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Home Before Morning: A Teleplay

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HOME BEFORE MORNING:

A TELEPLAY

BY

SUSAN E. APSHAGA

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

IN

ENGLISH

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

1988

MASTER OF ARTS THESIS

OF

SUSAN E. APSHAGA

APPROVED:

Thesis Committee

Major Professor

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DEAN OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

1988

ABSTRACT

In choosing to adapt a book for television, I am faced with a transition process complicated by necessary consideration of the visual/aural dimension. I must analyze the story to be adapted and then reconstruct, on the basis of that analysis, the essence of that story in a new, more dramatic medium with a completely different vocabulary and set of techniques. The book, then, is the raw material from which I must synthesize a flow of narration true to the spirit of the original, yet distinct from it in form, emphasis and detail. In attempting such a synthesis, I found that three readings of the text were necessary for me to gain sufficient understanding of Van, the central character, and her relationship to the world around her so that I could then manipulate her circumstances to fit the screenplay format I had laid out. This entailed a compression of time, shifts in chronology, elimination of irrelevant subplots, and enhancement of those details which contributed to my overall scheme. The result was so large in scope that, for the sake of coherence and manageability, I chose to limit the script to the Vietnam portion of the story. As a result I was able, within this

somewhat more well-defined range, to revise more quickly and purposefully. One difficulty I encountered while transferring Home Before Morning from the traditional prose text to the visually-oriented screenplay format involved my initial reluctance to deviate from the literal confines of the originating material. The adaptor, while retaining a certain respect for the written work, must, for practical and creative considerations, be able to approach this work dispassionately. A second difficulty lay in the actual manipulation of the textual material in order that a dramatic climax be attained in true cinematic fashion. The screenwriter must be ever mindful of his/her theme so that the choices made are for the betterment of this theme. And, since the essence of motion pictures is the symbiotic relationship between sight and sound, it is of the utmost importance to think of cinematic narration in precisely those terms.

FADE IN

INT. QUONSET HUT--NIGHT

We HEAR soft strains of REASON TO BELIEVE by Tim Hardin.

CLOSE SHOT of a framed PHOTOGRAPH of a smiling, innocent-looking young WOMAN in her early twenties, dressed in formal Army attire, saluting. It stands on a shelf, a soft light flickering on its glossy surface.

ROLL CREDITS

SLOW PAN (L to R) of the SHELF: a burning candle; some books (e.e. cummings, a Bible, medical texts, an Army manual); some record albums (Joni Mitchell, Cat Stevens, Tim Hardin); a nearly-empty bottle of Scotch; two joints, one partially smoked; a small, rhinestone American flag pin.

CLOSE SHOT of the PIN.

CLOSE SHOT of the WOMAN of the photograph, VAN, asleep. Her face is also played upon by the candlelight. It is an old face, no longer innocent, and in direct contrast to the photograph.

NEW ANGLE reveals that she is in an Army bunk. By her head is a make-shift nightstand (up-ended footlocker) with a small record player on it. An album spins on the turntable. Well-worn combat boots are also evident.

We HEAR a DOOR OPEN. Someone ENTERS the room.

ANOTHER ANGLE of Van asleep as CORETTA, a Black WOMAN in her late twenties, dressed in wrinkled, faded fatigues, leans close over Van's face.

CORETTA

Van. Van.

She gently shakes Van's shoulder.

CORETTA--CONT'D

Van, come on. They need you
in O.R. stat.

Van slowly wakes, groggy.

VAN

Okay, okay.

NEW ANGLE as Van throws off her blanket and swings her feet to the floor.

VAN--CONT'D

Shit.

CLOSE ANGLE of the RECORD PLAYER with the album still spinning.

We HEAR someone LEAVE, a DOOR CLOSING. The MUSIC FADES OUT.

END CREDITS

INSERT SUBTITLE: Pleiku, Vietnam June 1970

CUT TO:

EXT. JUNGLE COMPOUND--NIGHT

ANGLE ON Van, now dressed in old fatigues and green t-shirt, as she LEAVES her quarters and steps out into the still night.

ANOTHER ANGLE as she walks toward the camera, yawning, and out of frame right.

Over this, we HEAR the VOICE of John F. Kennedy.

J.F.K.
(V.O.)

The world is very different now.
For man holds in his mortal hands
the power to abolish all forms of
human life.

NEW ANGLE as Van hurries through the camp, a collection of old wooden buildings and quonset huts.

Over this, the VOICE-OVER continues.

J.F.K.--CONT'D
(V.O.)

And yet the same revolutionary
beliefs for which our forebears
fought are still at issue around
the globe.

NEW ANGLE (LONG SHOT) as Van rounds a corner of a building. In the f.g. is a sign--71st Evacuation Hospital.

The VOICE-OVER continues.

J.F.K.--CONT'D
(V.O.)

The belief that the rights of man
come not from the generosity of the
state, but from the hand of God.
Let every nation, whether it wish us
well or ill--

NEW ANGLE as Van runs up the steps of a large
quonset hut and ENTERS.

HOLD on this scene as the bright lights from the
windows spill out into the darkness of the camp.

The VOICE-OVER continues.

J.F.K.--CONT'D
(V.O.)

That we shall pay any price, bear
any burden, meet any hardship, support
any friend, or oppose any foe in
order to assure the survival and
success of liberty.

CUT TO:

INT. QUONSET HUT--CORRIDOR

It is obvious that this is a hospital building, with
TECHNICIANS, NURSES and various MEDICAL PERSONNEL
rushing here and there with gurneys, charts and the
like.

ANGLE ON Van as she walks with determination through
the hall.

The VOICE-OVER continues.

J.F.K.--CONT'D
(V.O.)

To those people in the huts and
villages of half the globe struggling
to break the bonds of mass misery, we
pledge out best efforts to help them
help themselves, for whatever period
is required--

NEW ANGLE as Van ENTERS a scrub room, a small
cluttered area with shelves of green scrub clothes
and various operating room supplies, sinks and
clothes hampers. She grabs a scrub dress and begins
to change into it.

The VOICE-OVER continues.

J.F.K.--CONT'D
(V.O.)

Not because the communists are doing it, not because we seek their votes, but because it is right.

ANOTHER ANGLE as Van finishes dressing. An older NURSE, SWANSON, similarly dressed but covered in blood, LOOKS IN.

SWANSON

There's a bad one in the neuro room. I need you to pump blood.

Van nods, and Swanson DISAPPEARS, closing the door.

NEW ANGLE as Van, now dressed in clean scrubs, walks along a corridor lined with gurneys. Wounded SOLDIERS occupy most of them, while OTHERS mill around in various states of injury. DOCTORS and NURSES rush around as before.

The VOICE-OVER continues.

J.F.K.--CONT'D
(V.O.)

In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility; I welcome it.

ANOTHER ANGLE of this CORRIDOR, emphasizing the WOUNDED, as Van walks along.

The VOICE-OVER continues.

J.F.K.--CONT'D
(V.O.)

I do not believe that any of us would exchange places with any other people or any other generation. The energy, the faith, and the devotion which we bring to this endeavor--

NEW ANGLE as Van rounds a corner and heads for a set of large double doors leading into an operating room.

The VOICE-OVER continues.

J.F.K.--CONT'D
(V.O.)

Will light our country and all who serve it. And the glow from that fire can truly light the world.

Van pushes the doors open and walks through.

ANGLE ON Van, pulling on her mask, as she ENTERS a large operating room and stops abruptly.

ANOTHER ANGLE (CLOSE SHOT) of her FACE as she takes a deep breath.

The VOICE-OVER continues.

J.F.K.--CONT'D

(V.O.)

And so, my fellow Americans--

POV of several DOCTORS and CORPSMEN feverishly transferring a bleeding SOLDIER from a gurney to the operating table. His head is a mass of blood-soaked bandages, with blood streaming from the ripped up flesh that was his jaw. Three I.V. lines run to him from half-empty blood bags. We are struck by the graphic visuals of this scene.

The VOICE-OVER continues.

J.F.K.--CONT'D

(V.O.)

Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.

NEW ANGLE, favoring JIM, the DOCTOR supporting the soldier's head, who kicks the gurney away, and it BANGS against a wall. From this point on in the sequence, BACKGROUND NOISE pertinent to the situation is HEARD throughout.

ANGLE ON Van, startled.

ANGLE ON Jim, who is SCREAMING now.

JIM

The son-of-a-bitch is drowning in blood here. Somebody help me get a fucking airway in him. Van!

ANGLE ON Van as she begins to move forward now, but slips on the bloody floor. She then rushes to the cabinet area, pulls out an instrument package, grabs a mayo stand and rolls it quickly to the table.

CLOSE SHOT of her HANDS as they rip open the packet and hurriedly arrange the instruments on the tray.

Over this, we HEAR the soldier GURGLE.

CLOSE SHOT of Jim's tense FACE.

JIM

Don't you dare die, you Motherfucker!

CLOSE SHOT of Van's equally tense FACE.

JIM

(O.S.)

Gimme a knife, Van.

CLOSE SHOT of Van's HAND putting a scalpel into Jim's HAND.

NEW ANGLE of Van and Jim as they huddle over the soldier's head, scalpel to his throat. Blood spurts up at them, and Jim quickly shoves his hand over the incision.

JIM

Trach tube.

ANOTHER ANGLE as Van and Jim work feverishly. The soldier COUGHS, gagging.

JIM--CONT'D

Suction.

ANGLE ON a HAND pushing the suction machine to the table.

ANGLE ON Jim as he applies the tubing to the soldier's throat. This FULL SHOT is taken as though from the POV of the soldier's feet.

ANOTHER ANGLE of Jim as he looks from the soldier to the monitor back to the soldier.

JIM--CONT'D

Come on, man. Breathe!

We HEAR the soldier GASP.

JIM--CONT'D

That's it. Come on!

ANGLE ON Van and Jim who look at one another with relief.

