LAST FLAG FLYING

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Based on the novel by Darryl Ponicsan

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Detour Filmproduction
A seedy neighborhood. LARRY "DOC" SHEPHERD, wearing a heavy windbreaker, stands idly on the street. An AWOL bag is on the sidewalk at his feet. A garment bag is slung over his shoulder. He studies the little working-man's bar across the street as the title "DECEMBER 13, 2003" comes up.

Small and dark. A pool table, a few booths, not much decor. SAL NEALON leans on his elbows on his side of the bar, doing a crossword. He's in his late 50s and wears a cropped mustache, going gray, like the sides of his short-cropped hair. He wears a black T-shirt, revealing a USMC tattoo on his arm. He smokes a cigar, chewing its end more than it needs. An edgy dude - you wouldn't want to fuck with him. At the other end of the bar, COPS is on a TV that hangs suspended from the ceiling. On the show, a nervous couple try to explain to a sarcastic cop what they are doing in the projects if not buying drugs. Sal's only customer, O'TOOLE, an old functioning alcoholic, is watching. At some point Doc enters, pausing near the door. O'Toole gives him a cursory glance. Doc hangs his garment bag on a hook on the stanchion and takes a stool. He puts his AWOL bag on another stool and settles down with a little uncertainty.

SAL
I ask you, you ever see these cops catch a killer or a rapist on this show? Ever see them put the cuffs on some crooked CEO fuck?

Wanders over to Doc.

SAL (CONT’D)
What can I get you?

DOC
Beer.

SAL
What kind?

DOC
 Doesn't matter.

SAL
Bottle or draft?

DOC
Draft.

(CONTINUED)
Sal walks back over and starts filling up a glass while he continues his conversation with O'Toole.

SAL
Nah, they're always just drug users and johns... just people hurtin', trying to find a little pleasure in life.

O'TOOLE
What have you got against cops?

SAL
Nuttin'. What I got something against is good ol' stupidity.

Sal wanders back to Doc and serves him the beer. Doc looks into a manila envelope and withdraws a five dollar bill and lays it on the bar.

SAL (CONT'D)
You comin' or goin'?

DOC
Passing through, kind of.
(about money)
Keep it.

Sal takes Doc's money, puts it in the register, and goes back to his crossword.

DOC (CONT'D)
Good beer.

SAL
Yeah, it's from Pennsylvania.

DOC
How long have you had this place?

SAL
Too long.

DOC
It's real homey.

SAL
You think so? Where the hell do you live?

Doc doesn't get Sal's wit.

DOC
New Hampshire. Portsmouth.

(CONTINUED)
Sal is back on his puzzle.

    DOC (CONT’D)
    Home of the Navy prison.

    SAL
    I know the place.

    DOC
    It's an okay town.
        (drinks)
    So you're Sal.

    SAL
    That I am.

    DOC
    So Sal, how do you suppose I knew that?

    SAL
    Name's on the sign outside.

Doc smiles, looks around, turns to O'Toole.

    DOC
    Not exactly a hot spot, huh?

    O’TOOLE
    Not anymore.

    DOC
    I like it, though. It's homey.

    SAL
    Yeah, you said that. That's why I was worried about where you lived.

    DOC
    You don't remember me, do you?

    SAL
    I don't remember half the women I fucked, and that's just the ones I didn't have to pay. How am I supposed to remember you?

    DOC
    Well, I remember you.

Sal looks at him more closely, squints. The cigar droops.
SAL
Can't be.

DOC
Could be.

SAL
No way.

DOC
Way.

SAL
Sweet Jesus... Doc?

DOC
(bemused)
Doc... Nobody's called me that in a long, long time.

SAL
Fuck me. You made it, Doc.

DOC
Yeah.

SAL
O'Toole, look at this. Old buddy from 'Nam. I saved his life once.

O'TOOLE
Then you must be some kind of fuckin' hero.

DOC
He never saved my life.

O'TOOLE
Didn't think so.

SAL
And now he's come to kick my ass.

O'TOOLE
Long overdue and well deserved. I'll hold his coat for him.

DOC
No, I'm not here for that.

SAL
You gotta excuse me, Doc. I'm shit for names.

(Continued)
DOC
Shepherd. Larry Shepherd.

SAL

DOC
Once.

SAL
Yeah, well, we were all something once. Now we're something else.

DOC
So you do remember me?

SAL
'Course I do, you saved my fuckin' life.

O'TOOLE
I thought it was the other way around.

DOC
You heard, I got busted down to E-One?

SAL
Most unfair. The green weenie - they broke it off in you. What can I say, dear, after I say I'm sorry?

DOC
How's Mueller?

SAL
Ol' Mueller the Mauler. Maybe he's alive. How should I know? Have another beer. On the house. Fuck, I'll have one with you.

DOC
You're not in touch with him?

SAL
Saw him medevacked out, and that's all she wrote.

DOC
Mueller got hit?

(CONTINUED)
Sal now comes over closer to Doc.

**SAL (CONT'D)**
I still think I rate credit for a save.

**DOC**
Who? What?

**SAL**
You, you fuck. I saved your life.

**DOC**
I don't remember anything like that.

**SAL**
Captain said, Doc is coming unhinged. He's gonna blow. Take him for two days to Pleiku. Show him around Disneyland.

**DOC**
I do remember Disneyland.

**SAL**
Hell yeah you do.

**DOC**
But all I remember is gettin' laid and drunk.

**SAL**
Well, yeah... that's why it was there.

**DOC**
Mueller was with us.

**SAL**
I did that too. I said, Cap'n, Doc's too fucked up for one person to handle. Take Mueller, he said.

**DOC**
(sarcastic)
Oh, yeah, and things were much better after that.

(CONTINUED)
SAL
C'mon, Doc, we had a good time, didn't we? We had some fun.

DOC
Sure we did. Not sayin' we didn't.

SAL
We did, the three of us.

DOC
Yeah. I laugh sometimes when I think about it.

SAL
Really? Do you?

DOC
Yeah, kind of.

SAL
Why not? You got to laugh at every-fuckin-thing. I laugh at my prostate gland, little son of a bitch, laugh every time the doctor gives me a fingerwave, two times a year.

DOC
It's good you know how to do that. Wish I could do that.

SAL
So what was it, three years?

DOC
Ended up about two, with good behavior.

SAL
That's not so bad.

DOC
It was pretty bad, but it was a long time ago.

SAL
BCD?

DOC
Yeah, but at some point instead of calling it a Bad Conduct Discharge, I started calling it a better career decision.

(CONTINUED)
SAL
Fuckin-A. You're alive and upright. So you got out, and then what? You stayed there?

DOC
Didn't really have anywhere else to go.

SAL
Fuck all. Listen here, how did you find my lonesome ass?

DOC
Easy. On the internet. You can find anybody on the internet these days.

SAL
That's fucked.

Doc kind of laughs as O'Toole gives them fresh beers.

SAL (CONT'D)
So whaddaya do in Portsmouth, for a living?

DOC
Stocking clerk, at the Navy Exchange.

SAL
You're shitting me.

DOC
(old joke between them)
I wouldn't shit you, you're my favorite turd.

LATER - O'Toole is asleep on the pool table. Doc is crawling into a booth. Sal is also finding a spot to lay down.

DOC (CONT'D)
(stretching out)
Don't you go someplace when you close?

SAL
Like where?

DOC
I don't know, home?

SAL
It'll be there tomorrow.
INT. MEN'S ROOM - MORNING

A dreadful little space full of generational stains and graffiti. Sal washes his face, pulls out some paper towels and dries. He looks at his reflection in the mirror. This is the face he has earned. This is the place he has landed.

INT. SAL'S BAR & GRILL - MORNING

Doc and O'Toole are still asleep. Sal draws a beer, starts eating a cold piece of pizza.

SAL

Reveille, reveille, drop your cocks and grab your socks. Reveille!

Sal has to stir Doc. Finally he wakes up and looks at Sal.

SAL (CONT'D)

You want a beer? This is the last of the pizza.

Doc shakes his head.

SAL (CONT'D)

I'm still a little fucked up from last night. I'm getting too old for this shit, frankly.

DOC

(sitting up)

What's the deal with the grill part of Sal's Bar & Grill?

SAL

Gone to rust is the deal.

DOC

Too bad.

SAL

Used to put out a righteous burger. Serious meat with a nice slice of raw onion and nothin' else, except for mustard and ketchup, of course. No lettuce or pickles or any of that crap. But people lost their taste for honest hamburgers, so I let the grill go. Why? You hungry?

DOC

Just curious.

(_CONTINUED)
SAL
There's Mexicans here now, so we can get some chorizo con huevos. Hell, we qualify for menudo. You got the balls for that?

DOC
No, thanks. There's something I'd like to show you, though, if you're up for it.

SAL
I'm always up for it. Shoot.

DOC
You got a car?

SAL
I'm a fuckin businessman, of course I got a car.

(stirs O'Toole)
Yo, O'Toole, open up for me today, okay?

O'Toole nods his head, then goes back to sleep.

INT. SAL'S TAURUS - MORNING - MOVING

Not much of a car. A 20-year-old Taurus Wagon. Sal drives through a light drizzle, on a rural road.

SAL
I just fuckin' love it, you know? It's like priceless.

DOC
What is?

SAL
The Navy. They put the cock to you, then they let you work at the Navy fuckin' Exchange.

DOC
I got five people under me.

SAL
You're a fuckin' inspiration.

DOC
You know what amazes me about you?
SAL
Could be anything. I'm a pretty amazing guy.

DOC
You turn over your bar to a customer, you get in your car, and you drive me to hell and gone, and you don't even know where we're going.

SAL
I didn't think it would take so fuckin' long.

Doc refers to a folded up MapQuest sheet of paper.

EXT. RURAL CHURCH - MORNING

A humble building that might have been a barn once. It lacks a steeple and stained glass, but it makes up for it with the spirit we will encounter inside. We see the Taurus Wagon in the parking lot.

SAL (O.S.)
You gotta be kiddin' me.

INT. SAL'S TAURUS - MORNING

Sal looks at the place, doubtfully.

DOC
C'mon, you're gonna love this. I promise.

SAL
I don't know, Doc, you seen one, you seen them all.

Doc grins as they start to get out of the car.

INT. CHURCH - MORNING

A small black congregation, listening intently to a sermon. Sal and Doc enter, drawing some notice, but then space is made for them. A middle-aged preacher is at the pulpit with the aid of a cane. It is MUELLER.

MUELLER
...Now remember, Jesus and Judas, they were friends...

As the sermon continues, Sal leans toward Doc, whispers:

(CONTINUED)
SAL
Oh. My. Fucking. God. Is that who I think it is?

DOC
I told you you'd like this.

Sal is wildly amused. He turns and looks around at the others, wanting to share his excitement.

MUELLER
But, oh, how a good man can be laid low by a false friend, how havoc can follow the lying smile...

CONGREGATION
Amen!

SAL
Amen, brother!

(whispers to Doc)
The dude was a world-class drinker, gambler and cocksman.

DOC
Shhhh.

SAL
And likely a speed freak. How the hell did you find this place?

DOC
The internet.

MUELLER
Oh, yes, in the spirit of friendship, have a drink... have a toke... have a snort... the devil has a friendly face and a winning way. But behind that smile, as behind the kiss of Judas...

SAL
(whispers)
I think he's makin' this shit up just for us.

Reverend Mueller eventually finishes his sermon, looking closely at his two visitors... a long judgemental look. An echoing of Amens rolls wall to wall.

SAL (CONT’D)
(shouting out)
Oh, Amen, brother! Amen!

(CONTINUED)
MUELLER
Thank you, brothers and sisters, and praise the Lord for our fellowship here today.

SAL
Praise the Lord!

MUELLER
I see we have some visitors among us today. Welcome to our Sunday services. Would you like to stand and introduce yourselves?

Sal needs no second invitation. He springs to his feet, snaps off a salute and sounds off:

SAL
Salvatore Nealon, Sergeant, U.S. Marine Corps, retired.

Heads in the congregation turn. Whispers become a buzz that fill the church. The Reverend totters a bit at the pulpit, holding on. RUTH, Mueller's concerned wife, studies how her husband is responding. Doc tugs at Sal's sleeve, but Sal pulls him to his feet.

