriting:

153 mt vernon

beacon hill

EXT. MOUNTAIN VILLAGE - VIETNAM - DAY

An abandoned farming village. Wooden houses with thatched roofs, terraces of green rice. Golden, late afternoon sun.

The Squad, minus Shortstack, trudges through the empty village. They're all exhausted. Dead on their feet.

A SHOUT. Shortstack jogs toward them from up ahead.

SHORTSTACK

All empty. Gooks've probably been gone for weeks.

SKINNER

What did I fucking tell you?
(to the others)

(MORE)

SKINNER (CONT'D)
 Keep humpin' it, boys, couple hours
 of daylight left.

The guys GROAN and START COMPLAINING.

MCGILL	JESSE	*
Sir, we're all exhausted, we just wanna camp--	Have a heart, Sarge, you're gonna inspire mutiny!	*
		*

BAMA
 My feet are gonna bleed right
 through my boots.

SKINNER
 Well, this ain't Basic, asshole.
 Shoulda worn thicker socks.

DEAN
 We're all wiped, Sarge. Be nice to
 sleep with a roof over our heads
 for once.

Skinner hesitates: it *would* be nice.

DEAN (CONT'D)
 No bugs in your blanket. No mud in
 your skivvies.

JESSE
 I hate lookin' at the stars when I
 jack off. It's like God's watching
 me blow a load.

SHORTSTACK
 (to Jesse)
 I fucking slept next to you last
 night!

JESSE
 Don't worry, honeybee, I sure as
 shit wasn't thinking about you.
 (to the guys)
 Look at him! Godawful face and he
 ain't even got nice tits to make up
 for it.

DEAN
 He's small and dainty, though,
 gotta give him that.

The guys are cracking up. Shortstack shoves Dean.

SHORTSTACK

Fuck both of you, man. Any of you assholes jack it near me, I'll cut your dicks off.

JESSE

Golly. Sugar sure ain't sweet.

Dean LAUGHS. Shortstack fumes.

SKINNER

All right, all right, shut up.
We'll bunk here.

They all sag in relief, managing half-hearted WHOOPS.

INT. FARMHOUSE - VIETNAM - DAY

The guys dump their bags on the wooden floor of a farmhouse. They set up their sleeping rolls, take off their boots, rub their aching feet.

Sure enough, Bama's feet are covered in bloody blisters. He GRUNTS in pain. McGill tosses him painkillers, hydrogen peroxide.

Jesse's folding up his uniform coat when Dean brushes their shoulders together. Faux casual.

Their eyes meet. Just for a second.

The sun sinks below the mountain horizon.

INT. FARMHOUSE - VIETNAM - NIGHT

SNORES. The CHIRPING of a million insects and frogs. A deep purple midnight, stars glittering like tinsel. Moon like a ripe fruit.

Jesse sleeps soundly until he's shaken gently awake. Dean.

They blink at each other. Wordless, Jesse gets to his feet. They slip silently outside.

EXT. VILLAGE - CONTINUOUS

Together, Jesse and Dean steal through the night, barefoot, dressed in loose shirts and pants. Stripped of the uniform.

Dean leads Jesse to another hut, a few houses down from the farmhouse. They shut the door carefully behind them.

INT. HUT - CONTINUOUS

As soon as they're inside, Jesse backs Dean up against the door. They speak in WHISPERS. Breathing words, mouths close, sharing breath.

DEAN
Christ. C'mere. Oh, Christ Jesus.

JESSE
No talking, asshole, you want 'em
to hear?

DEAN
They won't hear--

Jesse covers Dean's mouth with his hand. Dean's eyes flutter shut. He's getting off on it.

JESSE
Be *quiet*.

Dean nods silently. Jesse cracks up.

JESSE (CONT'D)
You should see the look on your
face--

Dean cuffs him lightly upside the head, and Jesse takes advantage of the movement to grab Dean's wrist, uncover his mouth, kiss him hard.

After that, it's all bodies. A series of collisions. They kiss against the door for only a moment before stumbling further into the hut, hands everywhere.

There's a woven mat on the floor. Dean sinks to his knees, pulls Jesse down with him with a loud THUD. They both freeze.

No noise but the INSECTS. After a long moment, Jesse shoves Dean onto his back, clambers over him. They kiss, rut.

JESSE (CONT'D)
God, if you ain't got the nicest--

DEAN
C'mon, Jesse, fuck you, man, will
you just--

He breaks off, GASPS, covers his own mouth with his hand. Jesse grins, a flash of teeth in the darkness.

No more speaking. They fuck as quiet as possible, PANTING into each other's necks.

Afterward, they slump together. They look at each other and smile in the way people do post-orgasm.