NEW ANGLE as Van connects an oxygen line to the trach line, while Jim pumps an airbag.

NEW ANGLE as MACK, a SURGEON, JOINS them at the table.

ANOTHER ANGLE as Mack clamps off the bleeding jaw. Another NURSE steps in to assist him as Van moves off to take down an empty blood bag.

ANGLE ON Jim who monitors the soldier's vital signs.

JIM
No blood pressure, Van. Get another I.V. into him. And keep that blood pumping!

CLOSE SHOT of Van's HANDS inserting an I.V. needle into the soldier's arm.

CLOSE SHOT of Mack who looks up from his work.

MACK
Get a crash cart in case he arrests.

ANGLE ON Van crossing the room.

JIM
(O.S.)
More towels.

ANOTHER ANGLE as Van, arms laden with clean towels and pushing a crash cart, is bumped by a NEUROSURGEON who has just ENTERED, sending the towels onto the bloody floor. He glances at Van briefly, without a word, and goes to the operating table.

ANGLE ON Van stooping to pick up the towels, angry.

ANGLE ON the neurosurgeon who looks at the soldier on the table, disgusted.

POV of the bloody SOLDIER with all sorts of tubes, clamps and bandages all over him. It is a pathetic sight.

NEUROSURGEON
(O.S.)
Who the fuck woke me up for this gork?

ANGLE ON the neurosurgeon, Mack and Jim.

MACK
The--uh--brain doesn't look too damaged, sir.

NEUROSURGEON
You're wasting your time.

MACK

We can fix him. I...think we should try.

NEUROSURGEON

Bullshit. He's going to die and there isn't a Goddamned thing you can do about it.

The neurosurgeon turns on his heel and heads for the door.

MACK

We're gonna need your help as soon as we stop the bleeding.

ANOTHER ANGLE as the neurosurgeon turns back to Mack.

NEUROSURGEON

You call me when you're ready, and not a minute before.

He EXITS. Van, with clean towels and the cart, shrugs as she approaches the table.

ANGLE ON Mack who shakes his head and looks at the clock on the wall.

POV of the CLOCK at 12:30.

WIDE ANGLE of the ROOM as Mack, Jim, Van and the other nurse continue their work. Smoke rises from the soldier's face as it is cauterized.

ANOTHER ANGLE of the same, though they all show signs of fatigue.

ANGLE ON Van carrying an I.V. bottle. She slips on some blood and falls against the soldier's pants pocket. A PHOTOGRAPH falls from it onto the floor. She stoops to pick it up.

CLOSE SHOT of the PHOTO in her hands. It shows a tall blond BOY in his late teens, wearing a tuxedo and nervous smile. On his arm is a smiling GIRL, about the same age, in a gown and corsage. The photo is turned over to reveal HANDWRITING: Gene and Katie, May 1968. The photo is turned back to the picture side and a drop of blood drips onto the boy's face.

CLOSE SHOT of Van who wipes the photo on her scrub dress and looks at the table.

POV of the SOLDIER, GENE, and Mack who looks up at Van shaking his head sadly.

REVERSE ANGLE of Van who closes her eyes, jaw set.

NEW ANGLE as Gene, his head swathed in clean, white bandages, is wheeled from the room on a gurney.

ANOTHER ANGLE as Van, preoccupied, picks up bloody linen and tosses it into a hamper. In the b.g. a CORPSMAN mops the floor. Van then pulls the photo from her pocket, looks at it, and EXITS.

CUT TO:

INT. POST-OP--NIGHT

There are beds lining both walls of this crowded room. All but one or two are occupied with WOUNDED. Van ENTERS, dressed now in her fatigues, and looks around. She sees Gene, goes to his bed, pulls up a chair and sits next to his bed. Over her right shoulder, taped to the wall, is a frayed, homemade sign. On it is a paragraph written neatly in black magic marker.

ANOTHER ANGLE as she takes Gene's hand. Blood has already begun to seep through the new bandages which cover his entire head.

VAN

Gene? Gene? Are you in any pain?
Gene? Can you hear me?

She looks down at their clasped hands.

POV (CLOSE) of their HANDS as his weakly squeezes hers.

CLOSE SHOT of Van.

VAN

Do you want something for the pain?

CLOSE SHOT of their HANDS, again his hand squeezing hers.

VAN--CONT'D
(O.S.)

Coretta?

ANGLE ON Coretta, the Black NURSE from the opening sequence, who is checking the chart of another PATIENT across the room.

CORETTA

Mmm?

VAN
(O.S.)

I need 10 milligrams of morphine and
an I.V. over here.

At this, Coretta looks up from the chart and looks
sharply at the camera. She is weary.

CORETTA

Van, you know we're running low--

POV of Van's grim, exhausted FACE.

ANOTHER ANGLE as Van turns to Gene as the blood from
his bandages begins to seep into the pillow beneath
his head.

CLOSE ANGLE of the blood-soaked pillow.

CLOSE ANGLE of Coretta, compassion in her tired
eyes.

CORETTA--CONT'D

Aw, the hell with it.

ANGLE ON the full, bright MOON in the dark sky as
seen through the post-op window. PAN R to L
following the light as it shines across the beds of
two sleeping PATIENTS and comes to rest it fullest
on Van, dozing in the chair, and Gene, who has now
got an I.V. in his arm. Their hands are still
clasped. HOLD. The POSTER on the wall is also
evident in the light, now like a gentle spotlight.

Over this, we HEAR soft strains of HOW CAN WE HOLD
ON TO A DREAM by Tim Hardin in the b.g.

ZOOM IN on the POSTER until readable and HOLD.

POSTER TEXT

Oh, God,
Help me see past the bottles,
See past the tubes,
See past the machines,
That I might see into their eyes,
See into their minds,
See into their hearts,
And bring them some small part of
my healthy self,
That they will still believe
Life is worth the living,
Life is worth the fight.

We HEAR the faint SOUNDS of a hospital in the b.g.
as the MUSIC FADES OUT.

FOCUS OUT SLOWLY

We HEAR the faint SOUNDS of MUSIC.

FOCUS IN SLOWLY

CLOSE ANGLE of a SIGN--No gambling, cussing or
spitting.

The MUSIC is louder and now recognizable: RUBY by
Kenny Rodgers and the First Edition.

INSERT SUBTITLE: El Paso, Texas June 1969

NEW ANGLE reveals a typical western RESTAURANT/BAR,
ranch-style decor, populated by MEN and WOMEN
dressed casually in jeans, boots and cowboy hats.
Over the bar is a PICTURE of Lyndon Johnson. Next
to this, a small American FLAG.

CLOSE ANGLE of the FLAG.

CLOSE ANGLE of a rhinestone American flag PIN on the
lapel of a green suit.

ZOOM OUT to reveal Van, upon whose lapel the pin is
fastened, and BARBARA, a WOMAN of about the same
age, sitting at a table with drinks and a plate of
dip and chips between them. They are LAUGHING and
having a good time. Both are fresh and young-looking,
dressed in equally fresh, crisp Army uniforms.

BARBARA

I've always wanted to see the
Himalayas.

VAN

I want to see Tripoli.

BARBARA

And Pakistan.

VAN

And the polar icecaps.

BARBARA

The Amazon.

Van raises her glass in a toast.

VAN

To Johnny Weissmuller's loincloth.

They CLINK glasses and drain their drinks.

BARBARA

Van, you ever wonder if we're doing the right thing? I mean about Vietnam. Maybe we oughta get married and retire. Sit home all day, eat candy, and watch the soaps.

VAN

Chocolate-covered cherries and The Edge of Night.

BARBARA

No, it has to be something real gooey, like milk chocolate caramels.

VAN

Mmm.

BARBARA

And we'll bake cakes for the PTA.

VAN

And become class mothers so we can go on all the trips with the little buggers.

BARBARA

And have husbands who look like Omar Sharif.

VAN

No way, Barb. Tab Hunter.

BARBARA

God, you've got no taste in men.

Van holds her left hand up to her cheek coyly, revealing a sparkling diamond RING.

VAN

I beg your pardon. What about J.J.?

BARBARA

You mean that pretty little thing from Jersey who made a real women out of you?

Van throws a chip at her.

BARBARA--CONT'D

Okay, okay. So maybe he's the exception.

VAN

Thanks a lot.

BARBARA

He did give you that rock after all. At least his intentions are honorable.

A WAITRESS comes to the table.

WAITRESS

Another round, ladies?

Van looks at Barbara.

BARBARA

What the hell. You only live once.

The waitress leaves. Barbara stares thoughtfully into the dip, playing with a chip.

BARBARA--CONT'D

J.J. was in Vietnam, right?

VAN

Yup.

BARBARA

What did he do there?

VAN

Well, he said he sweated all the time, took a lot of crap from people, and dreamed about the kind of car he'd buy when he got back.

BARBARA

But did he ever say what it was like?

VAN

Yeah, he said it sucked.

BARBARA

Typical response. And what did he say when you told him you were going?

VAN

He told me not to.

BARBARA

Why not?

VAN

Well--

TOGETHER

Because it sucks.

BARBARA

Man of profound thoughts.

VAN

Well, in a couple of days we'll get to see for ourselves, won't we?

BARBARA

I wish we were going over together.

VAN

I know. Me too. But we'll see each other. Vietnam's not exactly mainland China.

BARBARA

I guess.

VAN

Anyway, tonight's supposed to be a celebration, right?

BARBARA

Right.

VAN

So close your eyes.

BARBARA

What're you up to?

VAN

Just do as you're told, lieutenant.

Barbara closes her eyes, and Van puts a candle in the dip, lighting it. She then puts a bottle of Jim Beam, wrapped in a bow, next to it. There is an envelope attached.

VAN--CONT'D

Okay, open your eyes.

Barbara does so and smiles broadly.

VAN--CONT'D

Happy birthday, Lieutenant Kaplan.

Barbara grabs up the Jim Beam.