SAL (CONT'D)
And guess who this lad is.

INT. PARSONAGE - AFTERNOON

Mueller, Ruth and their two guests sit at a table laden with a ham and heaping bowls of vegetables and greens. Mueller sits rigidly, his eyes on Sal and Doc, wary.

SAL
Man, oh, man, southern ham, thank you, ma'am. Listen here, Ruth, I hope this old man appreciates you.

RUTH
Oh, I think he does.

SAL
'Cause if ever he don't, just pack a bag and come live with Sal.

RUTH
You don't have a wife?
SAL
No, ma'am, neither chick nor child.
I do have a lady friend, but she
don't cook worth a damn. She has
other talents, if you know what I
mean.

Embarrassed, she turns to Doc.

RUTH
And you, Mr. Shepherd? Are you
single or married?

DOC
I married a wonderful woman, Mrs.
Mueller.

SAL
Bet she don't cook like this.

RUTH
I get it, Mr. Nealon, you haven't
been eating well.

SAL
Am now.

DOC
The light of my life, my Mary. A
heart as big as... anything. A
real pretty girl, with a great big
smile...

SAL
Nice...

DOC
She had a little... slowness...
because of a thing when she was
born.

SAL
What's that mean, she's retarded?

DOC
No, she could do anything anybody
else could, she was just kind of...
delayed. A great mom, a great
wife.

RUTH
What does she do?

(CONTINUED)
DOC
Oh, no... I'm sorry. I lost her last January. Breast cancer.

RUTH
I'm so sorry.

Sal stops with fork in mid path.

SAL
Sorry, Doc. You know me, I didn't mean nothin'.

MUELLER
We pay for the things we say, Salvatore.

SAL
Well, then you can add it to my tab.

DOC
That's all right. You didn't know.

MUELLER
Your tab is long overdue, I suspect.

RUTH
Do you have any children, Doc?

DOC
(hesitates)
Just one, a son. Larry Junior.

RUTH
Richard and I have a boy and a girl, and we have four grandchildren.

SAL
Richard?

MUELLER
(quickly)
Honey, don't you have some coffee and pie for our visitors, before we send them on their way?

RUTH
(rising)
I have a peach cobbler for dessert.

(CONTINUED)
SAL
Oh, man, peach cobbler... this is livin'!

Ruth goes to the kitchen, looks over her shoulder at her unusual guests.

MUELLER
(to Doc)
I'm glad to see you prevailing over your hardships.

DOC
Doin' my best.

MUELLER
You, at least, seem to have turned out to be a decent man.

DOC
Try to be.

MUELLER
I regret any role I played in all that foolishness that happened back in Vietnam.

Sal shakes his head, as if trying to defog his brain.

SAL
What the hell did you do with Mueller the Mauler, preacher? He in the witness protection program or something? Where're you keepin' him?

MUELLER
I grew up, Sal, and I found a purpose along the way.

DOC
You don't have to feel sorry.

MUELLER
I always figured you for a lifer, Sal. Is that the way it worked out?

SAL
I re-upped, sure. I was expectin' all the dominoes to start fallin', like they said they would. I was all ready to kill commies in San Diego, but they never showed up - they just all kind of disappeared. (MORE)
SAL (CONT'D)
Can you believe people are now
going to Vietnam on fuckin'
vacations? They get their pictures
taken where fifty-two thousand
young Americans took their last
dump. Fuck me.

MUELLER
So you mustered out on principle.

SAL
I mustered out with a plate in my
fuckin' head and one-hundred
percent disability. That was the
good news.

MUELLER
How did that happen?

SAL
Fuck if I remember. Somebody hit me
on the head with something. I
believe drink was involved.

He laughs. The other two can't manage it.

11 LATER - They sit in the living room having cobbler and coffee. Doc hasn't touched his, Sal digs into his, while practically flirting with Ruth.

SAL (CONT'D)
...I was on the shy side of
insubordination most of the time,
but I could get away with it
because of my dashing good looks
and my boyish charm.

Mueller snorts.

MUELLER
I guess we're all just lucky to be
alive, praise God.

SAL
I tell myself that.

Doc sits with his arms on his knees, head down, sinking down
into himself. One by one they notice him. Sensing their
attention, he raises his head.

SAL (CONT'D)
(nodding to the untouched
cobbler)
You gonna eat that?
MUELLER
You okay, Doc?
(a beat)
What's wrong?

Doc shakes his head.

RUTH
It's best to talk, whatever it is that's bothering you.

DOC
My son... because of my son, I came here, found you guys... Maybe I shouldn't have...

RUTH
Your son?

DOC
Larry Junior. A year ago he joined the corps.

SAL
Ooh-Rah.

DOC
But two days ago they came and told me he had been killed.

SAL
Aw, shit, Doc. Why didn't you say anything earlier?

DOC
He died in Baghdad. His convoy got ambushed, and they said he had unloaded his weapon on them and died with his bayonet in his hand.
(beat)
He's coming home tonight. They're gonna bury him at Arlington. Full honors. A hero.
(beat)
Can you guys come with me?

LATER - Sal smokes a cigar out on the porch. He listens to what is being said inside, Mueller all over Doc with sympathy and God.
... and I can promise you this: someday you will meet your wife and your son again, in a better place, and all of this will seem like a momentary separation.

That does it. Sal tosses his cigar and goes inside.

SAL
Oh come on... what better place did they go to? Las Vegas? Miami Beach?

MUELLER
Doc knows the place I speak of.

SAL
Well, then show him. Doc's got a map. Maybe he can find it on the internet.

MUELLER
Only when you see it will you know it, and in your case, Sergeant, it's odds-on you'll never get to see it.

SAL
Then I guess I won't miss it.

MUELLER
Oh, you will miss it dearly, every moment of eternity. Do you know how long eternity is?

SAL
It ain't going to matter, but of all the billions of people floatin' around in your heaven, how come none of them ever got the word back to the rest of us?

MUELLER
One of them did.

SAL
Oh, that guy... weak on exact details, if you ask me.

MUELLER
I'm not asking you.
SAL
(to Doc)
Listen here, Doc, I'm sorry for your loss, but I ain't gonna blow a bunch of smoke up your ass. The worst thing that can happen to anybody has landed on you, and now you got to deal with it.

MUELLER
You were a hazard when you were young, and now you're just an old fool.

SAL
I got your fool dangling, fool.

MUELLER
Fuck you.

SAL
There he is! That's the Mueller I know!

DOC
Please, c'mon, I didn't mean to cause trouble.

SAL
I'll help bury your boy. I might not be able to get you into heaven, but dammit, I can get you to Arlington.

Ruth opens the door from the kitchen, pauses, listens.

DOC
Mueller?

MUELLER
(uncomfortable)
I'd certainly like to help, but...

SAL
Don't worry - he'll stay here and pray for you... very valuable.

RUTH
Richard, could I see you for a moment?

Mueller slowly gets up.

(CONTINUED)
DOC

Please.

MUELLER

I don't get around so well, as you can see.

DOC

It's just in the car.

As Mueller leaves the room, Sal is all smiles.

SAL

Oh, he's comin' with. That's affirmative.

DOC

But he said...

SAL

Don't matter what he said. I guarantee his old lady's gonna shame him. Right now she's in there saying, "You got to go with..."

13 INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS 13

RUTH

... with that poor man, Richard. He needs you.

MUELLER

He'll have qualified people there to counsel him.

RUTH

Yes, but who will protect him from that... Sal person?

MUELLER

(chuckles)

Well, I do know that a lot of shit can go sideways when Sal is around.

RUTH

What in the world has happened to your vocabulary?

MUELLER

Sorry, dear.

RUTH

You can't refuse friends in a time of need.

(CONTINUED)
MUELLER
Friends? I haven't seen these guys in decades.

RUTH
You can't refuse anyone. You're a preacher.

MUELLER
They were a bad time in my life, honey.

RUTH
The man lost his son, Richard.

They look at each other for a beat, the way long-married people can do.

RUTH (CONT'D)
I'll pack you an overnight bag.

INT. SAL'S TAURUS - NIGHT - MOVING

Sal leans forward over the wheel. Doc is next to him, and Mueller is in the back. Sal looks over to Doc.

SAL
That seat goes back a little.

Doc starts to make the adjustment.

SAL (CONT'D)
I've had this car 17 years. She's been good to me. Technically it's a Taurus, but I call it, a cli-taurus...

Doc smiles, and Sal looks at Mueller in the rearview mirror, giving him nothing.

SAL (CONT'D)
You have to wear that collar everywhere you go?
(no answer)
Take it off, why don't you, and relax, Richard.

MUELLER
I am relaxed.

SAL
Never knew that was your name. You ever go by Richie? Dick?
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
(a beat)
You like Dick?

Mueller refuses to take the bait.

Never heard of any brothers named Richard. Didn't think they named them that.

Richard Pryor. Dick Gregory. Little Richard...

Now he likes dick.

Even Doc laughs. The car suddenly fills with light. A semi is tailgating them.

The fuck...?

Change lanes. Get over.

Sal gets pissed.

All right fuck face, you want to play, I'll play.

The speedometer moves to 70, 80...

Pull off the road! Get to the side!

Hold tight. I'm gonna jackknife this fucker!

You'll kill us all, you son of a bitch!

Sal slows down and pulls over a bit, lowers the window, and flips the semi the bird as the truck passes them. Mueller slaps the back of Sal's head.

What the hell was all that?

Sal's loving this.
SAL
Seems like you're gonna hafta either tighten up your mouth or loosen up your collar.

Mueller tries to calm himself down. He's too steamed. He takes off the collar.

15 EXT. ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY - NIGHT
The car is parked in front of the cemetery on a drizzling Sunday night.

SAL (O.S.)
Where're we supposed to go, Doc?

16 INT. SAL'S TAURUS - NIGHT
Doc shuffles through a pile of internet maps and papers.

DOC
Dover Air Force Base.

SAL
That's in fuckin Delaware.

DOC
Right. Dover, Delaware.

SAL
So why're we here?

DOC
I don't know.

SAL
You said Arlington.

DOC
That's what they said.

SAL
But now you're saying Dover.

DOC
Yeah, I guess first... Dover. They got to fly in somewhere, so they fly to Dover.

Sal looks behind at Mueller, who looks away.

SAL
All right, Doc. Dover it is. I'm guessing you got a map.

(CONTINUED)
DOC
Looks like an hour and a half. You want me to drive?

17 EXT. INTERSTATE - NIGHT

The Taurus Wagon rolls down the highway.

SAL (O.S.)
Mueller, my man, my mauling brother, can I axe you a personal question?

18 INT. SAL'S TAURUS - NIGHT - MOVING

Doc drives. Sal is in the passenger seat while Mueller has the back.

MUELLER
I suspect you're going to anyway, and since I'm stuck here in the backseat you might as well...

SAL
On a Saturday night, are you still up to giving your wife a good fuck?

DOC
C'mon Sal, that's... that's...

SAL
What? I'm curious is all.

Mueller gives him an icy look.

MUELLER
I don't discuss my sex life. It's called respect for your wife, but you wouldn't know anything about that.

SAL
Hold on, I respect your wife. Of course I do. I only wanted to know if you can still cut the mustard. Just makin' conversation on how the years have treated you.

Not taking the bait, Mueller just stares off into the night.

SAL (CONT'D)
Now, Doc here, you don't even have to ask. He don't need no Viagra to fly the flag, do you, Doc?
DOC
I haven't had sex in two years.

SAL
Holy shit - why the hell not?

DOC
My wife was sick.

MUELLER
(to Sal)
Weren't you even listening?

SAL
Yeah, but life goes on.
(beat)
Don't it?

MUELLER
Apparently.

SAL
Remember your first time?

DOC
I told Mary all about that. I
confessed to everything. I wanted
no secrets from her.

SAL
Now that's just plain stupid.
Never do that.

MUELLER
It was never about you getting
laid, Doc. It was about Sal getting
you laid.

SAL
Duh.

MUELLER
He had to show you a good time, and
he only knew his way. Ignorant
soul.