Dean's dog tags glint in the moonlight.

INT. BUS - BEACON HILL - DAY

Jesse blinks back to reality. The bus stops with a SHRIEK of brakes and he gets off.

EXT. MOUNT VERNON STREET - BEACON HILL - DAY

A beautiful red-brick neighborhood for the upper class. Flower boxes, wrought iron gates. Old money Boston.

Jesse sticks out like a blood spatter in a field of snow.

He heads down the street. He finds the right house.

EXT. WALKER TOWNHOUSE - DAY

A townhouse, pretty and pristine.

Jesse stares up at it. Clutches Dean's tags.

He walks slowly up the front steps and RINGS the doorbell.

A pause. A breath. And the door opens a crack, revealing EILEEN WALKER (40s), a career housewife. Blonde, manicured, perfectly dressed. And perpetually spooked.

EILEEN

Hello.

JESSE

Hello. Ma'am.

She waits. He struggles.

EILEEN

I don't have anything to give out--

JESSE

No, it's not. That's not.

(beat)

Are you Mrs. Walker?

EILEEN

...Yes.

JESSE

My name is Jesse Lewis, ma'am. I
knew your son.

Her expression collapses. Her small body deflates.

EILEEN

You were in the...in the...?

JESSE

Same squad. For almost a year. Knew
him best, maybe. Out of all the
guys. We were buddies.

She looks him up and down. Still nervous.

EILEEN

Are you from here?

JESSE

Roxbury, born and raised.

EILEEN

He never mentioned a friend from
Roxbury.

JESSE

Frankly, ma'am, I'm not surprised.

She understands the double meaning.

Beat.

EILEEN

I'm still not sure why you're here.

JESSE

I don't want a handout. I just got
something of his. I can't...

(beat)

It ain't mine to keep. I'm just
trying to do right by him.

Eileen gives him one last look. Her eyes bright and scared.

JESSE (CONT'D)

May I come in?

EILEEN

I'd...rather you didn't.

JESSE

Ma'am, I knew him. He was my
friend.

She finally gives in. Jesse follows her inside.

INT. WALKER TOWNHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The inside of the Walker house is a reflection of Eileen herself: lovely, quietly rich. Eileen leads Jesse into the

PARLOR.

Eileen sinks onto a chair, clearly shaken.

Jesse stands awkwardly.

EILEEN

My husband will be home soon. He
leaves work early on Fridays.

She says it like a warning. Then deflates again.

EILEEN (CONT'D)

Usually Emmeline cooks for us, but
on Fridays--on Fridays I let her
off. I do the cooking myself.

(beat)

Today I made steaks. I cooked them
in butter, but--but I'm just so
anxious they'll turn out dry. Even
the nicest sauce can't hide dry
meat.

She fiddles with her rings, her watch. Looking anywhere but
at Jesse's face.

JESSE

Mrs. Walker...

EILEEN

What am I doing? Let me get Sylvie.

She hurries from the parlor.

Without her presence, silence slumps like a dead body. A
weight on Jesse's back. He gazes at the tags in his hand.

WALKER

DEAN L

RA01257753

O POS 574-07-9286

CATHOLIC

Silver. Scratched up. Shaped like tombstones.

Eileen reappears in the parlor door. In tow: SYLVIE WALKER (19), a free-spirited spitfire. The antithesis of her mother.

Jesse stands up. Sylvie drinks him in.

EILEEN (CONT'D)
Mr. Lewis, this is my daughter
Sylvia.

Sylvie steps forward. Reaches out, shakes Jesse's hand firmly. Eileen clearly doesn't like the physical contact.

SYLVIE
It's Sylvie. Mom said you knew my
brother.

JESSE
We were buddies. Over there.

She nods. And then it bursts out:

SYLVIE
Did he ever talk about me?

EILEEN
Sylvia.

SYLVIE
Did he?

JESSE
Yeah. You bet. Told us all these
stories about his kid sister and
the, the scrapes you got him into.

What a feast for a starving girl.

EILEEN
You said you have something that
belonged to him.

Jesse holds out the dog tags, slow and careful.

Sylvie knows immediately what they are. She takes the tags, cups them in her hands. Reverent.

Her expression makes Jesse uncomfortable.

JESSE
He--he gave 'em to me, but I
thought they should go to his
family. Next of kin and all.

SYLVIE
 (distracted)
 Grace was his next of kin.

Eileen reaches out. Takes the tags from Sylvie. Stares down at the tiny, stamped-metal letters.

JESSE
 ...Grace?

SYLVIE
 They're dirty.

EILEEN
 I have silver polish around here somewhere. I'll have Emmeline fix them up. We can hang them on the mantle next to his medals.