BARBARA

Now this is my kind of man.

VAN

Uh huh. Now the card.

Barbara takes the envelope, RIPS it open, pulling out the card.

BARBARA

(reading aloud)

To Barb, the woman who helped me survive nursing school and boot camp intact--intact, Van?

VAN

Okay, so I'm not exactly Americanus Catholicus Virginus anymore.

BARBARA

Hussy.

(continues reading aloud)

And who taught me, through her infinite wisdom, to leave myself and go to the needs of another person; to give of my whole being, and see the goodness in my fellow man; to know that to love someone is to bid him to live and invite him to grow. You have done that for me, Barb, and I'm so grateful for your friendship. Happy birthday. Love, Lynda.

Barbara looks up at Van, smiling tearfully.

BARBARA--CONT'D

I'm just glad we made it through together.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET--NIGHT

A JEEP, with Van driving and Barbara beside her, makes its way through the traffic.

CUT TO:

INT. JEEP
MOVING SHOT

ANGLE ON Barbara who is drunk, holding the half-empty bottle of Jim Beam in one hand and a paper cup in the other. She looks a bit depressed.

BARBARA

Twenty-three. I guess I'm getting old.

ANGLE ON Van, amused.

VAN

Oh, ancient.

WIDER ANGLE to include both women.

BARBARA

When my mother was twenty-three,
she had me. I wonder if I'll ever
be a mother.

VAN

Of course you will. Don't be stupid.

Barbara brightens.

BARBARA

Right. You're right. And if it's
a girl, I'll name her Lynda, in honor
of my best friend in the world, who
gave me the best birthday party ever.

VAN

And I'll name my first one Barbara,
after the best friend I ever had.

They STOP at a red light, both women silent, in
their own thoughts.

BARBARA

Do you think we'll both come back
when it's over?

VAN

The war? Sure. Remember what our
recruiter said? Nurses don't get
killed. The hospitals are in rear
areas. We'll be safe as babes.

BARBARA

You're right. Like babes.

MEDIUM TWO-SHOT (FRONTAL) as Barbara smiles at Van,
then looks to her right at the sidewalk, a shadow of
fear flickering in her eyes. Van looks innocently
and confidently at the camera.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET--NIGHT

The JEEP pulls away at the green light and drives
off. HCLD as we HEAR the ROARING of jet engines.

CUT TO:

STOCK SHOT--DAY

World Airways JET airborne.

CUT TO:

INT. JET
MOVING SHOT

The CABIN is crammed with SOLDIERS. A STEWARDESS walks up the aisle collecting food trays.

ANGLE ON Van who sits in the tail section by the window, her rhinestone pin evident on her lapel.

ANOTHER ANGLE to include her seatmate, a young PRIVATE.

PRIVATE

Why in hell anybody like you would want to go blows my mind.

VAN

We're supposed to be doing something good over there.

PRIVATE

Come on. It's nothing but politics.

VAN

Well, I don't know much about that, but I do know there are guys dying for what they believe in, and if they're getting hurt, somebody's got to be there to take care of them. I want to do my share for our country.

PRIVATE

Well, as far as I'm concerned, they oughta let jerks like Johnson and Goldwater do the fighting. If they hadn't snagged me, I could've been pulling down some great bucks in advertising by now.

Van is disgusted by this attitude.

SERGEANT

(O.S.)

There ain't nothin back in the good ol' U.S. of A. for me.

WIDER ANGLE reveals a young, but haggard SERGEANT sitting in the seat across the aisle from them. His well-worn uniform contrasts with their new ones.

SERGEANT--CONT'D

You'll see for yourselves, if you don't go home in a glad bag.

Van and the Private exchange distressed glances.

PRIVATE
(to Van)

A lifer.

SERGEANT

Yep. Second tour. Last time I couldn't wait to get back to the World. Countin my days from the minute I stepped off the plane with all the other fresh meat. I was gonna buy me a car, find a woman-- the whole deal. But when I got home, all I could think about was Nam.

PRIVATE

Ha! That'd be the day.

SERGEANT

You'll see, friend. After a while, the place gets to you. And then all that bullshit back in the World don't mean shit. It's crazy.

He turns from them and stares silently ahead.

ANGLE ON Van and the Private who shrug at one another. Suddenly the cabin begins to jerk wildly from side to side.

ANOTHER ANGLE of the CABIN as gear falls out from overhead racks and everyone is disoriented. There is a general CRY of alarm.

ANGLE ON Van who looks out her window in fear.

POV of the GROUND below, a jungle-like area dotted with explosion smoke.

ANGLE ON the Sergeant who is calm, with an odd smile on his face.

SERGEANT

Home, Sweet Home.

ANGLE ON The CABIN as the jet goes into a steep climb, pushing everyone back in their seats. After a moment, the cabin levels out as normal.

ANOTHER ANGLE (CLOSER) favoring Van, who brushes the hair from her face with a shaking hand.

WIDER ANGLE includes the Private, frozen and ashen-faced, and the Sergeant, who looks at them with amusement.

SERGEANT

Don't pay it no mind. The V.C. love to fuck with us. It don't mean nothin.

VAN

Jesus.

PILOT

(O.S.)

Men, we just came into a little ol' firefight back there, and it looks like them V.C. ain't takin too kindly to us droppin in on Tan Son Nhut. So we're gonna take a little ride on over to Long Bihn and see if we can't get us a more hospitable welcome. Keep your seatbelts buckled and we'll be down faster'n you can say Vietnam sucks.

ANGLE ON Van who again looks out the window at the ground below.

POV (AERIAL) of an Army BUS winding its way through the jungle terrain, rice paddies on either side of the road.

CUT TO:

EXT. VIETNAM ROAD--DAY

ANGLE ON the Army BUS as it moves along the road. The rice fields on both sides are bordered by barbed wire. An Army TRUCK passes, going in the opposite direction.

ANOTHER ANGLE as the bus passes an old VIETNAMESE MAN driving a water buffalo that is pulling a mat with bundles of sticks on it.

CUT TO:

INT. BUS
MOVING SHOT

ANGLE ON Van, her gear in her lap, looking out through a window reinforced by chicken wire.

WIDER ANGLE reveals her seatmate, a Black WOMAN (Coretta of the opening sequence). Around them are anxious, nervous SOLDIERS.

CORETTA

First tour?

VAN

Huh? Oh, yes.

CORETTA

Me too.

(holds out her hand)

Coretta Jones, Oakland, California.

VAN

(shaking the offered hand)

Lynda Van Devanter, Arlington, Virginia.

CORETTA

Pretty country Virginia.

VAN

Mmm. I think I miss it already.

Van turns to look out the window again.

POV, through the wire mesh, of a GROUP of VIETNAMESE SOLDIERS marching two OTHERS ahead of them at gunpoint as the bus drives by them.

ANGLE ON Coretta.

CORETTA

They say that's the biggest worry.

WIDER ANGLE to include Van who turns to her.

VAN

What is?

CORETTA

You can't tell the good guys from the bad guys. Your hooch maid could be the one who's bringing the V.C. maps of your compound so they can try to kill you at night. And if they don't succeed, she'll be back in the morning, singing while she washes your clothes and shines your shoes.

VAN

Come on.

CORETTA

Believe it. My brother was over here in '66. Said the V.C. used to booby-trap their own kids and send them into our camps begging for food. They get inside and boom. Take half the camp with them. Got so they'd shoot the kids on sight, no questions asked.

Coretta stares off.

CORETTA--CONT'D

He never got over it.

ANGLE ON Van, shaken, who once again turns to the window.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROAD

The BUS passes between two guard towers into a compound identified by a sign as the 90th Replacement Detachment at Long Bihn.

ANOTHER ANGLE of the COMPOUND as the bus drives through it. Milling around the different buildings are many VIETNAMESE CIVILIANS, mostly women, old men and children, dressed in everything from traditional native clothing to hand-me-down American wear.

CUT TO:

INT. MESS HALL--DUSK

WIDE ANGLE of the ROOM with its line of hungry SOLDIERS and cafeteria-type long tables. The room is full.

ANOTHER ANGLE (CLOSER) reveals Van and Coretta eating at one end of a table.

VAN

My recruiter said the hospital areas were safe from enemy attack.

CORETTA

Safe? Honey, your recruiter ought to be horsewhipped. There might not be many nurses dying, but there are certainly enough being wounded to discourage anyone with half a brain

CORETTA--CONT'D

from being here. The V.C. don't care whether you're a nurse, a clerk, or carry a gun. All they know is you're an American.

A SOLDIER sits next to them with his tray of food.

SOLDIER

She's right, lieutenant.

VAN

So what do we do?

SOLDIER

The best you can hope for is to get an assignment as far away from the action as possible.

VAN

Yes, but does such a place exist?

SOLDIER

Well, almost anywhere but the 71st.

VAN

71st?

CORETTA

The 71st Evacuation Hospital. A MASH unit up in the Pleiku Province. Near the Cambodian border.

SOLDIER

Heavy combat area. Wall-to-wall casualties.

CUT TO:

STOCK SHOT--DAY

Army HELICOPTER airborne.

CUT TO:

INT. CHOPPER
MOVING SHOT

ANGLE ON Van and Coretta sitting among OTHERS in the cramped compartment.

ANOTHER ANGLE (CLOSER) of the two.

The chopper ENGINE DRONES throughout their conversation.

CORETTA

Look at it this way. Pleiku is in the mountains and is probably the only place in this whole damn country where it gets below 80.

VAN

That's our silver lining, right?

CORETTA

Better than none at all.

Coretta looks out the window at the ground below.

POV (AERIAL) of a COMPOUND, a crowded collection of wooden buildings and quonset huts, all covered with red dust, and surrounded by barbed wire rolls, fences and tanks. Jungle hills lie all around it.

CORETTA--CONT'D

(O.S.)

Well, Toto, we sure as hell ain't in Kansas anymore.