SAL
As I recall, you was there too,
partaking, how shall we say, fully.

MUELLER
Yes, and I didn't know any more
than you did what a good time was,
back in those days.

(CONTINUED)
SAL
Those days? It hasn't changed much. A little whorin', a little drinkin', a little fightin', all things in moderation.

MUELLER
Sounds like the recipe for a wasted life.

SAL
At least it's bullshit-free.

MUELLER
You positive about that?

They fall silent, crossing the Severn River Bridge into Delaware.

19
EXT. DOVER AIR FORCE BASE - NIGHT

GATEHOUSE - the Taurus Wagon is parked off to the side as our three wait while the AIR PATROL GUARD finishes a phone call.

19
INT. SAL'S TAURUS - NIGHT

DOC
Wonder if anything is wrong?

SAL
He's a guard at a gate - he don't know nothing.

DOC
Wonder if there'll be an honor guard and all that?

SAL
There'll be something - it'll be respectful. It's just not public - there's a blackout on all that stuff this time around.

MUELLER
Yeah, no pictures of coffins, no reminders to the public.

DOC
People should know. Don't they owe it to the guys who've sacrificed?

MUELLER
People are so ready to believe in anything once it's called a war.

(CONTINUED)
SAL
Yep.

MUELLER
Call it war, you got their support. War on drugs, war on crime... it's all fake. War itself is fake.

Eventually the GUARD comes to the car, and makes the gesture of rolling down the window.

GUARD
Gentlemen, the body is in transit. The plane's not due 'til 0800 tomorrow. Come back then and you'll be able to wait in the hangar.

DOC
Okay. Thank you.

SAL
In transit. Somebody's always in transit, even...

EXT. KING'S COURT MOTOR LODGE - NIGHT

A cheerless refuge from the rain.

INT. KING'S COURT MOTOR LODGE FRONT DESK - NIGHT

The guys are in mid check-in.

MUELLER
I thought I'd have my own room.

SAL
Don't get cranky on us old man.

Doc takes cash out of his envelope.

SAL (CONT’D)
Whoa... what's with the wad?

DOC
They took up a collection at the Exchange, when they heard.

SAL
See? You got lots of friends.

DOC
They felt bad. They wanted to do something.
A HYPED-UP EMPLOYEE enters the front area and changes the channel on the TV that rumbles in the background.

    HYPED-UP EMPLOYEE
    You guys aren't watching this?
    
    DOC
    What?
    
    HYPED-UP EMPLOYEE
    They got him!
    
    SAL
    Who?
    
    HYPED-UP EMPLOYEE
    That sumbitch Saddam! They got him in a spider hole!

He finds a news station that is showing some footage of the captured Saddam Hussein, submitting to an inspection of body, etc.

INT. KING'S COURT MOTOR LODGE ROOM - NIGHT

Two queen beds, a TV going with the Hussein footage, and an empty pizza box at the foot of the bed. Doc already looks asleep, while Mueller lays on his bed, almost asleep.

    SAL
    How's the rack, Padre?
    
    MUELLER
    It's fine.

Here they are, but where are they? Nothing to do, nowhere to go. Sal just finishes the last piece of pizza and stares at more Saddam Hussein footage.

EXT. KING'S COURT MOTOR LODGE PARKING LOT - MORNING

They make their way to the car and throw their bags into the trunk.

    DOC
    I was wondering...you never went home, so how did you get to pack a bag?
    
    SAL
    I always keep one in the trunk. Sometimes a lady friend wants me to stay over. I hate to say no.

(CONTINUED)
MUELLER
Is there one particular lady friend
or are there more?

SAL
One at the moment, but I'm always
holding auditions.
   (slams down the trunk)
Let's do this.

INT. HANGAR - MORNING

Cold and hollow and cheerless. A folding table has been set
up with coffee and doughnuts. Only Sal partakes. Across the
hangar is a MOTHER, weeping. Her eyes are red from crying.
She holds a hanky against her face. Her HUSBAND is a large
man, a working man, and he is angry.

MOTHER
   (through tears)
   I want him to look nice...

FATHER
Irene, that ain't gonna be the boy
that walked out of our house, that
waved good-bye.

Another circle of four - mother, father, second wife, second
husband - huddle together. One more circle of three waits - a
mother, father and daughter.

The hangar door slides open. An Army major and a Marine Lt.
Colonel come in. Behind them are four coffins, each on a
wagon, each covered with a flag and each with an enlisted man
escort.

They space out the coffins. The escorts stand at attention.
Our three move toward the Marine. The COLONEL steps forward.
He is ramrod straight, around 40, used to being feared. He
addresses Sal in a lower voice suitable to the occasion.

COLONEL
Mister Shepherd?

Sal nods to Doc, who stands dumbly, his eyes on the flag-
covered box that contains his son. The Colonel extends his
hand. Doc shakes it.

COLONEL (CONT'D)
Mr. Shepherd, I'm Colonel Willits.
The President of the United States
has asked me to express his deep
regret that your son was killed in
action.

(CONTINUED)
Sal can't help himself and rolls his eyes.

DOC
Thank you.

COLONEL WILLITS
He died a hero in the service of his country. He was an inspiration to his fellow Marines.

WASHINGTON, the escort, stands at stony attention. He is a young black man, also a lance corporal. Something is wrong with his ear lobe. It is covered with tiny bumps and looks like it is rotting away. He is 20 and though taught to kill he gives off a sense of basic goodness.

DOC
Can I see him?

COLONEL WILLITS
Sir, that would be ill-advised. Trust me on this. You do not want to see him like that.

DOC
I don't know... I think I have to.

COLONEL WILLITS
Sir, Lance Corporal Shepherd was hit in the back of head. I can assure you he felt no pain... but the exit wound in such a case is devastating... to the face.

DOC
They were behind him? They shot him from behind?

MUELLER
Take the Colonel's advice, Doc. Best to remember him as he was.

Doc thinks about it, looks to Sal.

SAL
I'd have to see him, but that's me. The thing is, you don't have to listen to no colonels no more. Those days are gone.

The Colonel seems to recoil, his jaw tightens. Washington sees it and twitches.

(CONTINUED)
DOC
I'm gonna see my son.

COLONEL WILLITS
What you see you will not be able to un-see.

DOC
I understand... but I have to.

COLONEL WILLITS
As you wish. Lance Corporal Washington, escort these two gentlemen to the coffee mess.

Washington leads them away. At the table, they turn and watch Doc. Washington holds his attention stance.

SAL
Listen up, why don't you stand at ease, you're givin' me a stiff neck.

WASHINGTON
(relaxing)
Man, never heard anyone talk to the Colonel like that.

SAL
Colonels don't scare me, kid. Never have, never will.

WASHINGTON
You a Marine?

Sal slides up his sleeve and reveals his tattoo.

WASHINGTON (CONT'D)
I thought so.

SAL
I got more time in the chow line than you got in the corps.

WASHINGTON (to Mueller)
You too?

MUELLER
Semper Fi, do or die. How do you think I got this cane?

(CONTINUED)
SAL
Hey kid. The fuck's wrong your ear?

WASHINGTON
Baghdad boil.

SAL
Say what?

WASHINGTON
Baghdad boil. Everybody's got one. You get bit by a teeny sand fly. They say it'll go away. In a year or two.

SAL
That's one ugly ear.

MUELLER
This is a big mistake.

They look at Doc, who braces himself, then buckles at the knees when the coffin lid is lifted. Sal takes a step toward him, but Mueller gently stops him with the crook of his cane.

MUELLER (CONT'D)
Nothing you can do now. Or do you just want to out-tough a colonel?

SAL
I don't want nothin'. I'm just along for the ride.

MUELLER
Yeah right.

WASHINGTON
So you were in 'Nam with Larry's dad?

MUELLER
We were.

WASHINGTON
You know what happened back then?

SAL
Naw, we were just pullin' triggers, killin' gooks.

WASHINGTON
His dad wound up doing brig time behind it.

(CONTINUED)
MUELLER
That's all in the past.

SAL
What do you know about that?

WASHINGTON
Sounded like he fucked up some dudes... or some dudes fucked him up.
(nobody says anything)
You them dudes?

MUELLER
What exactly did he tell you?

WASHINGTON
Only some bad shit went down. I was Larry's best friend. No one else knew anything about it.

SAL
You were with him in the ambush?

WASHINGTON
Ambush?

SAL
Yeah, an ambush and a fire fight, they said.

WASHINGTON
Okay.

SAL
Okay?

WASHINGTON
If that's what they're saying it was, then that's what it was.

SAL
You were there. What the hell happened?

Washington hesitates.

SAL (CONT'D)
Spit it out, kid. It's just us, Marine to Marine.

WASHINGTON
(nervous)
It was fucked.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
Me and Shepherd and three other dudes were all day humping school supplies. Tablets, pencils, some new books. It was our last run, pissed-off mode, sand down our throats and up our asses. One guy said he wished he was in the fuckin' Navy. We started dissin' swabbies, calling them chickens of the sea, shit like that. Then Shep says, my old man was a swabby, a medical corpsman, wound up with the Marines in 'Nam. I asked him how long he put in, and Shepherd says about five years, but a couple of them in the brig. Anyway, we was always stoppin' at this little store we called Abdul's Haji Mart for Haji Cokes. It was my turn to make the run but Shep said he'd do it. So he gets out and we're bullshitting. Then this raghead comes up behind him, shouts out Ala Akbar or whatever, you know, God is great, and then he puts a cap in Shep's head.

This sinks in.

SAL
What happened next?

WASHINGTON
Shit man, we went off. Lit 'em all up - that raghead, Abdul, and damn near the whole fuckin' hood.

Sal and Mueller just take this in.

WASHINGTON (CONT'D)
We carried Larry back to the Hummer and went home. Fuck a whole bunch of school supplies.

SAL
He's supposed to get a Bronze Star behind this.

WASHINGTON
Oh, he'll get the Star. The more Stars the better, right?

They look over at Doc as the Colonel lowers the coffin lid. Doc still braces himself against it.

(CONTINUED)
MUELLER
We can't tell him about this.

SAL
We can't?

MUELLER
Let him have his Bronze Star, his burial at Arlington with honors. Let him have his hero. Lord knows he's had little enough in his life.

SAL
You mean, let him have the lie?

MUELLER
Yes. What's more important?

SAL
I don't know, but it's never the lie.

Sal walks toward the coffin, toward Doc and the Colonel. Mueller trails behind, slowed by his cane. Washington takes Mueller's arm and they move a little faster that way. As they get closer, they can overhear the Colonel.

COLONEL WILLITS
I'm sorry sir, but there is always a sound reason for my recommendations.

Doc is trembling, unable to speak. Sal puts a hand on his shoulder. Doc goes into his arms. Sal holds him awkwardly. These men are not used to hugs. He pats his back.

DOC
Sal... he don't have a face anymore.

All Sal can offer is the universal spine stiffener, God's blessing and curse combined:

SAL
Gotta be a man.

Doc nods into his shoulder and stands back, running a handkerchief over his face. Sal takes a moment to stare down the Colonel.

SAL (CONT’D)
How'd this boy wind up dead, mister?

(CONTINUED)
MUELLER
Sal...

COLONEL WILLITS
I beg your pardon?

SAL
Simple question. How'd it happen?

COLONEL WILLITS
The Lance Corporal acquitted himself with dignity and honor, and he died a hero.

SAL
Yeah, well, they're all heroes, ain't they?

COLONEL WILLITS
That they are, sir.

SAL
All heroes, for sure. But how did it happen that he was shot in the back of his head, like a fuckin' dog?

Doc looks at the uneasy Colonel through teary eyes.

COLONEL WILLITS
He was a brave Marine, a credit to the corps, and he served his country well.

SAL
So did we all - all of us here. And we still have to when we get the chance.

DOC
What's going on, Sal?

SAL
I don't know. That's why I'm askin'.

MUELLER
Shouldn't we be making arrangements for the funeral. Isn't that why we're here?

SAL
Were you there, when it happened?

(CONTINUED)
COLONEL WILLITS
No, I wasn't.

SAL
Where were you?

COLONEL WILLITS
With all due respect, that's none of your business.