SYLVIE
 Mom, for Chrissakes--

EILEEN
Sylvia.

JESSE
 Who's Grace?

Eileen and Sylvie stop bickering and look at him. Almost surprised he's still there.

EILEEN
 His wife. Widow. ...You said you knew him.

JESSE
 We were buddies.

SYLVIE
 He was a private guy. Maybe he didn't want anyone to know.

EILEEN
 Why wouldn't he want anyone to know?

SYLVIE
 He missed her tons. He sent her about ten thousand letters, right? Maybe the other guys would've teased him.

Eileen's looking at Jesse, suspicious.

JESSE

Sorry. Sorry. I'm sure he told us.
Me. Just--been a long day. I should
get going.

SYLVIE

No, please--stay for supper, will
you?

EILEEN

Sylvia.
(to Jesse)
I'm afraid I've only cooked for
three. Emmeline doesn't do the
shopping until Sunday.

JESSE

That's fine, ma'am. I gotta get
home, my ma's waiting--

SYLVIE

Why don't you just come back on
Monday?

Eileen shoots her a look. Sylvie looks right back.

EILEEN

...Are you available Monday
evening, Mr. Lewis?

Jesse looks at Eileen. Looks at Sylvie, with her wide eyes.
She holds the dog tags close to her chest.

JESSE

Yes ma'am.

EILEEN

I'll have Emmeline make another
place at the table.

Sylvie smiles.

EXT. WALKER TOWNHOUSE - DAY

Dusk now. A violet sky. Street lamps flickering yellow.

Jesse walks slowly. He gets only a few feet down the sidewalk
when the door of the Walker house swings open and Sylvie
slips outside.

SYLVIE

Wait!

She hurries up to him.

SYLVIE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry about the strong-arming.
I know it probably won't be much
fun for you--

JESSE

Fun? Your ma's the type to miss the
good old days when there was
separate bathrooms for us Colored
folk. You think the biggest problem
with stickin' me at a dinner table
with her is that I might not have
fun?

SYLVIE

I'm sorry. I really am.

JESSE

I gotta get going, Miss Walker.
I've done my part here.

SYLVIE

Meet me tomorrow at Chung King in
Chinatown.

JESSE

Don't think that's a good idea.

SYLVIE

Oh, Lord. Think if you were me,
huh? Jesse, I just wanna know what
he was like over there. Tell me the
funniest thing he did. Or the most
awful thing he did.

JESSE

You don't wanna know--

SYLVIE

I can handle it. You jerk. Just
because I'm a girl doesn't mean I
can't handle it. Please, Jesse.
Just a couple stories and I'll
leave you alone.

Jesse can't answer.

SYLVIE (CONT'D)

Chung King. Five o'clock.

She gives him a fierce look. Hard and wild and desperate. Then she turns on her heel and goes back inside, leaving Jesse alone on the sidewalk.

INT. JESSE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Jesse walks in the front door, heads immediately for the fridge. It's empty but for a few cheap beers.

He grabs a longneck, slams it on the counter. Ragged breath.

His body is a shivering, wound-up spring.

There's a box of instant coffee on the counter. He grabs it, hurls it against the wall in one motion. It bursts open when it hits the floor, spilling dark grounds across the linoleum.

Jesse slumps forward. Teeth bared, eyes screwed shut.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - VIETNAM - DAY

The Squad humps it through the mountains. Sun beating down.

They're tired. Sweaty. Bored as hell.

Shortstack walks in front, halfway through a story. Dean walks behind Jesse.

SHORTSTACK

This guy--he seems fine, you know? Regular Joe. He's got a girl back home, even, showed all the guys this photo of her. They took it in a photo booth at the Indiana State Fair. She was a real looker, everybody said that. Solid dime.

None of the guys reply. Even Skinner's too bone-tired to roll his eyes.

SHORTSTACK (CONT'D)

Guy said, she's the kinda girl who's always up for it. Put the kids to bed and give you a suckjob right after.

BAMA

Easy to say when you don't got kids.

SHORTSTACK

All you gotta know is, this guy's got a real nice incentive to get home, right?

No answer.

SHORTSTACK (CONT'D)

Right?

JESSE

We're all ears, man. Ain't nothing else to listen to.

SHORTSTACK

So this guy's on watch one night. Way out in the jungle. It's raining, pitch black. Couldn't see a gook if he danced naked and waved his little pecker right in front of your nose.

They trudge down the thin, overgrown trail. Footsteps slow and heavy.

Jesse's rifle slips a bit from his pack. Dean reaches out to readjust it so it doesn't fall. Nobody notices, not even Jesse.