CUT TO:

EXT. COMPOUND--DAY

ANGLE ON the CHOPPER as it touches down on the helipad. In the f.g. is a SIGN denoting this place as the 71st Evacuation Hospital.

ANOTHER ANGLE (CLOSER) as Van, Coretta and the others deplane. Into the shot runs a GROUP of excited MEN and WOMEN dressed in fatigues, led by a large MAN in his mid-thirties, BUBBA.

ANOTHER ANGLE (CLOSER) as Bubba claps Van on the back.

BUBBA

Well, it's about time you FNGs got here.

VAN

FNGs?

BUBBA

Fucking New Guys. We are real glad to see you.

He shakes all the newcomers' hands.

BUBBA--CONT'D

Welcome to the war, kids. We could sure use some new blood around here.

CORETTA
(grimacing)

Ha, ha. I get it.

She turns to Van and shrugs, rolling her eyes.

ANGLE ON the GROUP as they walk into the compound.

ANOTHER ANGLE as they STOP in the midst of all the buildings.

CORETTA

This is the damndest hospital I've ever seen.

BUBBA

Lieutenant, you ain't seen nothin yet.

CUT TO:

A SERIES OF SHOTS--DAY

Bubba leads the newcomers into a T-shaped arrangement of buildings. They walk through the O.R. area, by the individual operating cubicles set up with tables and equipment. They walk through post-op where one or two SOLDIERS recuperate in beds. As they pass a door labeled MORGUE, a NURSE comes out pushing a gurney with a covered body on it. Van quickly turns away and then is immediately ashamed for doing so when she sees Coretta staring at the gurney unblinkingly.

CUT TO:

EXT. COMPOUND--DUSK

ANGLE ON the GROUP as it comes to a long, grassy strip of ground between buildings. Planted there are two scrawny BANANA TREES with signs in front of them. In the b.g. is a small, make-shift SWIMMING POOL.

ANOTHER ANGLE (CLOSER) as the group STOPS.

BUBBA

And last, but by no means least, the Bernard J. Piccolo Memorial Peace Park.

Coretta leans over and reads the signs.

CORETTA

Complete, of course, with the Bernard J. and Elizabeth L. Piccolo Memorial Banana Trees.

BUBBA

Our ex-C.O., a truly wonderful man,
and his faithful, loving wife.

VAN

And that, no doubt, is the Bernard J.
Piccolo Memorial Swimming Pool.

BUBBA

No, actually the people around here
were thinking of calling it the Cap-
tain Bubba L. Kominski Memorial Swim-
ming Pool, in honor of just possibly
the second-best neurosurgeon on this
entire Asian continent. But Bubba
Kominski is far too modest to allow
anything like that.

VAN

I don't suppose we'll ever get to
meet this most talented, humble man.

BUBBA

You're looking at him, lieutenant.
Captain Bubba L. Kominski, gentleman,
scholar, neurosurgeon of distinction,
at your service.

CORETTA

I was right. This is the damndest
hospital I've ever seen.

CUT TO:

INT. SURGICAL-T--DAY

ANGLE ON the CORRIDOR, crammed with scurrying
PERSONNEL and wounded SOLDIERS on gurneys.

ANGLE ON Van and Bubba, on the same side of an O.R.
table, working on a PATIENT in one of the cubicles
off that corridor. Both are in scrub gear; Van has
on her rhinestone flag pin.

BUBBA

I bet you thought us world-renowned
surgeons were above donkey work like
this. Well, lesson number one is
that everybody around this death
factory is a jack-of-all-trades.
Saline.

A Black CORPSMAN, AMOS, hands Bubba a bottle.

BUBBA--CONT'D

Thanks, Amos. This kid got messed up with a Bouncing Betty.

VAN

Who?

BUBBA

Bouncing Betty--a land mine. Bounces up to about waist level before going bang. The V.C. like it 'cause it tends to deprive our upstanding young men of their--uh--family jewels shall we say. Lucky for this guy he was facing the other way.

Van carefully arranges instruments on a mayo stand. Bubba shakes his head and rearranges them.

BUBBA

You can always tell the FNGs by the way they set up their mayo stands. You can forget most of what they taught you in school. Here we don't have the time or the people for that bullshit. Here you're the scrub and the assistant. You're not always gonna have a free hand. Now get on the other side. You're gonna start cutting with me.

Van hesitates.

BUBBA--CONT'D

Go on. Get over there.

VAN

But I never--

BUBBA

I know you never. That's why I'm gonna teach you. Welcome to med school.

ANGLE ON the two, with Van now on the other side of the table, as Bubba patiently directs her in operating procedures.

ANOTHER ANGLE as Bubba carefully checks her work and approves with a nod.

NEW ANGLE as the two are in heavy concentration.

BUBBA

We got us some real damage here. There's a bleeder that let loose.

BUBBA--CONT'D

Gimme some suction while I tie it off.

ANOTHER ANGLE as Bubba drops a metal frag into a bowl with a CLANG.

VAN

Do you think he'll walk again?

BUBBA

Hard to tell. But then we'll never know. We just patch 'em up and send 'em away.

Van looks surprised.

BUBBA--CONT'D

You'll get used to it. This is an assembly line, not a medical center.

NEW ANGLE of the two, now tired, as Amos changes their gloves and another CORPSMAN brings in a new PATIENT. This one is brutally burned, a blue-green slime covering all exposed areas. Van, repulsed by the smell, looks weakly at Bubba.

BUBBA

Napalm.

CUT TO:

INT. MESS HALL--NIGHT

ANGLE ON Van in line with her tray as food is scooped onto it.

CLOSE SHOT of the steaming FOOD on her plate.

CLOSE SHOT of Van's pale, sickened FACE.

ANOTHER ANGLE AS Van drops her tray and runs from the hall, hand over her mouth.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICERS' CLUB--NIGHT

Van ENTERS, looks around, and goes to a table where Coretta sits with CARL ADAMS, a DOCTOR in his mid-thirties, and FATHER BERGERON, a tall, grey-haired PRIEST in his sixties.

We HEAR strains of MERCEDES BENZ by Janis Joplin in the b.g.

ANOTHER ANGLE as she approaches the table. At first they don't acknowledge her, so deep are they in their discussion.

CARL

But how can you walk through a place like this, up to your knees in blood, and still believe in God?

FATHER

(French accent)

Major Adams, I can think of no better source to answer your doubts about God than the former German Catholic Cardinal von Faulhaber of Munich.

Van sits down quietly next to Coretta who WHISPERS hello.

FATHER--CONT'D

Albert Einstein once told him that he respected religion but believed in mathematics. The cardinal informed Einstein that both were merely different expressions of God's precision. Einstein asked what the cardinal might say if mathematical science ever came to conclusions contradictory to religious beliefs. The cardinal replied by saying, "I have the highest respect for the competence of mathematicians, and I am sure they would never rest until they discovered their mistake."

Everyone LAUGHS.

FATHER--CONT'D

And who might this be?

VAN

Lynda Van Devanter, Father.

FATHER

Jacques Bergeron. Servant to the people of this nation of pain.

CORETTA

Father B here enjoys talking both Armies out of everything from medical supplies to jeep engines.

FATHER

Life is a constant challenge, is it not? I am not here to convert anyone, merely to try to ease the suffering of

FATHER--CONT'D

some. I believe it is God's will. I take no sides in this war.

CARL

I admire your neutrality.

FATHER

I remember what a North Vietnamese general said to me once. He said, "I cannot understand why you do not like me, Father. You call yourself a servant of the Lord. I thought it was one of the teachings of your religion that the Lord loves everyone, rich or poor." Well, I smiled and swallowed another sip of his wine--a wonderful, full-bodied burgundy. Perhaps a little sweeter than I prefer, but not at all disagreeable. "General," I said, "you are correct in believing that the Lord loves you, but, fortunately, I choose my friends more carefully than does the Lord."

Again everyone LAUGHS.

CARL

You're a braver man than I, Father.

FATHER

The Lord is my light and my salvation, Major. Whom shall I fear?

CUT TO:

INT. O.R. CUBICLE--DAY

Van and a middle-aged SURGEON, FRANK, work on a PATIENT. He is obviously angry with her, and she in turn is upset.

FRANK

Why do they insist on sending us you know-nothing nurses from those miserable excuses for nursing schools? Like I've got the time to stand here and explain every Goddamned--

Carl ENTERS, in clean scrub gear.

CARL

Frank, I'll take over here. Go get some sleep.

FRANK

Good luck. She's greener than the
Goddamned eggs we had for breakfast.

EXIT Frank.

CARL

Don't listen to him. He loves to
bitch, and seventeen hours in here
haven't helped.

VAN

I'm sorry. I didn't know what--

CARL

Look, it's okay. If you want good
help, you've gotta be willing to
train them, right?

Van nods.

CARL--CONT'D

I'm Carl Adams.

VAN

Lynda--

CARL

Van Devanter. I remember. Now, let's
get to work here. Okay, now I want you
to feel around the spleen til you get
the vascular system between your fingers.

VAN

Got it.

CARL

Good. Now, slip your fingers behind it
and hold it right about where you can
feel the clamp.

VAN

Okay, done.

CARL

Perfect. Now, put another clamp in
there, in case the first one lets go.

VAN

Clamped.

CARL

All right, now all you need to do is
cut off the spleen and tie the blood
vessels. Got it?

Van nods.

CARL--CONT'D

Okay, do it.

His eyes smile at her reassuringly and she goes to work.

CUT TO:

EXT. COMPOUND--NIGHT
MOVING SHOT

ANGLE ON Van and Carl as they walk through the compound.

VAN

I thought they'd never stop coming.

CARL

That? This is the slow period. Wait'll you find yourself in the middle of a real push. Sometimes you don't get out of O.R. for days at a time.

She blinks at him, unbelieving.