SAL
With all due respect, Doc here ought to get to talk to somebody who was. You weren't.
(to Washington)
Were you?

Washington hesitates, glances at the Colonel staring at him, but then reluctantly answers.

WASHINGTON
I was there, sir.

The Colonel doesn't like how this is going at all, but it's too late.

COLONEL WILLITS

Washington takes a deep breath.

LATER - Sal is at the coffee table. Mueller approaches from the hangar door. Doc is leaning back against the coffin, considering what to do. The Colonel and Washington stand on either side of him.

MUELLER
Where are we with this?

SAL
Where we was, pretty much. He'd like his son's face back.

MUELLER
I called my wife. I'm going home. I'll take the bus.

SAL
You quittin'?

MUELLER
Quitting what?
SAL
We'll know in a minute or two.

Sal sees the Colonel once again approaching Doc so he wanders over to him.

SAL (CONT'D)
Yo, Doc.

Doc looks up.

SAL (CONT'D)
What's it gonna be here?

Doc stands up straight, looks the Colonel in the eye.

DOC
I can't bury him in Arlington. Not now.

COLONEL WILLITS
He qualifies and he deserves that honor.

Doc digs out his wallet, rifles through it, and produces a photo of his son. He holds it out, in front of the Colonel's face.

DOC
Here, this is what his face looked like. He was a good-looking boy. (shows the photo to the others)
See? The high school girls were all over him. He was a good-looking boy. I'm taking Larry home.

COLONEL WILLITS
I assure you that is a bad decision and you will come to regret it.

Doc tries to push the cart. Sal hands his cup to Mueller and joins him. They push together.

COLONEL WILLITS (CONT'D)
Hold on. The Marines will transport the body, at no cost to you, anywhere you choose.

They keep on pushing.

(CONTINUED)
COLONEL WILLITS (CONT'D)
Gentlemen. I cannot release the Lance Corporal's body, except to a licensed mortician...

Mueller steps up.

MUELLER
Or to a clergyman, isn't that the case?

The Colonel hesitates, as Mueller hands him Sal's cup and begins to put on his clerical collar.

COLONEL WILLITS
Correct.

MUELLER
So I guess that would be me.

Using his cane, Mueller walks behind Doc and Sal as they push the coffin. Washington stands next to the Colonel, impressed.

EXT. HANGAR PARKING LOT - MORNING

Sal and Doc push the cart, Mueller trailing behind. They come to a stop, not before dinging the car.

DOC
Sorry about that.

SAL
Forget about it.

They stand silently, awkwardly for a moment. What now?

MUELLER
Now how you gonna get him home? Strap that coffin to the roof of Sal's car?

SAL
We could do that. We'd need help liftin' it up. Maybe we...

MUELLER
Don't be ridiculous.

SAL
Why not? Tell me a better way to be. You wish you could be ridiculous, but it's too late now.

(CONTINUED)
MUELLER
Doc, let the government take care of the transport - that's the kinda thing they're good at.

DOC
I don't like the government right now.

MUELLER
You don't have to.

DOC
I don't trust it any more.

SAL
Hell, we could rent a truck.

DOC
Yeah, let's do that. We'll stay here, and you can take the car and go find a truck. Pay for it out of this.

Doc gives him an envelope full of cash.

SAL
Consider it done. One truck, comin' up.

MUELLER
(to Doc)
I'll be going with Sal. He can drop me at the bus station. I think I'll be going back home now.

For a moment no one says anything.

DOC
I understand, Mueller. I'm sorry for dragging you up here.

MUELLER
I thought I could be of some help. I thought we were going to a funeral.

SAL
We ARE going to a funeral, it just looks like it's going to take a little longer to get there.

Doc doesn't want to make this any harder than it is.
DOC
It's okay, Mueller. I'm just glad I got to see you again.

MUELLER
I'm sorry, lad.

A handshake and a hug, awkwardly trapping his cane against him.

MUELLER (CONT'D)
Glad I got to see you too. God bless you, Doc.

INT. SAL'S TAURUS - DAY - MOVING

Sal drives, Mueller next to him. They maintain a silence, then -

MUELLER
We should stop and ask somebody where the bus station is.

SAL
It's a small town, we'll run into it. Give you a few more minutes to enjoy my company.

MUELLER
Always a pleasure.

SAL
Before you bail on us.

Mueller stares straight ahead.

SAL (CONT'D)
So, what's on your agenda? Read the bible all the way home, leftover ham for supper, say a little prayer...

MUELLER
Oh, I'll say a little prayer long before that. The bigger question is, what's on your agenda?

SAL
I feel I owe him one. Nothin' more, nothin' less.

MUELLER
Even though he says you don't owe him a thing?
ALL THE MORE REASON.

MUELLER
What would have happened, way back then, if we hadn't... you know?

SAL
Doc wouldn't have ended up doing two years in the brig, that's for sure. And we wouldn't have had to see what we did.

MUELLER
What was that?

SAL
You don't remember?

MUELLER
I remember a lot of shit... what are you talking about?

SAL
A certain platoon buddy, shot, writhing around on the ground dying, with nothing to help him cause we'd taken all the morphine for ourselves.

MUELLER
He was going to die, anyway. He had no chance. Minutes.

SAL
Maybe.

MUELLER
There was nothing we could do at that point.

SAL
Yeah, and we did nothin'. Sometimes you ought to do a little more.

Sal sees a Ryder agency and pulls to the curb.

INT. U-HAUL RENTAL AGENCY - DAY

A nervous older WOMAN, smoking a cigarette, is behind the counter, dealing with Sal and Mueller.
WOMAN
I have a van that would work for you, but you might be happier with a truck that's got a hydraulic tail lift.

SAL
Ohhh, a hydraulic lift. I like it.

WOMAN
What will you be hauling?

SAL
(hesitates)
Your truck with the lift'll handle it.

WOMAN
Will you be dropping it off back here or at another location?

It catches Sal short. He hadn't thought about that.

WOMAN (CONT’D)
Don'tcha know?

SAL
Guess I'm gonna return it here.

WOMAN
And when will that be?

Again, Sal has to think about it. The agent's suspicions start to grow. She grows more nervous. Terrorists?

WOMAN (CONT’D)
You don't know how long you'll need it?

SAL
Better give me a week.

MUELLER
Oh my, a week, he says.

Now she looks uneasily at Mueller as she taps her keyboard.

SAL
Now Mueller, it's outta your hands now.

At "Mueller," the agent's head jerks slightly, not sure what she heard.
... Just have a seat and take a load off. I'll handle this.

Mueller makes his way to a chair and sits. The woman is fretting inwardly.

**WOMAN**
I need to see your driver's license.

**SAL**
Yes, ma'am.

He empties one pocket of change and keys and a cigar cutter. The woman looks at that with apprehension. Out of the other pocket: cash, cards and hard candy. He finds the license.

**WOMAN**
Norfolk, Virginia?

**SAL**
Gotta live somewhere.

**WOMAN**
What brings you up here?

**SAL**
With all due respect, that's none of your business.

Now she's really worried.

**WOMAN**
Just trying to be friendly.

**SAL**
Really? Okay. Well, I'm here because of a death in the family.

**WOMAN**
I'm sorry.

**SAL**
(smiling)
That's all right. It wasn't my family.

**WOMAN**
Will you be the only driver?

Again, he has to think about it.

(continuing)
SAL
I'll have some help.

WOMAN
Then I'll need to see the other driver's license. Is it that gentleman there?

SAL
His holiness? His holiness can't hardly walk, let alone handle a big rig with a hydraulic lift.

WOMAN
Whoever, I'll need their license.

SAL
I'll drive it myself.

WOMAN
So you are the only driver?

SAL
Yes, ma'am. I be the wheelman.

Paranoia deepens.

WOMAN
Insurance on the vehicle?

SAL
What about it?

WOMAN
Would you like to get some?

SAL
Not necessary.

WOMAN
How will you be paying?

SAL
Cash.

He pulls out Doc's brown envelope.

MUELLER
And get directions.

SAL
Oh, yeah, where's the bus station?

She can't wait to call the police.
Sal and Mueller are driving along in the rented truck.

SAL
Sixteen or sixty, put a dude behind the wheel of a big rig, got to feel like hot shit.

MUELLER
It's a rented U-Haul with an automatic transmission.

SAL
Bigger than anything you ever handled.

MUELLER
Look Sal, Doc’s boy is dead. Try not to forget that.

SAL
I haven't forgotten that. But we're still alive, right? With time tickin' fast away. If a minute comes up that’s not too terrible, I'm gonna try to enjoy it. You used to be up for some fun.

MUELLER
Still am.

SAL
Really?!

MUELLER
As long it's right in God's eyes.

SAL
'God's eyes?' God don't have no eyes.

MUELLER
Oh, He's got eyes. And ears too. He hears every insult you send His way. There will be a reckoning, Sergeant.

SAL
A reckoning?

MUELLER
I assure you of that.
SAL
Then great – then I reckon I'll take that opportunity to stand at attention and say to God, "Hey, where were You when they were rapin' children or with the genocide and all that? Where were You when they flew airplanes into buildings, killin' thousands of folks just goin' to work, and the murderers shouting Your name, or You by some other name. Same difference. Where were You when Doc's kid was buyin' Cokes and some raghead blew his face off?" You see, I ain't gonna explain myself to God, I'm gonna make Him explain Himself to me!

MUELLER
I'm going to pray for your soul.

SAL
And I'm bettin' at the end of it, if the fucker even exists he'll say "Get your ass in here, you're my kind of dude."

(beat)
At least that's what I'm hopin'. If He's a tight-ass God, I'm fucked.

MUELLER
It might be time for a lube job on that plate you got in your head.

SAL
Don't fuck with my plate, it's pickin' up WOR in New York.

Mueller just stares at him. Sal notices the radio.

SAL (CONT'D)
Looky here.

He turns it on. Rap music. An Eminem song (something from "The Eminem Show").

MUELLER
Turn that shit off.

SAL
(he doesn't)
You've heard this stuff, right?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
SAL (CONT'D)
Now, I've been known to get in a face or two, but even I find some of this stuff offensive. And damn hard to dance to...

MUELLER
For once you and I agree on something.

SAL
Don't it make you a little ashamed to be an African American?

MUELLER
No, not really.

SAL
Well, it ought to, dignified old gentleman like you, who'd be the first to agree just how far this stuff is from Motown.

MUELLER
Why should I feel ashamed? This dude is white.

SAL
The fuck ...!?

MUELLER
That's affirmative. White as rice.

SAL
That's comin' out of a white mouth?

MUELLER
Yep - a white sewer mouth.

SAL
Then, by God, fuck me. I ought to feel ashamed myself. Only I never did much identify with the white race.

MUELLER
Oh really? Now I'm curious. What race do you identify with?

SAL
Green. The corps - that was the only culture ever made any sense to me.

(beat)
You ever miss it?

(CONTINUED)
MUELLER
Not for a minute.

SAL
I don't believe you.

30 INT. BUS STATION - DAY

Sal carries Mueller's bag and waits while Mueller hobbles back with his ticket in hand.

SAL
No problem?

MUELLER
Not unless being stuck on a bus for the next seven hours is a problem.

SAL
Busses are real nice now. Recliners, a shitter in the back. Maybe you'll meet some poor redneck and save his soul. How many points you get for that? Is it a point system?

MUELLER
I'm just hoping I can sleep. I didn't sleep too well last night.

SAL
Me either. Remember when we could sleep in a hole in the ground, with bullets zinging just overhead?

MUELLER
You can't go back, Sal.

SAL
Who'd want to?

MUELLER
We can't redo the choices we made back then. All we can do is learn from them and try to do better in the future.

SAL
Yeah, I know that.

MUELLER
But you're still gonna do it, aren't you?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
MUELLER (CONT'D)
You're gonna take Doc and his dead son to Portsmouth and try to make it fun.

SAL
You ought to come with.

MUELLER
Can't do that.

SAL
All right. Well, I'd better get started.

He extends his hand and they share an affectionate shake.

SAL (CONT'D)
I still can't believe it, you of all people, a preacher.

MUELLER
Goddam right.