SHORTSTACK (CONT'D)

The guy's buddy comes up and says, Hey man, you're off the hook. My turn for watch. And the guy says, Thank God, I could sleep for a year. And his buddy says, Well you got four hours. And the guy says--

A GUNSHOT. Shortstack's head snaps to the side with a burst of red blood. He hits the ground like a ton of bricks.

For a split second, the guys are frozen. Uncomprehending.

SKINNER

GET DOWN--

They all dive, scrambling for their guns. Jesse is a second too slow, still frozen, until Dean drags him down too.

Skinner spins, aiming blind, gun pointed at the green growth--

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - VIETNAM - LATER

Stillness. Quiet. Just SINGING insects, the endless soundtrack of Vietnam.

Skinner kneels beside Shortstack's body. Pale, empty face. Chunk of skull blown away. Bloodstained dirt. Shortstack's pants are wet, soiled with piss and shit.

Skinner rolls him over. Removes his pack, rifles through his things. He leaves the personal belongings--a watch, a pocketknife. Takes the equipment. The extra socks.

The Squad watches solemnly. Skinner steps back.

In the distance: the FAINT NOISE OF A CHOPPER.

JESSE

Dustoff's here. He ready?

Skinner doesn't answer.

DANNY

He was a Catholic. Isn't there a-- you know, a prayer, or something?

SKINNER

Yeah, that'll patch him up.

DANNY

It just doesn't seem right to ignore it. Seeing as he was a Catholic.

DEAN

I got one.

He steps forward. Takes a breath.

DEAN (CONT'D)

"Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum. Benedicta tu in mulieribus, et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Iesus..."

Jesse watches him. The chopper grows LOUDER as it approaches.

Dean raises his voice.

DEAN (CONT'D)

"...Sancta Maria, Mater Dei, ora pro nobis peccatoribus--"

(even louder)

(MORE)

DEAN (CONT'D)
 "--nunc, et in hora mortis
 nostrae."

The chopper hovers right above their heads. Begins to lower.

DEAN (CONT'D)
 (shouting)
Amen.

The chopper sinks to the earth, kicking up wind and dust.

INT. JESSE'S APARTMENT - DAY

Jesse opens his eyes. Chest heaving. Stumbles away from the counter, arm swinging--an aborted punch. He stops his fist from hitting the cabinet just in time.

EXT. MOUNTAIN PASS - VIETNAM - NIGHT

Fog, thick and wet. Moon like a ghost.

Jesse lies on his belly in a thick copse of trees just off the trail. He clutches his rifle. At his side: two hand grenades.

He watches the trail.

The SNAP of a twig. He tenses, whips around--just Dean.

Jesse settles back down. Dean sits next to him.

They speak in murmurs.

DEAN
 You pissed?

JESSE
 Got no reason to be.

DEAN
 So you are.

Jesse smiles tightly.

DEAN (CONT'D)
 You're like my fuckin' ma. C'mon,
 out with it.

A pause.

JESSE
 Ave Maria. Hail Mary.

DEAN

What?

JESSE

Never did that at my church. It's a Catholic guilt thing, right? Ten Hail Marys every time you rub one out?

DEAN

It's just a prayer. It's just an old prayer, I dunno, I've known it for ages.

JESSE

Do you pray for us sinners, Walker? You gonna get Jesus Christ his glorious self to step in for us poor dumbasses in this fucking forsaken--

DEAN

Jesse.

(gently)

You gotta shut up.

They sit in silence. Jesse white knuckles his rifle.

DEAN (CONT'D)

Can't have you goin' nuts on me, man.

JESSE

Yeah.

DEAN

Couldn't handle it, if you went nuts.

JESSE

I'm not. I *won't*.

Dean reaches into his pocket and pulls out a battered rosary.

DEAN

I'll stop praying for you, if you like.

Jesse sits straight up. Looks Dean right in the eye.

JESSE

I swear--I *swear*, Walker, if you're beggin' God for *forgiveness* every time we--

DEAN

That's not--

JESSE

I'll never even fuckin' look at you again. You understand me? Don't you dare confess me, you fuck.

DEAN

Cool it, would you? Every VC in ten miles can hear you.

JESSE

Fuck the VC.

Fuming, Jesse bites his tongue. They fall silent. The jungle sings and sighs.

DEAN

Ave Maria, gratia plena, don't let nobody toss grenades at our feet today. Don't let nobody blow our brains out. Sancta Maria, Mater Dei, keep Jesse Lewis's guts in his stomach, please, and don't make his feet bleed too bad, 'cause he don't ever wanna fuck around when his feet are bleeding.

Despite himself, Jesse laughs under his breath.

DEAN (CONT'D)

Pray for us sinners. Amen.

He crosses himself. A moment, and then Jesse crosses himself too.