CARL--CONT'D

Nothing like Minnesota. In at 8 and home by 5, just in time to play ball with the kids before supper. I just hope all of this is over before Mark's old enough. Sometimes kids come through here who barely look any older than him.

VAN

They're old enough to fight for democracy.

CARL

You really believe that's why we're here?

VAN

Of course I do.

He looks at the rhinestone flag pin on her shirt and she notices.

VAN--CONT'D

I think we should be proud of our country. And proud of our flag.

CARL

Oh, so do I, but I'm afraid this time we may find that our country is wrong.

They STOP at the door of Van's hooch.

CARL--CONT'D
Nite, Lynda.

He walks on as she opens her door.

VAN
Good night. And thanks.

CARL
Any time.

Puzzled, she steps inside and the door closes behind her.

CUT TO:

INT. HOOCH--NIGHT

Van is writing a letter by lamplight at her make-shift desk.

VAN
(V.O.)

Everyday we see more and more why we're here. When a whole Montagnard village comes in after being bombed and terrorized by Charlie. There are helpless people dying every day. The worst of it is the children. Little baby-sans being brutally maimed and killed. They've never hurt anyone. Papa-san comes in with his three babies-- one dead and two covered with frag wounds. You try to tell him the boy is dead, but he keeps talking to the baby as if that will make him live again. It's enough to break your heart. And through it all, you feel like something's missing. And then you put your finger on it. There's not a sound from them. The children don't cry from the pain. The parents don't cry from sorrow. They're stoic. No, Dad, nobody can tell me we don't belong here.

We HEAR a DOOR SLAM. Van looks up from her writing.

ANOTHER ANGLE of the room as Coretta ENTERS, very tired, and flops onto her bunk.

CORETTA
How you doing, honey?

VAN

I'm a little wiped. God, you look beat.

CORETTA

I am. That emergency room is like a damn merry-go-round. Get one load patched up and out and twice as many are waiting to take their places. I am going to bed.

VAN

What about our welcome party at the Bastille?

CORETTA

You couldn't get me out of this bed with anything less than atom bombs. Have a brew for me, huh?

VAN

Better yet--
(CLICKING off her light)
I'll have two.

CORETTA

Great. One for each of my feet.
Shit.

CUT TO:

EXT. COMPOUND--NIGHT

A SERIES OF SHOTS as Van, in dress, flak jacket and helmet, makes her way through the camp. In the b.g. we HEAR faint COMBAT SOUNDS. She eventually approaches a well-lit hooch whose door is almost completely blocked by a high sandbag wall. We now HEAR rowdy PARTY SOUNDS which replace those associated with combat, and MUSIC--MAMMA TOLD ME NOT TO COME by Three Dog Night.

CUT TO:

INT. HOOCH

This hooch, the BASTILLE, is filled with PARTY-GOERS in various stages of drunkenness. There is much LAUGHTER. The MUSIC continues, LOUD.

Van ENTERS hesitantly, looking around.

POV of the HOOCH. On one wall there are PICTURES of Bubba, his WIFE and LITTLE GIRL. On the opposite wall are PHOTOS of SLIM, a large MAN in his mid-thirties,

his WIFE and THREE BOYS. On the connecting wall between are hundreds of LETTERS taped up.

ANGLE ON Van picking her way through the partiers. She is approached by SLIM.

SLIM

You can always tell the FNG. Nobody wears flak jackets and helmets around here.

VAN

But Slim, regulations--

SLIM

Fuck regulations. This is the Bastille!

VAN

What if we get a rocket attack?

SLIM

We haven't had a rocket attack in weeks.

VAN

But what if?

SLIM

Relax. The V.C. wouldn't dare crash our party.

NEW ANGLE as Van, still in flak jacket and helmet, sits drinking a beer. Around her the party is in full swing, and she is relaxed, enjoying herself. RUN FOR YOUR LIFE by the Beatles BLARES.

ANOTHER ANGLE as the room suddenly shakes, knocking over furniture, drinks and several PARTIERS.

CUT TO:

EXT. BASTILLE

Slim brings Van out into the bunker immediately outside. She is very nervous.

SLIM

This is nothing. Happens all the time. Lemme get you another beer.

He LEAVES.

VAN

No, I--Slim? Slim?

We HEAR a piercing SIREN, followed by a VOICE over

the loudspeaker, as Van huddles in the bunker alone. We also HEAR the others still partying in the Bastille.

LOUDSPEAKER

(O.S.)

Attention all personnel. Take cover.
Pleiku Airbase is under rocket attack.

The bunker shakes as we HEAR an EXPLOSION.

VAN

No shit.

LOUDSPEAKER--CONT'D

(O.S.)

Take cover. Security alert condition
red. Option one.

BUBBA

(O.S.)

It'll never happen, buddy. The Yanks'll
take it in three.

We HEAR another EXPLOSION. Van closes her eyes
tightly.

Carl ENTERS the bunker.

CARL

It'll be okay, Lynda.

Van opens her eyes as Carl sits down next to her.
He takes her hand.

CARL--CONT'D

You're safe here.

VAN

I think I want to go home.

CARL

We all do.

ANOTHER ANGLE as Slim ENTERS with a beer which he
offers to Van.

SLIM

Here you go. Drink up.

(to Carl)

They need you back in O.R. stat.

CARL

Okay. Are you going to be all right?

VAN

I think so.

Carl gets up to go.

VAN--CONT'D

Carl?

CARL

Mmm?

VAN

Thanks. I mean for being there.

CARL

Anytime.

Carl EXITS as Bubba ENTERS.

BUBBA

Well, what've we got here?

(shouting)

Come on, everybody. Party's out here!

NEW ANGLE of the BUNKER crowded with partiers. We HEAR some fooling around trying to SING Gene Pitney's TWENTY-FOUR HOURS FROM TULSA.

ANOTHER ANGLE (CLOSER) of Van, Bubba and Slim. Bubba passes a joint around. Slim then hands it to Van.

VAN

(holding up her beer)

No, thanks. I've got my brand.

SLIM

Do you know what this stuff is? It's top grade Montagnard. Ccme on. It'll help you relax.

She hesitates, takes the joint, then takes a hit, COUGHING.

VAN

I think you're trying to kill me too.

SLIM

Jeez. We gotta teach you FNGs everything. Come on, try again. Inhale and hold.

Skeptically she tries again, if awkwardly. This time she succeeds. We then HEAR an EXPLOSION close by. Van jumps and the communal SINGING STOPS.

BUBBA

Calm down, lieutenant. No problemo.

Bubba gets up and starts to leave the bunker.

BUBBA--CONT'D

Come on. Let's go inspect the damage.

ALL

Yeah. Okay.

ANOTHER ANGLE as everyone STREAMS FROM the bunker following Bubba's lead.

ANOTHER ANGLE of Van and Slim in the bunker alone.

VAN

What're they nuts? How do they know it's over? We could walk out there and end up in the middle of another attack.

Slim gets up, wiping off his seat.

SLIM

Don't sweat it. Once it stops, it stops. That's it for the night. That's the way the V.C. work. It's all just harassment. They need target practice and we've got a nice little red cross they can aim at. They've had their fun for the night. Come on.

Van gets up, skeptical, and follows.

CUT TO:

EXT. COMPOUND

ANGLE ON (LONG SHOT) Slim and Van as they walk around the camp, taking in the damage around them. Nearby a hooch has been blown up and is smoldering.

ANOTHER ANGLE (CLOSER) as Bubba joins them.

BUBBA

I'm a little worried. The Elizabeth L. Memorial Banana Tree took some shrapnel. I hope she isn't too traumatized.

VAN

What! We could've been killed and all you can worry about is an ugly little tree?

BUBBA

Look, Van, there's one thing you have to remember. You can always get a new hooch or another doctor, but there is only one Eliza--

VAN

Don't say it! You two are raving loonies.

SLIM

She catches on real quick, partner.

VAN

Yeah, well one of you better escort me to the ladies lounge before I--

SLIM

The ladies lounge?

BUBBA

I think she means she has to go pee-pee.

The men LAUGH until we, and they, HEAR CHOPPERS.

CLOSE SHOT of Bubba and Slim as their smiles suddenly melt away and their expressions become serious. Bubba SIGHS heavily.

CLOSE SHOT of Van who also hears the choppers, looking up into the night sky.

POV of the deep darkness of the night SKY with a vivid half-moon and many small, bright stars. HOLD.

Over this, we HEAR the CLANGING of instruments and the SQUEAKING of gurneys.

BUBBA

(O.S.)

This kid's in shock. Get a coupla I.V.s into him.

SLIM

(O.S.)

We need more plasma. Where the hell's the plasma?

CUT TO:

INT. EMERGENCY ROOM--NIGHT

This is a triage scene, with several bleeding SOLDIERS and hospital PERSONNEL checking them out.

ANGLE ON Bubba leaning over a SOLDIER on the floor.

BUBBA

This one's got no reflexes. Shove
'im over with the expectants.

ANGLE ON Slim pushing a gurney with a badly bleeding
SOLDIER on it to Amos.

SLIM

Snow him with morphine. He's gonna
die within the hour.

ANGLE ON Coretta.

CORETTA

Got a big belly wound over here.

ANOTHER ANGLE as Slim hurries to join Coretta, who
stands over another badly wounded SOLDIER.

SLIM

I'm coming. Goddammit! I knew this
was going to fucking happen. Those
fuckers in the mess hall. I told
them not to serve anymore fucking
fruit cocktail. Every time they
fucking serve fucking fruit cocktail
we end up with more fucking wounded
than we can handle.

CUT TO:

INT. O.R.--NIGHT

All the cubicles are full, with SURGICAL TEAMS
working feverishly. CORPSMEN and TECHNICIANS rush
around with supplies.

CARL
(O.S.)

Somebody get Coretta. I need more
blood!

ANGLE ON one cubicle where Van and Carl work on a
SOLDIER.

VAN

Oh God.