SAL
Think we'll ever bump into each other again? We're not that far away.

MUELLER
Never know. He moves in mysterious ways.

EXT. HANGAR - DAY

The back of the parked truck is open and Doc pushes the coffin up to it as Sal joins him.

DOC
This is a lot of truck.

SAL
Never go small, kid. Check this out.

He pulls a small lever and raises the lift up to the level of the coffin. Together they half-slide, half-lift it off the wagon and onto the lift. Sal leans back against the lift and lights a cigar.

SAL (CONT'D)
I was wondering, though. What would your kid have wanted?

(CONTINUED)
Doc thinks about it for a beat.

    DOC
    To drink beer with his friends.
    Chase girls. He was twenty-one, he wasn't thinking about dying.

    SAL
    You can make this a lot easier on yourself.

    DOC
    I don't want to make it easier on myself.

    SAL
    (chuckles)
    Yeah. Guys like you and me, we take all the shit 'til it's disaster, and then we're cool, the worst has happened, like we always knew it would.

    DOC
    They sent him to a God-forsaken desert because... who knows why? It wasn't to protect America. It's like that jungle they sent us to. It wasn't a threat to us. And then they sent him back to me in this, with more lies... a hero, honors, Arlington. I ain't going to bury no Marine. I gotta bury a son.

32  EXT. HANGAR - DAY

Washington stands outside the hangar, watching the U-Haul truck pull away, wistfully. Then he walks away.

33  INT. U-HAUL TRUCK - DAY - MOVING

Sal drives toward the gate.

    SAL
    Some rig, huh?

Doc doesn't answer but is looking out the window. Something's wrong. A DAFB Police Car pulls in front of them, slows, bringing them almost to a stop. Another Police Car blocks them from behind, trapping them. They come to a stop.

    BULLHORN VOICE (O.S.)
    Get out of the truck. Walk away, hands above your head.
Mueller sits in the waiting area, quietly reading his bible. A man in a cheap RAINCOAT is talking to the ticket agent, looking over at Mueller. Another man in a black ANORAK takes a seat next to him.

ANORAK
Taking a bus today?

MUELLER
Yes, to Richmond. And you?

ANORAK
Richmond, huh. That home for you?

MUELLER
No, but it's getting close. Why?

Cheap Raincoat has walked over and is standing in front of Mueller.

RAINCOAT
You're the one they call the Mullah?

MUELLER
The what?

RAINCOAT
Mullah.

MUELLER
I'm waiting for a bus to Richmond, reading the scriptures.

ANORAK
What, the Bible? Checking out the competition?

MUELLER
Who are you two? What do you want from me?

ANORAK
That depends.

RAINCOAT
We're from Homeland Security.

MUELLER
What?!
Sal crushes an empty Bud can and tosses it the length of the room, missing the basket. As he grabs for a fresh one, Doc retrieves the empty and deposits it on top of the others in the plastic-lined wastebasket of the very same room they occupied the night before. Sal pops another can.

SAL
It used to mean something. There used to be an esprit de corps, a unity, a well-earned pride, some goddamn common sense. I don't know what it means anymore.

DOC
Fuck 'em. Fuck 'em all.

SAL
Fuck 'em all! I spent the best years of my life defendin' this country.

DOC
I think your best years are still ahead of you, Sal.

SAL
Fuck you.

DOC
It's true. It can be true.

SAL
Will you sit the fuck down? Look at me - all my future is behind me. I got a scrambled brain held together with a steel plate. And they look at me and what do they see? A fuckin' terrorist!

DOC
An apology would have been nice.

SAL
Oh they're sorry. Sorry they didn't smoke our asses.

A KNOCK on the door. They look at each other, like, what now? Sal eventually shrugs his shoulders and Doc cautiously opens the door. Mueller steps in and drops his bag. He stares down Sal. Sal gets off the bed he's been sitting on, Mueller's bed. He smooths it, and steps aside. Mueller lies down in his overcoat.

(CONTINUED)
SAL (CONT'D)
You forget your toothbrush?

Mueller says nothing. He needs a moment. Then -

MUELLER
I called my wife from the police station. The damn police station. Only after they decided I was not a Muslim radical. And not a mullah, but an old preacher named Mueller.

Sal thinks this is hilarious.

SAL
Mullah the Mauler! Its all over - this country's fucked.

DOC
Was Ruth upset?

MUELLER
Oh yeah, she wanted me to come right home. But I told her that when times demand it, even old men should become threats.

SAL
(interupting)
Fuckin' A right it is! It's like during the pinko scare....

MUELLER
(icily)
I believe I was talking.

Sal raises his hands - sorry and continue.

MUELLER (CONT'D)
I told my wife I was not coming home until we were done. Where's your boy?

DOC
They've got him again.

MUELLER
Tomorrow we get him back and take him home.
Our three come into the lobby and are met by the Lt. Colonel Willits and Washington.

COLONEL WILLITS
Good morning, gentlemen.

SAL
What's the deal, colonel whatever your name is - where's Larry?

COLONEL WILLITS
Willits. Colonel Willits. I've been briefed on last night's snafu. Totally ridiculous, the rental agent apparently went off the deep end, but there it is and what's done is done.

He addresses Doc.

COLONEL WILLITS (CONT'D)
I hope, given further time for reflection, that you can see that Arlington is a resting place that should not be refused in anger. There lie heroes. The details of the Lance Corporal's death are what they are, but make no mistake: his death was heroic. He was in a foreign and hostile land doing the decent thing. He deserves to lie beneath the sacred soil of Arlington. He would want that. I urge you to choose that for him.

DOC
Thank you. I'm gonna take my son home and bury him in New Hampshire. Not in his uniform. I'm going to bury him in his graduation suit.

COLONEL WILLITS
As you wish. Your government will fly the coffin, at no expense to you, to Portsmouth and a funeral director of your choice.

DOC
No, we're taking him with us now.
COLONEL WILLITS
With all due respect, you're cutting off your nose to spite your face.

SAL
Take a look at these faces. Think any of them care about your fuckin' opinions? With all due respect.

DOC
We can go by train.

They all kind of look at each other for a moment and arrive at a consensual "why not?"

COLONEL WILLITS
Okay, I'll make the arrangements. (punches out a number on his cell phone) Lance Corporal Washington here will be going with you. (in phone) Colonel Willits here. You are going to make a few things happen, ASAP.

SAL
Hold on, Colonel, we don't need no babysitter.

COLONEL WILLITS (in phone) Stand by. (to Sal) I wasn't implying you did. Washington's on TDY, escort duty. You don't want him, he goes right back to Baghdad.

DOC
Guys?

MUELLER
We could use the help.

SAL
Does he pull per diem?

COLONEL WILLITS
Of course.

Sal grins at Washington.
SAL
Then fall in, Washington!
(to Colonel)
But he takes his orders from us.

COLONEL WILLITS
He takes his orders from ME. But, he will accommodate you in any reasonable way you ask, because I just ordered him to. Is that clear?

SAL
Well, you're a fuckin' force of nature, ain't you? It would have been fun to run into you in the field in my younger days.

COLONEL WILLITS
You think so?

SAL
One of us woulda got fragged.

INT. HANGAR – MORNING

Everybody is back at the hangar where the casket has been taken. They see six more flag-draped coffins being wheeled into the hangar. Their casket is loaded onto one carryall while the civilians pull away in another. Sal turns back to see Washington, in the distance, standing at attention with the Colonel in his face.

COLONEL WILLITS
I don't give a fuck what they say. The Lance Corporal is ours. He's a Marine until he goes into the ground, and he remains a Marine for the period he is under the ground, plus one hundred years. I will not have three over-the-hill veterans pissing on my corps. Is that understood?

WASHINGTON
Yes, sir!

COLONEL WILLITS
You're a Marine, and your mission is to see your brother home. You're in charge, and when IN charge, TAKE charge. Understood?
WASHINGTON

Yes, sir!

COLONEL WILLITS

There's going to be a mortuary affairs detail at every step of the trip. You will protect the dignity of that dead Marine, and see that he is buried with honors. In his uniform. Not in some pussy civilian graduation suit! Understood?

WASHINGTON

Yes, sir!

COLONEL WILLITS

And don't let that Sal asshole outflank you. He's old but he's dangerous. Don't let that happen - kill him first.

WASHINGTON

Sir?

COLONEL WILLITS

That is not an order.

WASHINGTON

Yes, sir.

COLONEL WILLITS

And just because that crippled preacher reminds you of your father, don't trust him.

WASHINGTON

I never knew my father, sir.

COLONEL WILLITS

Lance Corporal, do you have a personal problem?

WASHINGTON

No, sir!

COLONEL WILLITS

Then get on it.

WASHINGTON

Yes, sir!

He jumps into the other carryall and it takes off.
Alongside the train at the Wilmington, Delaware station, the "mortuary detail" of six service members, including Washington, carry the box containing the coffin. They eventually load the container onto a cargo car. Washington stands next to it in the car and salutes, as do the other five, before walking away. Doc stands back a little as Sal chats with the attendant, JOHN REDMAN, who also saluted.

REDMAN
I was there the first time. Gulf War, they called it then.

SAL
You got back.

REDMAN
Yeah, and I'm not pissin' blood and my babies are all okay. Filthy little war. But righteous.

SAL
Oh yeah...

REDMAN
Can't let the big ones swallow up the little ones.

Redman turns to Doc and shakes his hand.

REDMAN (CONT'D)
John Redman. Don't worry - I'll look after your boy.

Sal and Doc sit next to each other, facing Mueller, who's reading his bible. Sal watches him read.

SAL
When did you become so old?

MUELLER
I think it happened over the past thirty years. Same as you.

SAL
I categorically deny it.

MUELLER
You can deny it all you want to, but that ain't gonna stop the clock or turn it back.
SAL
What do you make of that grunt, Washington?

MUELLER
What about him?

SAL
I don't know, he don't say much, him and his Baghdad boil... that's some gnarly shit.

MUELLER
What do you want to know about him?

SAL
I don't want to know nothin' about him.

MUELLER
Sounds to me like he is an individual heavy on your mind.

SAL
Nothin' heavy about it. Just wonderin'.

MUELLER
Go back and talk to him, if he's such a mystery to you.

SAL
Everything's a mystery to me... except you.

MUELLER
Please.

SAL
I think I'll go back and talk to him.

MUELLER
I'm sure he'll enjoy that.

DOC
Tell him he can come sit up here with us.

SAL
I'll do an invite.
Alone in the restroom, Sal takes a toke on a joint, waving away the smoke.

Sal enters, slowly walking over to Washington, sitting next to the coffin.

SAL
You're welcome.

WASHINGTON
For what?

SAL
Are you on a train in Baghdad? No, you're not.

Washington just kind of nods as Sal finds a seat on some boxes.

SAL (CONT'D)
TDY. Sometimes it's fun, sometimes it's a bitch.

WASHINGTON
I don't mind. He was my best friend.

SAL
You didn't hang with the brothers?

Washington looks up at him.

WASHINGTON
There's no rule. I just liked the dude. He had my back and I had his. He was honest, said what he thought. Simple, in a good way. He never had an attitude.

SAL
Sounds a lot like his father.

WASHINGTON
What about the honest part?

SAL
Doc is not a dishonest man.

WASHINGTON
What about that brig time?
SAL
That could have been any of us. He got fucked. I know things you don't.

WASHINGTON
Yes, sir.

SAL
Doc was a lot younger than us, a kid, and technically he was in the Navy. He wanted to be our friend and we took advantage of it. We'd done him a favor and now he was doing one for us. But then it all went to shit and someone had to take the fall. C'mon up with us for a while. Redman here will look after your friend.

REDMAN
No problem.

WASHINGTON
That's all right.

SAL
No, you have to get out of here for a while.

WASHINGTON
Why?

SAL
Come talk to Larry's father, say something nice.

WASHINGTON
I don't know what I can say.

SAL
You'll come up with something.

EXT./INT. PHILADELPHIA STATION - AFTERNOON
The train pulls into the station.

CONDUCTOR (V.O.)
Philadelphia... Arriving Philadelphia.
Washington sits with the others, a bit uncomfortable. They look out the window at the people on the platform, waiting for the train, carrying shopping bags. Finally -

SAL
Look at them.