CARL

Jesus. He must've just eaten when he
got hit. Sponge. Wait'll we get one
of the Vietnamese with their undigested
fishheads and rice. Make this look
appetizing. Clamp that.

ANOTHER ANGLE of the two still working.

CARL

Better run that bowel one more time.

VAN

But you've run it four times already.

ANGLE ON Carl as he pulls out a frag and drops it into a bowl with a CLANG.

CLOSE ANGLE of Van who looks at him with amazement.

ANGLE ON both.

CARL

Call it instinct.

NEW ANGLE as Van and Carl change into clean gloves. Another PATIENT is brought to the table by Amos, who hands Carl an x-ray.

CARL

What've we got, Amos?

AMOS

Multiple frag wounds of the chest. Left lung collapsed, right lung partial collapse. There's also a frag in the right ventricle.

CARL

Shit.

ANOTHER ANGLE of the two at work.

CARL

Slim!

SLIM

(O.S.)

On my way!

Slim ENTERS the cubicle.

CARL

I need you pump blood into all four I.V.s.

SLIM

Right.

NEW ANGLE as Carl pulls out a frag. Immediately a spurt of blood a foot high shoots out. Van sponges, eyes wide. Carl is calm.

CARL

Duty. Honor. Ccountry. I'd like to have Nixon here for one week. Just one Goddamned week.

ANOTHER ANGLE as Carl sutures, Amos wiping his brow.

CARL

Quick, Lynda, what's your favorite food?

VAN

My mom's homemade lasagna. What's yours?

CARL

Suture. Mine's lasagna too. Cut right here, above the knot. There's a little place in St. Paul. My wife and I go there at least once a month. Best lasagna I've ever tasted. Clamp.

VAN

Mosquito?

CARL

Yeah.

VAN

Well, you obviously haven't tasted my mom's lasagna if you think the best is in Minnesota.

CARL

Suture. Ah, but does your mother have the red-checked tablecloths, candlelight and violins? Cut it, right there.

VAN

Aren't we the romantic?

CARL

Bah humbug. Suture.

Coretta JOINS them at the table.

CORETTA

The cooks brought some food into the lounge, Van. Go eat.

VAN

What time is it?

CORETTA

Breakfast time.

VAN

I'll wait and eat later.

CARL

Lynda, there may never be a later.
If you don't eat, you'll collapse.

VAN

I can't eat in the middle of all
this.

CARL

Then you'll have to learn.

VAN

My stomach is about to explode.

CORETTA

Try some antacids. Now go.

Coretta moves into Van's place.

CARL

Coretta, sponge please.

CUT TO:

INT. CORRIDOR

ANGLE ON Van who ENTERS the corridor from the O.R.
It is filled with occupied gurneys, and the MOANS
momentarily stagger her.

ANOTHER ANGLE as she passes one gurney and the
SOLDIER on it grabs her arm weakly.

SOLDIER

(shivering)

I can't feel my foot.

Van pulls the blanket up to his chin.

VAN

It's going to be okay.

SOLDIER

Nurse, I can't feel my foot.

VAN

Sssh. It's still there. We'll fix
you up in no time.

He won't let go of her arm.

SOLDIER

Please. I can't feel it.

Van turns to him and picks up the blanket to look at
his leg.

POV of the left LEG almost completely severed from the knee. Above the wound is a bloody tourniquet.

CLOSE SHOT of Van who is stunned, struggling for control.

ANOTHER ANGLE as Amos walks by, then STOPS.

AMOS
You okay, lieutenant?

VAN
I'm...fine.

Amos looks at the boy's leg and shakes his head.

AMOS
(matter-of-factly)
It'll end up in the trash. No good to him now.

Amos walks out of frame, Van looking after him in disgust.

CUT TO:

A SERIES OF SHOTS

The WOUNDED are wheeled in and out of Surgical-T.
Van and Carl at work.
The bloody condition of the floors.
The weary PERSONNEL trying to keep up with the steady flow of WOUNDED.
The linen carts overflowing with bloody linen and scrub gear.

CUT TO:

INT. O.R. CUBICLE

ANGLE ON Van and Carl still at work. Both look exhausted.

CARL
Got a question for you.

VAN
Huh?

CARL
What day is it?

VAN
Wednesday. No, maybe Thursday.

CARL

Day or night?

VAN

I think day. Last time I was out in E.R., I thought I saw light through the doors.

CARL

Clamp that bleeder.

VAN

Got it.

CARL

Why don't you get started on the spleen while finish up here?

VAN

Take it out myself?

CARL

That's right. I've talked you through enough of them. Are you sure it's daytime?

VAN

Not exactly.

CARL

It's probably night. Feels more like night.

CUT TO:

INT. SCRUB ROOM

ANGLE ON Van asleep, curled up in a corner.

ANOTHER ANGLE as Coretta ENTERS, looking exhausted, and finds Van, gently shaking her.

CORETTA

Van, wake up. Van? One more case, honey. A bad one.

VAN

Shit. What time is it?

CORETTA

Eleven. You've had about twenty minutes.

VAN

Any time to grab a bite?

CORETTA

Better not. It's a burn case. A squad napalmed by friendly fire. When you smell that O.R., you're liable to lose your lunch.

CUT TO:

INT. O.R. CUBICLE

ANGLE ON Van and Carl at work again. They are the only team left. Carl is weaving a bit.

CARL

Let's close the peritoneum with O Chromic.

VAN

You okay?

CARL

Never better. You like baseball?

VAN

I was once the best catcher in the league. O on a taper.

CARL

That should do it. I used to pitch. Cut, please. Had a curve that was good enough--suture--to get me a tryout with the Yankees. Scissors. You a Yankee fan?

VAN

Are you kidding? Washington Senators all the way.

CARL

The Senators? Why bother rooting for a bunch of losers?

VAN

Loyalty. Harmon Killebrew was my hero.

CARL

God, what a mess. This kid's unit was over the fence when this happened.

VAN

Cambodia?

CARL

Yup.

VAN

We don't have any soldiers in Cambodia.

CARL

We don't? Who told you that?

VAN

The government. The newspapers back home.

CARL

Don't believe everything you read.

Slim ENTERS the cubicle and goes to the monitor.

CARL--CONT'D

And don't believe anything the government tells you.

VAN

Carl.

SLIM

He's arresting!

CARL

Shit!

ANOTHER ANGLE as Carl and Slim try desperately to resuscitate the BOY. Carl is frantic.

SLIM

I've got no readings. Give it up.

CARL

No way.

SLIM

Carl, he's dead.

CARL

Fuck off! Lynda, give me a knife.

ANOTHER ANGLE as Carl cuts the chest and attempts heart massage.

SLIM

Still nothing. He's had it.

CARL

Shut up and keep working.

SLIM

He's dead, damn it!

CARL
Then I'll bring the fucker back!

SLIM
Carl!

Carl finally stops and leans his bloody hands on the table.

CARL
I'm tired.

ANOTHER ANGLE as Carl walks wearily out of the cubicle, Slim right behind him. Van stares after them.

POV of their bloody FOOTPRINTS on the floor.

ANGLE ON Slim who pauses at the door.

SLIM
You're wiped out, Van. Go to bed.

FULL SHOT of Van, scrub gear covered in blood, as she walks toward the door.

VAN
Bed...yeah.

CUT TO:

EXT. COMPOUND--NIGHT

ANGLE ON Carl who is dragging his feet through the camp. Van then joins him, and they walk together. Both are now in their fatigues, stained with blood. Carl puts his arm around her as they walk.

CARL
You're good help, Lynda.

She smiles weakly, putting her arm around him.

CARL--CONT'D
I've thought of nothing but sleep for the past 72 hours and now I'm too tired to sleep.

VAN
I know. Me too.

CARL
So, can I buy you a drink?

VAN

Yeah, I could use one.

CUT TO:

INT. CARL'S HOOCH

They ENTER.

CARL

Ain't exactly St. Paul, but it's home.

NEW ANGLE as they sit on the floor drinking scotch in silence. He offers her a cigarette and she takes one, handling it like a non-smoker, not inhaling. Suddenly she BURSTS INTO TEARS.

VAN

I'm sorry. I...can't help it.

Carl moves over to sit next to her, putting his arm around her.

CARL

Sssh. It's okay. You're just over-tired.

VAN

It's...just so hard to put the faces of all those kids out of my mind.

CARL

You'll learn how, or you won't survive this year.

VAN

Why do they have to die?

CARL

Who knows?

VAN

I just don't understand it.

CARL

Lynda, nobody does.

VAN

But there's got to be a reason.

CARL

I can't think of one good one. I've had my fill of this war.

His eyes also fill with tears.

CARL--CONT'D

I need someone to hold me. It's
the only thing in this world that
makes any sense.

Van looks at him and then slowly puts her arms
around him, hugging him tightly.

ANOTHER ANGLE as the two hold one another in the
dimly-lit room, with far-off SOUNDS of arms fire
punctuating the stillness. HOLD.

Over this, we HEAR the TRANSMISSION of the first
moonlanding.

V.O.

Forty feet, down two and a half.
Picking up some dust. Thirty feet,
two and a half down. Faint shadow.
Four forward. Drifting to the right
a little.

CUT TO:

INT. POST-OP--NIGHT

ANGLE ON a GROUP of DOCTORS, NURSES and PATIENTS
crowded around a small, static-plagued radio.

WIDER ANGLE reveals Van, walking in the corridor
just outside, wearing a bloody smock, pulling off
her O.R. mask. She pauses in the doorway, seeing
the group. Her diamond ring is gone from her
finger.

Over this, we HEAR the TRANSMISSION continue.

V.O.--CONT'D

Thirty seconds. Drifting right.
Contact light. Okay, engine stop.

Van ENTERS the room and goes over to the group,
listening.

V.O.--CONT'D

We copy you down, Eagle. Houston,
Tranquility Base here. The Eagle
has landed.

ANOTHER ANGLE as Van looks at the clock.

POV of the CLOCK at 4:16.

We HEAR loud CHEERS from all over the hospital and camp. Then FIREWORKS.

ANGLE ON the group as Amos walks away from it, passing Van who is very happy.

VAN

A man on the moon. What a great day to be an American.

Amos looks around at the WOUNDED in the room, then at Van.

AMOS

Is it, lieutenant?

He walks away and she looks around her.

POV of the POST-OP, maimed MEN filling the room to capacity.

CLOSE SHOT of Van as she grasps her rhinestone pin, almost in fear.

CUT TO:

INT. HOOCH--DAY

ANGLE ON Van sitting propped up on her bunk, talking into a tape recorder.

VAN

It hurts so much sometimes to see the paper full of demonstrators, especially people burning the flag. Fight fire with fire, we ask here. Display the flag, Mom and Dad, please. Everyday. And tell your friends to do the same. It means so much to us to know we're supported, to know not everyone feels we're making a mistake being here.

We HEAR a KNOCK at the door. Van CLICKS off her recorder.

VAN--CONT'D

Come in.

NEW ANGLE of the ROOM as Bubba sticks his head in the door.

BUBBA

Hey Van, this here moon thing is just possibly the second-best reason in the universe to have one hell of a party.

Coretta sticks her head in too. It is covered by a large fishbowl which she lifts to be heard.

CORETTA

Come on, girl. We're blasting off at the Bastille at 1100 hours.

CUT TO:

EXT. BASTILLE--MORNING
DRIZZLING

Several PEOPLE are milling around with drinks. Coretta, in her flight suit and fishbowl, slides off the roof onto some sandbags. Slim is nearby to comment.

SLIM

Look, everybody, the Fishbowl has landed!

We HEAR LAUGHTER and CHEERS.

ANOTHER ANGLE as Bubba comes out of the Bastille.

BUBBA

Hey! Hey you guys! Put a lid on it!

The crowd QUIETS DOWN, listening.

We HEAR more RADIO TRANSMISSION.

V.O.

Neil, this is Houston. You're loud and clear. Break, break. Buzz, this is Houston. Radio check and verify T.V. circuit breaker is in.

ANOTHER ANGLE as the crowd begins to slowly gather around the Bastille door.

V.O.--CONT'D

Roger, T.V. circuit breakers in. LMP reads loud and clear. And we're getting a good picture on the T.V. Okay, Neil, we can see you coming down the ladder.

ANGLE ON Van, rapt, as Carl joins her and puts an arm on her shoulder.

V.O.--CONT'D

Okay, I'm at the foot of the ladder. The LM footpads are only depressed in the surface about one or two inches. Although the surface appears to be very fine-grained as you get close to

V.O.--CON'D

it. It's almost like a powder. Now and then it's very fine...I'm going to step off the LM now...That's one small step for a man...one giant leap for mankind.

Van swells with pride at this, putting her hand over Carl's.

ANOTHER ANGLE reveals that everyone is silent, struck by the moment.

ANGLE ON Van and Carl as Amos approaches them.

AMOS

Excuse me, Major. They need you in O.R. Some sort of problem.

Carl squeezes Van and walks away.

AMOS--CONT'D

(bitterly)

If they can put a man on the moon, then why can't they get us the hell out of Vietnam?

VAN

Amos, what is your problem? Every time anything happens that we can be proud of as Americans, you always have to put it down. Maybe some of us would like you to shut the fuck up and keep it to yourself. Try being a little more sensitive to what the rest of us might be feeling, okay?

Van storms away from him. Coretta joins him, having overheard the last bit of Van's admonishment. She is plainly upset.

CUT TO:

INT. HOOCH--NIGHT

ANGLE ON Van as she pours herself a scotch and begins to undress.

We HEAR some urgent SHOUTING.

ANOTHER ANGLE as Van, also hearing the shouts, looks out her window.

POV (LONG SHOT) of some PEOPLE, led by Slim, scurrying out of another hooch across the compound. They have a stretcher between them.

ANGLE ON Van, interested, putting her clothes back on and rushing to her hooch door.

CUT TO:

EXT. COMPOUND

ANGLE ON Van as she runs across the compound toward the others.

ANOTHER ANGLE as she catches up with Coretta who rushes to keep up with the rest. Her face is grim.

VAN

What's going on?

CORETTA

It's Amos.

VAN

Huh?

Coretta hands her a piece of paper.

CORETTA

Slim found this by his bed.

VAN

(reading)

I can't take it anymore. There's too much death and suffering. Please don't try to stop me.

Van looks up quizzically.

VAN--CONT'D

Amos?

CORETTA

Yes, Amos. You remember. The one who needs to be just a little more sensitive to what the rest of us are feeling.

ANOTHER ANGLE as Van hangs back a moment, stunned, as Coretta strides on into the surgical building.

CLOSE SHOT of Van's guilt-ridden FACE.

FULL SHOT of Van as she strides ahead into the building after Coretta.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICERS' CLUB--NIGHT

We HEAR the Guess Who's AMERICAN WOMAN as Van ENTERS, looking around at the subdued crowd.

ANOTHER ANGLE as she spots Carl and Father Bergeron in a corner sipping beer. She joins them and lights up a cigarette, still handling it like a dabbler.

FATHER

I rarely think of my life in France before I came here. It's been so long, it almost seems that I've been in Vietnam forever.

CARL

I spent a year in Vietnam yesterday.

FATHER

Good evening, lieutenant.

VAN

Hello, Father.

CARL

How's Amos?

VAN

Holding his own, I guess.

CARL

God, this makes me sick. Let the old glorymongers and politicians fight their own wars. Let the young people get on with their lives. Maybe if the old men were the ones being sacrificed, there'd be fewer wars.

FATHER

I know the communists as well as I know you. You both are the same. The only real villain is the war. I can only hope that God forgives us all for allowing it to continue.

Father gets up and extends his hand to Carl who shakes it.

FATHER--CONT'D

Good luck, Major. I'll pray you arrive home safely.

Van's face registers surprise at this.

CARL

Thank you, Father. And good luck
to you too.

FATHER

Good night.

VAN

Good night, Father.

Father EXITS.

VAN--CONT'D

Arrive home safely?

CARL

Uh...yeah. My orders just came
through this afternoon. I'm going
home.

VAN

When?

CARL

Day after tomorrow.

VAN

So soon.

Carl takes her hand across the table.

CARL

Lynda, I--

We HEAR CHOPPERS. Van pulls back her hand, stubs
out her cigarette, and stands..

VAN

No sense waiting for them to call us.

Carl SMACKS his hand on the table.

CARL

Don't those fuckers ever stop? When
I'm back in the World, I don't ever
want to remember one single thing
about this fucking hole. It's all
been nothing but a bunch of crap.

Standing, he sees her wounded expression and touches
her cheek.

CARL--CONT'D

Except for you.

CLOSE ANGLE on Van's FACE with his hand on her cheek. Her hand reaches up to cover his. HOLD.

CORETTA
(V.O.)

Got another burn case, Van. Docs want him in O.R. stat.

VAN
(V.O.)

Christ. Those Goddamned V.C.

CORETTA
(V.O.)

V.C. didn't do this one. Friendly fire.

CLOSE ANGLE on Carl's FACE as he silently stares at Van. HCLD.

CORETTA--CONT'D
(V.O.)

Have you heard from Carl?

VAN
(V.O.)

No. We promised each other we wouldn't write.

CORETTA
(V.O.)

I see.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. O.R.--DAY

CLOSE SHOT of a Vietnamese soldier's FACE, asleep.

ANOTHER ANGLE of O.R. as Van and Mack (from the opening sequence) work on the soldier. There is a BUZZ of talk around them. We HEAR the name BERGERON mentioned, and the phrase "TOO BAD."

VAN

Mack, what're they talking about?
What happened to Father B?

In the b.g. we HEAR the RAINS pouring down outside. The O.R. inside is covered with red mud, especially the walls which are oozing through the cracks. It mixes with the blood on the floor. Leaks in the roof are caught in bedpans, etc.

MACK

Sponge. You haven't heard then.

VAN

Heard what? I was in E.R. most of last night.

MACK

Clamp. The Father was captured-- sponge--by V.C. guerillas two nights ago.

VAN

God.

MACK

When they finished torturing him, they cut off his head and put it on a stake in the middle of a village up north as a warning to others who were American sympathizers.

VAN

But he wasn't an American sympathizer any more than he was a Cong sympathizer.

MACK

Clamp. Right there. No, he was just a good man who wanted to see the war end.

ANGLE ON Van who looks down at the patient intently.

POV of the Viet Cong's FACE, vulnerable under anesthetic.

VAN

(O.S.)

For all we know, this guy could've been his murderer.

ANGLE ON Mack who looks up at Van.

MACK

I should cut this sucker's head off to even the score.

CLOSE SHOT of Van looking now at Mack intently.

REVERSE ANGLE of Mack who meets Van's stare. After a few seconds, he looks back down at his work.

MACK--CONT'D

Suture.

CLOSE SHOT of Van who looks down at her work.

VAN

Suture.

CUT TO:

EXT. COMPOUND--DAY
RAINING

ANGLE ON Van who walks slowly through the dreary, rain-soaked compound. She slishes through the red mud, puffing on a cigarette, an obvious new habit. From this point on, cigarettes become a part of her.

Over this, we HEAR the VOICE of her FATHER.

DAD
(V.O.)

Hi, Lynda. This is your old Dad again, sending love from 10,000 miles away. We're expecting quite a crowd for Thanksgiving. If it pans out, I'm going to try and get some of them on tape for you. I had resolved that I wouldn't discuss with you or even mention anything about some of the wild antiwar things that're going on in the U.S. today, especially this moratorium bit that was happening in D.C over the 15th of November. But since you've asked questions in your letters, I guess it's all right.