DOC
Who?

SAL
Them. All the shit they bought. They don't have a clue.

MUELLER
Ordinary people, out for a day of shopping.

SAL
Fuckin' sheep is what they are.

WASHINGTON
I wouldn't mind being one of them.

SAL
Well, yeah, it's better than being shot at.

WASHINGTON
Rather be fighting them over there than in our own backyard.

SAL
Sound familiar?

MUELLER
Oh yeah...

SAL
(to Washington)
See, we fought the commies in 'Nam so we wouldn't have to fight them on the beaches of Malibu.

WASHINGTON
Guess it worked.

(a beat)
Marine's gotta be willing to die on order.

(CONTINUED)
SAL
Yep - that's always been the mission, and it's a bunch of crap.

MUELLER
There needs to be a reason. This time we were told there was an imminent danger. Arsenals of horrible weapons... a possible mushroom cloud.

SAL
Lies. It's always the same ol' shit: stay the course, if we pull out now, our heroes will have died in vain...

MUELLER
But I want to believe in our leaders, I want to believe in our country. We're a good country.

SAL
Yes we are, but when you catch your government lying to you, everything changes.

Passengers hurry on board. The doors shut and the train pulls away.

SAL (CONT'D)
So, how's the living over there?

WASHINGTON
It's all right. They got a shopping mall out near the airport. There's a new Burger King and Pizza Hut. We're livin' pretty good for a combat zone, but they sure hate us.

SAL
We gotta be the only occupying force in history that expects people to like us.

WASHINGTON
When you go out, you never know what's gonna happen. But coming from Oakland, I'm used to people dying all of a sudden.

DOC
Really?

(CONTINUED)
WASHINGTON
In high school, one of my best friends was killed by a stray bullet. My father was robbed on the street, and they put one in him. But I didn't even know who he was 'til he turned up dead.

SAL
Jesus, kid...

WASHINGTON
I'm only sayin'...

SAL
So you joined the Marines to get away from all that in Oakland?

WASHINGTON
No, sir. I wanted to strengthen my character. It was that way with Larry too. We wanted to test ourselves, to forge ourselves into the men we wanted to become.

SAL
That's what we used to think. Every generation has their war. Men make wars, and wars make men... Never gonna end.

MUELLER
Maybe we need to try something else.

DOC
When Larry was little, he played with toy soldiers. He dug trenches for them. He put them through basic training.

WASHINGTON
Mr. Shepherd, Larry was where he wanted to be. He hated it. We all hate it. But it's where we were sent, and we'll do what we have to do. We signed up for it.

DOC
He must have been embarrassed, me sitting out the last part of our war in the brig...

(CONTINUED)
WASHINGTON
No, sir, Larry wasn't embarrassed -
he loved you. You know what made
him different from most of us in
the unit?

DOC
What?

WASHINGTON
He had a happy childhood.

DOC
He said that?

WASHINGTON
Yes, sir. He had a mother and
father who loved him... and each
other. Nice house to live in. Good
food to eat. School... football...
nice friends... on and on.
(beat)
Mr. Shepherd, it was my turn to get
the Cokes. That was my bullet, not
Larry's. I should have been the
one...

Mueller puts his hand on Washington's knee, letting him know
it's okay and not to think like that.

DOC
A gray car pulled up to the
house... a Marine Lieutenant and a
Navy chaplain. Shiny brass belt
buckles. I kept looking at those
shiny buckles. "The President has
asked me to express his deep
regret..." Killed in action. In
action - nothing about shot in the
back of the head buying Cokes for
the guys. Nothing about killed
trying to get the Baghdad school
system up and running.
(looks out the window,
looks back)
The school system in New Hampshire
is in rough shape.
(beat)
Why wasn't Larry back in New
Hampshire delivering stuff to our
own schools?

Nobody can say anything.
With two glasses of beer, Sal wanders from the bar over to the table where Doc and Mueller sit. Mueller has a cup of coffee, and Doc a beer. As soon as Sal sits he downs a glass in one gulp.

MUELLER
Thirsty?

SAL
Huh?

MUELLER
That went down awfully fast.

SAL
Well I'm drinking for two, now that you've got all old and boring.

He starts to drink the other glass.

MUELLER
Might be you're an alcoholic. I am. I recognized that and owned up to it. That's the first step.

SAL
At least we're not drug addicts.

MUELLER
Not anymore, praise Jesus.

SAL
We never were.

MUELLER
We took the shit, didn't we?

SAL
We needed the shit.

MUELLER
If we needed it the corps would have issued it to us.

SAL
In a way they did.

(CONTINUED)
DOC
That shit was meant for pain. All drugs are.

SAL
So what's wrong with takin 'em then?

MUELLER
Morphine? It's kind of addictive.

SAL
So's pain.

DOC
We weren't the ones who were in pain, though.

SAL
The fuck we weren't.

MUELLER
That's a different kind of pain.

SAL
Pain is pain.

SAL (CONT'D)
Back from the war less than a day, his best buddy in a coffin, and all he's talking about is a Burger King and Pizza Hut at the shopping mall.

DOC
He just doesn't want to talk about it. We never did.

MUELLER
You asked him.
(new thought)
Next stop I need to call Ruth.

SAL
You need one of those mobile phones. You could be talking to her right now. Ten year-old kids have 'em. They've practically quit making pay phones.

EXT. TRAIN - NIGHT
45
45

As the train speeds to New York, we hear all the guys in mid-conversation. This time, however, it is revved up and boisterous.

(CONTINUED)
MUELLER (O.S.)
... So we ended up at Disneyland to resuscitate Doc, who was metaphorically drowning...

46 INT. CARGO CAR - NIGHT - MOVING

The guys sit on improvised seats in the baggage car, bull-shitting.

SAL
I got your metaphoricals - dangling! Stick to the story!

WASHINGTON
Wait a minute. They got a Disneyland in Vietnam?

Everybody laughs.

MUELLER
That's what they called all the bars and houses of ill-repute that sprung up near the base.

SAL
And it was the company fucking commander's doing! He's the one who told us to take a couple of days off and get Doc's ass over to Disneyland before he had a total meltdown.

DOC
I was having some problems...

SAL
He sure as shit was, and the biggest one was that it was time for him to get his cherry busted. How old were you, Washington, first time?

WASHINGTON
Thirteen.

SAL
I rest my fucking case! My point exactly. Doc was eighteen.

DOC
I was nineteen.

(CONTINUED)
SAL
One year worse. It was time.

DOC
No, it wasn't. The right time was when I met Mary, and we committed to each other.

MUELLER
I think thirteen is way too early, too, by the way.

SAL
Don't wreck my story. Believe me kid, he was ready. We killed some time in the bars then found the perfect little whorehouse.

WASHINGTON
That's so uncool.

SAL
What?

WASHINGTON
Paying for sex. Whores and pimps... it's disgusting.

SAL
Jesus, what the hell has happened to your basic GI?

WASHINGTON
I just think some things shouldn't to be bought and sold.

DOC
Actually, it wasn't all that bad.

The others laugh. Mueller leans a little toward Washington.

MUELLER
Jesus had not yet entered my life. I yielded to bad impulses.

SAL
Yielded to 'em? You smoked 'em, drank 'em, and fucked every impulse! Old Mueller the Mauler here would get the five dollars/five minute special - he was like a jackrabbit.

Sal makes a quick humping motion. Mueller fights a smile.

(CONTINUED)
MUELLER
Everything seems funny years later, but I don't care what anybody says, it was a dereliction of duty, pure and simple.

SAL
I got your dir'licion swinging, you old coot!

WASHINGTON
The whores I know, I don't want to be around.

DOC
But this was like going to a friend's house... and then you end up having sex with the friend. And then you pay them.

They laugh again. In spite of everything, they are having a good time... a good moment at least.

SAL
Next day, I gotta admit, I was sick of hearing about that little Asian whore. Oh, Doc was quite proud of himself. Said he had a hard-on so big he couldn't bend his fingers or blink his eyes.

Another round of big laughs.

SAL (CONT'D)
Fuck me... God, I really miss that, having a boner you can hang a towel on. My johnson used to stand up and watch me shave, now it watches me pull up my socks.

They all crack up.

MUELLER
Don't encourage him.

INT. PENN STATION - NIGHT
The train is grinding to a stop in Penn Station.

EXT. 8TH AVENUE - NIGHT
Our three walk downtown, away from the station. Sal takes a deep breath.

(CONTINUED)
SAL
New York, New fucking York.

MUELLER
Let's not wander too far.

SAL
Just far enough to find the first Blarney Stone.

Which is right across the street. Sal turns and goes inside. The others have no choice but to follow.

INT. BLARNEY STONE - NIGHT

They sit at the bar. Sal has escalated to a shot and a beer. Mueller has a ginger ale; Doc, a beer.

MUELLER
How much time do we have?

SAL
Enjoy, old man. It's the Big Apple. We got the time.

MUELLER
I have to call my wife.

SAL
See? Again, you need a fuckin' wireless telephone. You could sit right here and dial her up and you wouldn't have to get off the stool and hobble the full length of this place and have to stand on your feet next to the shitter just to say, "I miss you, dear, I hope you still love me, even though I used to fuck whores."

Though on his way, Mueller swings his cane around toward Sal's head, just missing as Sal ducks.

SAL (CONT'D)
I'm still too quick for you, floatin' like a butterfly.

Mueller continues on as Sal waves to the bartender.

SAL (CONT'D)
One more, please, before Grandpa Moses gets back.

(CONTINUED)
The bartender pours another shot. Doc takes some money out of his brown envelope.

SAL (CONT’D)
Drink up. Here’s to duty and honor.

Sal knocks back the shot.

DOC
I guess it woulda been an honor, the whole Arlington thing.

SAL
Sometimes the real honor is turning down the honor.

DOC
Wouldn't you be honored?

SAL
Don't matter to me. Drop me anywhere. You know what I put down when I have to write who to notify in case of emergency?

DOC
Your lady friend?

SAL
County coroner.

50 LATER - Mueller has rejoined the group.

SAL (CONT'D)
Request permission to have another, sir?

MUELLER
Ain't nobody gonna tell you you can't have a drink. Someday you're gonna have to tell yourself.

Sal signals the bartender to pour another.

SAL
Barkeep, I'm gonna have just one more drink... and then I'm gonna have another.

MUELLER
You have a drinking problem.

(CONTINUED)
SAL
No problem, really. I think I got it down.
(offers toast)
Born in pain, live in fear, die alone.

He chugs it.

MUELLER
Could you be any more Irish right now?

SAL
Nope, though my mom was half Italian. I got the best of both – I'm an Irish drinker and an Italian lover.

Doc has been watching the TV above the bar. It's the same footage of Saddam getting his physical exam, along with other shots, like the picture of his two sons displayed after they were killed.

DOC
I lost one, he lost two.

SAL
I guess he thought it was worth it.

DOC
It wasn't worth it. Not to me.

Now George Bush Jr. is on the TV, giving an interview.

DOC (CONT'D)
Would it be worth his twin daughters? He's got twins, right?

SAL
Who? The cheerleader?

Sal gets up and goes over to the bartender.

DOC
Who?

MUELLER
He was a cheerleader in college.

DOC
Would it be worth their lives? Even one of 'em?

(CONTINUED)
MUELLER
Good luck gettin' that answered.

EXT. BLARNEY STONE - NIGHT
The three of them come out, Sal and Doc none too steady. They go in one direction, stop to get their bearings, then go in another direction. Sal spots a phone shop across the street and attempts to cross in the middle. Mueller hooks him with his cane and pulls him back.

INT. PHONE SHOP - NIGHT
An overwhelming display of hi-tech. A CLERK is helping them.

SAL
How many minutes do I get again?

CLERK
On this plan, five hundred.

SAL
Every month?

CLERK
Will that be enough?

SAL
Enough? How can anybody talk for more than five hundred minutes a month on a fuckin' telephone?

MUELLER
We're gonna miss our train, sure as God made little green apples.

With a flourish, Sal slaps his MasterCard on the counter.

SAL
This goes through, you got a sale young lady, and I go hi-tech.

LATER - as Sal signs the papers...

CLERK
You can call other people who use this same plan and it won't count against your minutes.

SAL
Get out. Now, that's a helluva deal.

(CONTINUED)
MUELLER
What do you care? Who do you know on this plan?

SAL
You two fuckers! Get you some phones, right now.

MUELLER
Don't need one, don't want one.

DOC
I wouldn't mind having one, to tell you the truth. I've often thought about it.

SAL
Done! Barkeep, a couple phones for my partners here.

DOC
So he and I can talk anytime, even though he's in Norfolk and I'm in New Hampshire and it don't cost us nothing, right?

CLERK
That's the deal.

DOC
C'mon, Mueller. With three-way calling and all we can talk to each other at the same time.

MUELLER
Well, we're doing that right now, aren't we?

DOC
C'mon, Mueller.

MUELLER
What if I don't like it? Now I've got a contract for two years?

SAL
What if you fall down? A real possibility with your gimpy knee. And you're in a ditch, and you can't get up, and nobody can see you, and it starts to rain, and the ditch fills up with water? Looks like you're gonna drown. Farewell, old Reverend Mueller.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
Ah, but with your wireless phone you can call for help.

CLERK
And 9-1-1 calls do not count against your minutes.

Mueller looks like he is weakening.

SAL
Sold!

54
EXT. 35TH STREET - NIGHT
Sal hurries on ahead of the other two, dialing a number on his new phone. He ducks into an enclave off the street and is momentarily out of sight. Mueller's phone rings and he fumbles to answer.

MUELLER
Hello?

SAL
(disguised voice)
Is this Reverend Mueller?

MUELLER
What?

SAL
This is God. It don't count against your minutes to talk with me.

They've now caught up with Sal, who emerges with a big smile on his face.

MUELLER
Don't be burning my minutes with foolishness.

He hangs up.

DOC
Call Redman back on the train.

They once again fall into pace together as Sal dials.

SAL
(in phone)
Hey, Redman, guess who this is!
Right!
(holds phone against chest)
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
SAL (CONT'D)
He knew it was me. Listen up, John, I'm calling you on my new wireless...
(to Doc)
What's my phone number?

DOC
It's in the display.

SAL
What display? There's no number.

DOC
It comes on when you turn on the phone.

Sal turns it off and on. He takes a pen out of his pocket and writes the number on his palm.

SAL

DOC
Well, you hung up on him.

SAL
Shit.

MUELLER
You don't even know how to use that thing.

He dials again.

SAL
John Redman, sorry about that.
(beat)
What? Oh.

DOC
What's he saying?

SAL
They're on their way to Boston.

DOC
The train's left without us?

MUELLER
Well, that's just outstanding. I warned your ass.
SAL
We'll catch the next one. Redman says they'll wait for us.

INT. PENN STATION - NIGHT

The three of them seem to be wandering in different directions, getting information. Finally they come together.

SAL
Good news. We can catch the express, right to Boston.

MUELLER
When?

SAL
Seven a.m.

DOC
Oh, jeez...

Mueller gives Sal a withering look.

INT. BAR - NIGHT

They're having dinner at the bar. Sal has his phone on the bar. Mueller has put Doc between them. The bartender switches the TV to a basketball game.

SAL
Oh look, a show on black history. Is it that month already?

MUELLER
Very funny.

Back on the game, a player steals the ball, breaks away and goes airborne. He stuffs it.

SAL
Let me point out something to you. The butt-ugliest shot in basketball is the slam dunk. What does it mean, anyway? What does it say about the dude who stuffs it?

DOC
That he's pretty darn tall.
SAL
Dudes were tall before. They didn't go around hammerin' the ball through the hoop every time down the court. Ugly fuckin' shot and now they're stuck with it. Hangin' on the hoop, all that shit. Now, you take the fade-away jump shot; a man is covered, fenced away from the basket, he goes up, drops back, arcs that puppy over the defense. Beautiful. Elegant. Earl-the-Pearl skillful.

DOC
Free throws are what win or lose the game.

SAL
Well, but they interrupt the fucking action. They're boring and there are too many of them. You're not supposed to be bangin' into each other. Fouls should be shameful, but, fuck, there ain't no shame anywhere anymore.

MUELLER
Look who's talking. Have you ever been ashamed about anything? Ever in your life?

SAL
Only once.

They fall silent, then resume their meal.

SAL (CONT’D)
Boston was where he was from.

He expects someone to say something but no one does.

SAL (CONT’D)
I'm checking to see if he's got any family still there.

DOC
Why?

MUELLER
Because he's drunk.

SAL
What does that have to do with it?
MUELLER
This happen every time you drink?

SAL
Pretty much.

MUELLER
Then don't drink.

SAL
It's what I got instead of God.

MUELLER
Okay, I get it. I found God, Doc did his time, and you got drunk.

SAL
And maybe he got the best of the deal.

MUELLER
He was gonna die anyway, Sal.

SAL
But he didn't have to suffer. Not that much anyway.

DOC
Jimmy Hightower! We can't even say his name. We all feel guilty about how he suffered as he was dying, but did it ever occur to you that maybe nobody would have been shot at all, and everyone would still be alive if we'd all been doing our jobs instead of fuckin' around?

EXT. PENN STATION - NIGHT

They make their way back to Penn Station.

MUELLER
Now we only got, what, three more hours to wait.

SAL
On the town - two old jarheads and a chicken of the sea.

DOC
Only we ain't dancing.

SAL
Fuck, we're hardly hobbling.

(CONTINUED)
Even Mueller has to smile.

Suddenly we hear the odd electronic tones of Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head. Sal jumps, spins around. The music is coming from his chest.

SAL (CONT’D)
The fuck...!?

MUELLER
It’s your fancy new phone.

SAL
It does that?

DOC
Answer it, Sal. It must be John Redman.

Sal digs the phone out of his pocket.

SAL
(answering)
Hello?

FEMALE PHONE VOICE (O.S.)
(with Indian accent)
Mr. Nealon...?

SAL
Yeah.

FEMALE PHONE VOICE (O.S.)
My name is Sharon. How are you this evening, Mr. Nealon?

SAL
Not all that great, frankly.

FEMALE PHONE VOICE (O.S.)
I'm sorry to hear that. I wanted to let you know that my manager will be in your area in the next few days and would love to show you how to make a twelve to twenty percent return by investing in international market funds.

SAL
Wait a minute... I don't even know my own fuckin' number, how the hell did you get it?

(CONTINUED)
FEMALE PHONE VOICE (O.S.)
Have I called at an inconvenient time?

SAL
What do you think, bitch?

He makes like he is going to throw the phone across the street, then smiles and tucks it away.

INT. PENN STATION - EARLY MORNING
As the place comes to life, our three pull their aching bones off the benches and try to wake up.

INT. TRAIN #2 - MORNING - MOVING
On the way to Boston, the three of them are half-asleep. Doc stares out of the window.

DOC
What were their names?

SAL
Who?

DOC
His sons. Saddam's. The ones they shot up and put on display like it was the old Wild West.

SAL
Fuck, Doc, it's too early in the day.

DOC
I was just thinking.

SAL
I don't know. Weird-ass A-rab names. Hugo and Queasy, like that.

MUELLER
They were named Uday and Qusay. Fairly simple names.

SAL
Sure, if you're used to Leteesha and Kuamme.

MUELLER
You're a racist as well as an alcoholic.

(CONTINUED)
SAL
You forgot sexist. Fair to
everybody. What did you name your
kids?

MUELLER
Otis and Sally.

SAL
Now that's nice. A kid should
always be able to spell his own
name. Named her after me, didn't
you? Sally.

MUELLER
Say what?

SAL
After old Sal. I ever have a kid
I'll name him after you, Dick.
First he'll be little Dick, then
he'll grow up to be big Dick.

DOC
What if it was a girl?

MUELLER
Look at him, Doc. Even if he had
any left swimming in him, what
woman of childbearing age is gonna
spread her legs for him?

SAL
Your Sally, if you'll make the
introductions.

Sal once again jumps out of range of Mueller's cane.

MUELLER
I swear I'm gonna brain you, I
don't care if there's already a
plate in your head. I'll put
another one 'em there.

SAL
Seriously though, padre, can I ask
you a personal question?

MUELLER
No.

SAL
How come you married a black woman?

(CONTINUED)
MUELLER
What?!

SAL
Don't you tell me you never had a white woman. It was the 70s.

MUELLER
As I recall, white dudes finally admitted having an eye for black women.

SAL
Oh, yeah, I'm gaga for the sisters myself. And they dig me too. Well, a couple of 'em did... for a time... then I'd say somethin' stupid.

MUELLER
No, you? Say something stupid to a black person?

SAL
'Course I had a couple bouts of yellow fever too... and always did have a sweet tooth for the Latin babes. I got nothin' against white women, mind you. They're okay, some of 'em. But we were talkin' about you marrying a black woman.

MUELLER
First of all, who I married is none of your business.

SAL
That's why I'm being so polite about it.

MUELLER
I'll tell you why. God told me to.

SAL
Whoa. To marry a black girl?

MUELLER
No, to marry Ruth.

SAL
He told you that?

MUELLER
He did.

(CONTINUED)
SAL
Like He told the Reverend Pat Robertson who was gonna win the election?

MUELLER
Pat Robertson is a complete phony.

SAL
How come God never talks to me?

MUELLER
Because you can't listen. And he doesn't talk to Pat Robertson either.

SAL
But He does talk to you?

MUELLER
I didn't say that. I said He told me to marry Ruth and be a decent man and to preach the word.

SAL
So he does speak to you.

MUELLER
He didn't talk to me in words. He touched my heart.

DOC
Maybe it was Ruth who touched your heart.

MUELLER
Oh, it was. It was God through Ruth. I was down and out, and I didn't care about nothing. A recovering alcoholic with shot up legs. Then one day I found Jesus...

SAL
Where was that, bump into him on the street?

MUELLER
In my heart, the only place you can find Him. I went down there like it was a scary cave, which in a way it was, a dark, unexplored place. (MORE)
MUELLER (CONT'D)
Went down afraid and alone, came
back up fearless and with Jesus at
my side. Next Sunday I took myself
to church...

SAL
Hallelujah! And there was Ruth.

MUELLER
Right there, and everything came
together for me.

DOC
That's a beautiful story.

SAL
Sorry the fuck I asked.
(beat)
If God wants to keep holdin' out on
me, I get it. But would it kill
Him to pat me on the shoulder or
shake my hand like a man? And if
he'd also like to deliver a nice
black girl with a great ass, so
much the better.

60
EXT. BOSTON STATION - DAY

Walking just outside the Boston train station, Sal is in
front of the other two, talking on his cell phone.

DOC
What's he up to?

MUELLER
Look at him wheeling and dealing...
Mr. Cellular Phone.

Sal hears them talking about him and turns toward them, still
on the phone.

SAL
(to Doc and Mueller)
We've got an errand to run.

DOC
We got enough time?

SAL
Sure.

(CONTINUED)
MUELLER
(simultaneous)
No.

SAL
I'm on with Redman. He and
Washington just got to New
Hampshire. We'll see 'em there.
(to Redman)
We'll see you there.

He closes his phone.

A60 INT. DOVER, NH STATION - DAY
Redman closes his phone and walks back over to the baggage
car, where Washington and 5 other service members are
starting to carry the box containing the coffin. Redman
salutes as they walk away.

We follow the mortuary affairs detail through the
baggage/storage area of the train station and down an
elevator to the loading dock where a hearse, and the funeral
director LELAND await.

61 INT. TAXI - DAY - MOVING
The taxi is driven by a turbaned driver.

MUELLER
She's been living with it all these
years. What good's it gonna do her?

SAL
We're long overdue, the way I
figure. She ought to know the truth
and we ought to be men enough to
say it.

MUELLER
How'd you find her?

SAL
I got O'Toole to call his
granddaughter and have her look it
up for us on the world wide web.

DOC
What can we possibly say to her?

SAL
The truth. If it'd a been me, I'd
want the other guys to go see my
family.

(CONTINUED)
MUELLER
Where is your family?

SAL
They're all dead. I think I have a cousin left, in Scranton.

The cab pulls up to a small house. They look at the place but say nothing.

EXT. HIGHTOWER HOUSE - DAY

At the door: Mueller knocks with his cane. They wait. He knocks again.

DOC
Maybe nobody lives here anymore, maybe.

The door opens, revealing a woman in her 80s. She is wary.

MRS. HIGHTOWER
Yes?

None of them seems able to speak.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Some time later, they're all sitting around in the living room. Mrs. Hightower directs them through a series of framed pictures and Christmas card photos that they pass around.

MRS. HIGHTOWER
This was the last picture we ever got from Jimmy. And this is Jimmy's little girl all grown up.

DOC
So, how old was she when he died?

MRS. HIGHTOWER
Four months old. Her mom eventually remarried and they moved to San Diego. Here's my great-grandkids.

MUELLER
Look at that. He'd be a grandfather.

MRS. HIGHTOWER
I've never met them in person, but they call every now and then. So you three were with my Jimmy?

(CONTINUED)
The old woman stares at him blankly.

SAL
Yes ma'am. We'd already fought us a long year, and most of us were still breathing. But that extension... that four more months they added on... some of us couldn't handle it, and, I think we didn't all...

MRS. HIGHTOWER
What was it all for?

SAL
They said they knew, and we believed them. But now... we just came here to tell you what happened.

MRS. HIGHTOWER
Are you some of the men he saved?

Sal is just frozen. Doc and Mueller look at him wondering how he's going to respond.

MRS. HIGHTOWER (CONT'D)
Thry told me he saved three or four of his buddies, before...

SAL
Yes ma'am. We are.

MUELLER
He was a great guy, Jimmy.

DOC
Yeah, we've never forgotten him.

MUELLER
That's why we're here, ma'am. We owe him.

SAL
We just wanted to come by and pay our respects.

MUELLER
Let you know he's still in our hearts.

MRS. HIGHTOWER
That is so sweet of you boys. I can't thank you enough.
EXT. HIGHTOWER HOUSE - DAY

The door opens as they exit. Sal gets the last hug in.

SAL
Take care of yourself.

MRS. HIGHTOWER
This makes my week. Please come back anytime.

DOC
Thank you, ma'am.

MUELLER
Bless you, Mrs. Hightower.

MRS. HIGHTOWER
You boys be careful out there.

SAL
We will.

INT. TRAIN #3 - LATE AFTERNOON - MOVING

They sit in silence, not saying much. Even Sal stares out the window at the sunset.

EXT. DOVER, NH STATION - NIGHT

Washington waits for them, next to a hearse and Leland.

INT. FUNERAL HOME LIMO - NIGHT - MOVING

Washington sits next to Leland. In the back seat are Sal, Doc and Mueller. Outside the window are shells of abandoned plants and factories, lying idle. Sal just stares out the window.

SAL
Looks like things used to get made here.

LELAND
Used to.

SAL
Even morticians better watch out - they might be outsourcing undertakin' next.
LELAND
Never happen - American funeral directors are the best in the world.

Sal mutters a monologue... not that anyone is much listening at this point.

SAL
So were the American factories. We could make anything, quality stuff. That's how we won two world wars. Don't be surprised if somebody figures out that it's cheaper to ship a body to Mexico and back than to do it up here. They'll ship it to China or India once they figure out it'll save 'em a buck. Don't matter how good you are.

(new mumbly thought)
Just a matter of time till they start outsourcing soldiering. Hell, get a bunch of starving young people from all over the world, put 'em in a uniform and tell 'em to try to stay alive. When their tour is over we ship 'em back to where they came from... no VA hospitals, or pensions. You lost an arm? You got PTSD? Tough shit, we're flushing you down...

68  EXT. DOC'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The limo pulls into the driveway. As the others get out, Sal quickly goes to the nearest bush in the yard to pee.

MUELLER
If you had any more manners, you'd be a dog.

Sal continues peeing, emphasizing his relief.

SAL
Now I'm seeing God.

69  INT. DOC'S HOUSE - NIGHT

In the small, dark den, embers glow in the fireplace. Washington lies awake on the sofa.
Mueller lies awake. He can't help but notice the pictures of Doc and his wife, Larry Jr, etc. Actually, it feels like Mary still lives there. It seems Doc's barely touched anything since last January.

INT. LARRY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Sal is laying on a trundle bed, pulled out from under Larry's bed, where Doc rests. The room is lit by moonlight. Now an as-he-left-it shrine to Larry, they're surrounded by the various photos of family and friends, sports mementoes, music posters, etc.

SAL
You gonna want to stay on here, alone?

DOC
I don't know - haven't thought much about it.

SAL
Portsmouth? The brig right there. You might want to try another place. A fresh start.

DOC
But Larry would be here. Mary, too.

SAL
You could always come visit. You got close friends here?

DOC
Not too many. Not too close.

His voice trails, he's falling asleep. Sal jabs him in the ribs.

DOC (CONT'D)
What?

SAL
Move to Norfolk. You could work in my bar.

DOC
I never worked in a bar before.

SAL
Trust me - it ain't that hard.

(CONTINUED)
DOC
Your place don't seem all that busy.

SAL
That's my fault. I let it go. It needs new blood. We could get the grill part going again. I need a partner.

DOC
A partner?

SAL
Yeah. The bar'd be half yours, and when I bite it, it'll be all yours.

DOC
Sal... you don't owe me nothing.

SAL
This ain't paying off no debt. I really do need a partner, and I got nobody to leave the place to. You could stay with me for a while, but then you'd have to find your own place, 'cause I like to pursue the ladies and, frankly, you'd cramp my style.

SAL (CONT'D)
You thinkin' about it?

DOC
I am. I'm picturing it. It's kinda funny.

SAL
Might be time for another BCD in your life.

Doc smiles.

DOC
Better career decision...

SAL
Yeah, and if nothin' else, it might be fun. What's wrong with that?
Sal, Mueller and Washington are in the kitchen having coffee. Sal punches some numbers in his cell phone, waits for an answer.

MUELLER
You purely love that thing, don't you?

SAL
I can't get that fucker O'Toole to answer. The place could be burned down for all I know.

He puts the phone away. Doc comes in with a suit on a hangar.

DOC
Larry's graduation suit.

WASHINGTON
Looks a little small.

DOC
You think?

WASHINGTON
Yes, sir. Larry bulked up. That's gonna be way too tight on him.

DOC
I guess I could go down to Penny's and buy him something new.

WASHINGTON
We still got his dress blues.

MUELLER
Remember how we used to call the dress blues the tuxedo? By law you could go to any formal function wearing that uniform.

SAL
Not that we ever got invited to one... or would have gone if we did.

MUELLER
Still, it was good to know you were always dressed for any occasion.
SAL
No one ever forgets the first time you put it on and looked at yourself in the mirror — I'm in the U.S. Marine Corps, and I look pretty fuckin' good.

MUELLER
I do remember that feeling.

WASHINGTON
Yes, sir. I'm glad to know you never forget it.

MUELLER
Larry must have looked sharp.

DOC
He did. He was proud as a peacock in that uniform.

WASHINGTON
I know that for a fact.

SAL
Pride is the thing.
(to Mueller)
It's no sin.

MUELLER
No, of course not. Not that kind.

DOC
I could bury him in his dress uniform, even if.

SAL
Yeah. It means you did something. You served. Fuck what the politicians did, you served. You didn't weasel out of it. You didn't think it was somebody else's job. You took it on, man, and you looked sharp doing it.

DOC
I'm gonna. I'm gonna bury him in his uniform.

MUELLER
Good.

WASHINGTON
Never regret it, sir.
SAL
Fuckin' A.

EXT. FUNERAL HOME - MORNING
Establishing shot.

INT. FUNERAL HOME - MORNING
Doc is in the background, talking to Leland about various details. Washington, forever on duty, stands next to the coffin. In the foyer, Sal and Mueller sit on opposing benches, waiting for Doc. Sal is studying Mueller, looking at him over his folded arms.

MUELLER
Why're you looking at me like that?

SAL
I'm sizin' you up. I'm gonna buy you a new suit of clothes.

MUELLER
Say what?

SAL
I'm gonna dress you up for the occasion.

MUELLER
Why, may I ask?

SAL
Because I love you.

MUELLER
I don't need a new suit of clothes. It's you needs some grooming.

SAL
Neither of us is properly dressed. But we will be, you watch.

MUELLER
The things that come into your head. And out of your mouth.

SAL
The loving you thing rattled you, didn't it, old man?

MUELLER
It's very disturbing.
INT. LARRY'S ROOM - DAY

In close-ups: The ritual of a Marine putting on his uniform. Then we see it is Sal... and Mueller... putting on uniforms complete with the proper insignias.

SAL
Did I deliver or did I deliver?

MUELLER
The dude gave you these for nothing?

SAL

Now they each don the hats, positioning them just right. Looking good. Doc comes inside and is stopped cold. He looks at them, speechless. A flood of memories engulfs them all.

EXT. GRAVESIDE - DAY

Mueller's cane leans against an empty folding chair. Doc sits at the next chair. Friends and classmates of Larry have gathered behind him. Next to the graveside is the headstone of Doc's wife. Mueller stands at the head of the grave. Sal at the foot, in their dress uniforms. On the other side, Washington stands at attention as the minister backs away. They salute. Ceremonially, Sal and Mueller fold the flag into twelve tight triangular folds. Mueller takes Washington's arm and Sal carries the flag over to Doc. Sal then holds out the flag to Doc, whose eyes are red, his lower lip is quivering.

SAL
Doc, I don't know how grateful the nation is... or how much the President might regret your loss and all that... but here it is, your country's flag.

MUELLER
Put it somewhere and let it remind you of what your son must have felt in his heart.

Doc nods.

INT. DOC'S HOUSE - DAY

The post-funeral meal. A buffet is set up. The crowd of mostly young people mills about and speaks in soft tones. Sal, still in uniform, has a young pretty YOUNG WOMAN cornered.

(CONTINUED)
SAL
Well... technically speaking I'm no longer on active duty... but if I was, well, look at me. Could you resist all this?

GIRL
It'd be hard.

INT. LAUNDRY ROOM - DAY
78 Washington pulls down a pair of skivvies drying on a line in the shower. He folds them and puts them into his AWOL bag. The corner of an envelope is visible in a zippered pocket of the bag. He takes it out. Guilt-stricken. He sits on the toilet, looking at the sealed envelope.

EXT. BACK PORCH - DAY

WASHINGTON
Everybody wrote one, sir. I gave mine to Larry, he gave his to me.

DOC
What does it say?

WASHINGTON
I don't know, sir.

DOC
What did yours say?

WASHINGTON
(beat)
I forget.

They look at each other. Washington finally lowers his head.

INT. HOUSE - DAY
80 Mueller approaches Sal and the girl.

MUELLER
You have to come with me.

SAL
I'm in the middle of something, padre.

GIRL
Bye, Sarge, nice talking to you.
She goes. He watches her longingly as she blends into the group. He sighs.

**SAL**
Remember how it used to be?

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**EXT. BACK PORCH - DAY**

Doc is sitting on his back porch. Mueller sits across from him while Sal is still standing.

**SAL**
You gotta open it, Doc.

**MUELLER**
He wanted you to have it, so...

Doc looks from one to the other. He opens the envelope, unfolds the letter.

As Doc reads silently, we soon see a series of images and we hear his son Larry's voice. On a shelf in the living room we pan through a series of photos on display: Larry Junior as a kid, and in his graduation suit. Mary, a smiling Larry and Larry Junior, a happy family portrait. The folded flag from the funeral.

**LARRY{V.O.}**
Dear Dad. If you are reading this, then you've been notified. I was always prepared to sacrifice my life for my country. You have to be ready to die defending what you love. I need you to understand that I am honored to die in this way. Don't feel bad that my life was so short. It was a good life. I know you never wanted me to join the Marines, but you supported me even so. I had the greatest father and I love you. Now I am with mom. We will both watch over you. Dad, I want you to bury me in my uniform, next to Mom. Your loving son, Larry.

Sal is now sitting next to Mueller. Doc looks up at them, saying nothing.

**FADE OUT.**