NEW ANGLE as Van walks by the morgue. There are dead G.I. BODIES piled on the ground, partially covered with tarps. She pauses here as the rain soaks her. HOLD.

DAD
(V.O.)

This antiwar business is just the kind of thing that turns my stomach. The outfit that ran the whole show here, the commissars of the show--and I use the term advisedly--were in the building practically catty-corner from our own. All that college liberal boloney. They ought to be ashamed. Nothing but snivelling Communist propaganda.

Van shivers and walks out of frame left, leaving only the bodies on the red mud in view.

CUT TO:

INT. HOOCH

Van ENTERS, stops and looks around her, embracing herself. She then walks over to the mirror, staring at her reflection. She has aged. HOLD.

DAD--CONT'D
(V.O.)

Somehow or another our government always seems to be to blame as far as the protesters are concerned. I don't know what the right thing to do is in any of this, but I've got to have trust in somebody.

Van then notices her rhinestone pin, fingers it for a moment, then unclasps it. She holds it in her hands. HOLD.

DAD--CONT'D
(V.O.)

I've got to trust in God and in my president. Maybe Nixon's wrong in a lot of things, but nonetheless, he's my president, and I'm going to support him.

At this last line, Van tosses the pin on the shelf next to the PHOTO of her saluting and walks out of frame. HOLD on the PHOTO with the pin next to it.

CUT TO:

INT. O.R.--NIGHT

ANGLE ON Van and Mack at work on a PATIENT.

ANOTHER ANGLE as Coretta ENTERS to relieve her.

CORETTA

Swanson wants you to scrub that belly case.

Van looks and sees an N.V.A. SOLDIER being wheeled by the cubicle door on a gurney. She is incensed, STORMING from the room.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE

Van ENTERS and storms to a desk where Swanson is looking over some charts.

VAN

We still have G.I.s out there.
Why the hell are we doing Cong
first?

SWANSON

We're following triage protocol.
That soldier's next.

VAN

But twenty minutes ago this jerk
was out there trying to blow us
away.

SWANSON

And now he's wounded and needs our
help. Get to work.

VAN

If you're such a gooklover, Major,
why don't you scrub the case?

SWANSON

Because, Lieutenant, I've ordered
you to do it.

Swanson turns away from her, and Van STORMS out of
the room.

CUT TO:

INT. SCRUB ROOM

Van ENTERS angrily. She rips off her bloody gloves,
spits in her hands defiantly and puts on a clean
pair of gloves. She then STORMS back out of the
room.

We then HEAR a CHOPPER.

CUT TO:

INT. CHOPPER--DAY
MOVING SHOT

ANGLE ON Van who sits looking out the window with
anticipation.

POV (AERIAL) of the beautiful, glistening OCEAN
below, with white beaches, lush greenery and a
collection of modern BUILDINGS at the water's edge.
This is the 6th Convalescent Center at Cam Ranh Bay.

CUT TO:

EXT. HOSPITAL GROUNDS

ANGLE ON Van as she walks the grounds of the hospital, taking note of the smiling NURSES in clean, white uniforms. They are in contrast with her own worn fatigues.

NEW ANGLE as she approaches the door of a low, white building. She KNOCKS. Barbara, looking thin, haggard and exhausted, opens the door. Van, taken aback by Barbara's appearance, tries to be cheery.

VAN

Some people have all the luck, Kaplan.
Cam Ranh Bay, for God's sake.

They hug.

BARBARA

If I had any luck, I wouldn't be in Vietnam at all. Sometimes I think a grave would be better than this hole.

Van is visibly disconcerted by this.

BARBARA--CONT'D

Come on in.

CUT TO:

INT. ROOM

ANGLE ON the two as they sit in front of a window overlooking the sea, sipping wine, and silent. Barbara stares intently at Van who shifts a bit uncomfortably under such scrutiny.

VAN

So, you look pooped, kiddo.

BARBARA

Yesterday we worked 12 hours on a kid who seemed helpless. I don't think I ever wanted anyone to live as much. We almost had him out of danger when he arrested. Life's a bitch, isn't it?

VAN

Sometimes.

There is an awkward pause.

CLOSE ANGLE of Van, trying to be cheery.

VAN--CONT'D

Hey, you remember that night in El Paso? Candles in your bean dip. That was some party.

CLOSE ANGLE of Barbara who stares out the window.

BARBARA

(morosely)

There was a kid who came through here a week ago. Lynda, he begged me to kill him.

CLOSE ANGLE of Van.

VAN

Yeah, that was some party.

CLOSE ANGLE of Barbara.

BARBARA

And the thing was, he hadn't been wounded very badly. He just didn't want to go back to the boonies.

CLOSE ANGLE of Van.

VAN

(weakly)

I still want to see Tripoli.

WIDE ANGLE to include both women as Barbara turns away from the window and looks directly at Van.

BARBARA

Did you know my father died?

Van nods quietly.

BARBARA--CONT'D

Cancer. One of his old friends came through here last month on his way back to the World. He used to take me swimming at Fort Benning when I was little. Now the doctors say he'll never walk again.

VAN

Barb, you've got to stop doing this to yourself.

BARBARA

I can't take much more of this. I'm tired of all this death and blood.

VAN

You'll survive. You have to be tough,
that's all.

Barbara BURSTS INTO TEARS and Van holds her,
concerned and afraid.

VAN--CONT'D

Hang on, Barb. Hang on.

CUT TO:

EXT. 71st COMPOUND--DUSK
MISTING

FULL SHOT of the PERSONNEL in the midst of a triage
scramble, with blood, BODIES and red mud everywhere.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL CORRIDOR--NIGHT

ANGLE ON Van as she pushes a loaded linen cart by
two O.R. cubicles, each of which has a surgical team
working in it. Otherwise the hospital seems quiet,
cleaning up after a furious bout with wounded.
Stopping outside the scrub room, she carries a pile
of fresh linen into the room.

We HEAR the SQUEAKING of gurney wheels as she
emerges empty-handed from the room.

ANOTHER ANGLE as a CORPSMAN pushes a gurney toward
Van. On it is a pregnant VIETNAMESE WOMAN in labor.

CORPSMAN

Looks like you're gonna have a
baby.

VAN

What?

CORPSMAN

A baby, lieutenant. You're gonna
deliver a baby.

VAN

Like hell I am.

ANGLE ON the WOMAN as she SCREAMS, arching her back
and lifting her pelvis off the gurney. She then
drops back on the gurney, sweating.

ANGLE ON Van who looks at her, the Corpsman, and
back at the woman. She is angry.

VAN--CONT'D

Look, you tell your lady she's at the wrong hospital. I have two cases going on and I don't have any time for babies.

CORPSMAN

Hey, I was ordered to bring her down here. -I brought her.

He turns to leave. The woman SCREAMS.

VAN

Just a minute, private. You're not sticking me with this case.

The woman BREATHES hard now, reaching over to touch Van's arm. Van pulls away.

WOMAN

Baby come, baby come.

VAN

No, you don't understand. There isn't a doctor here. You'll have to wait for a doctor.

WOMAN

Baby come.

VAN

No, baby isn't coming yet. He won't come until the doctor arrives. If you'll just be patient.

ANOTHER ANGLE as the woman turns from her and begins pushing.

VAN--CONT'D

No. Oh shit. Please don't do this.

Van looks at the corpsman who only shrugs. She looks back at the woman and takes a deep breath. She relaxes.

VAN--CONT'D

Okay, okay. Here we go.

(in Vietnamese)

Breathe like me. Breathe like me.

DISSOLVE TO:

CLOSE ANGLE of a SCREAMING Vietnamese BABY BOY, just delivered. Van's white hands contrast sharply with the baby's dark skin.

FULL SHOT as Van wipes him off and wraps him in a towel. She shows him to the woman who CRIES happily.

VAN--CONT'D

You have a baby boy.

(in Vietnamese)

You have a baby boy.

The woman LAUGHS, then CRIES again as Van places the baby on the woman's stomach, wiping the sweat from her own face.

CLOSE SHOT of the BABY.

CORPSMAN

(O.S.)

Kind of renews your faith in mankind,
eh lieutenant?

CLOSE ANGLE of Van who looks at him and smiles wearily.

CLOSE ANGLE of the corpsman, smiling. He reaches into his coat and pulls out a joint, offering it to her.

ANGLE ON the two as they LAUGH.

CUT TO:

INT. HOOCH--DAY

ANGLE ON Van as she sits on her bed with a glass of scotch, talking into the mike of her tape recorder. A small tree branch, decorated in Christmas style, sits in a glass of water on her nightstand.

We HEAR the RAIN outside.

VAN

Thanks, Mom and Dad, for your tapes
and all the little Christmas goodies.
Christmas morning I got off duty and
opened all my packages alone. I
missed you all so much, I cried myself
to sleep.

ANOTHER ANGLE as Coretta ENTERS.

CORETTA

Van?

Van CLICKS off her recorder.

VAN

Mmm?

CORETTA

Swanson wants to see you.

VAN

Now? Shit, I just finished 13 hours
in O.R.

CLOSE ANGLE of Coretta, serious.

CORETTA

She says it's important.

CLOSE ANGLE of Van, wary.

VAN

Coretta, what's going on?

ANGLE ON both as they look at each other.

CORETTA

Come on.

CUT TO:

INT. SWANSON'S OFFICE

ANGLE ON Swanson and a WOMAN dressed in a Red Cross
uniform.

ANOTHER ANGLE as Van and Coretta stand before them.

SWANSON

I'm very sorry to have to tell you
this, Lynda. Your...your friend,
Lieutenant Barbara--

VAN

No.

SWANSON

Kaplan died yesterday. She was--

Van backs away.

VAN

No, I don't want to hear this.

Coretta reaches for Van's arm, but Van pulls away
roughly.

CORETTA

Van.

SWANSON

Lynda--

VAN

Major, that's impossible. She's perfectly safe.

RED CROSS WOMAN

It was a rocket attack. Nobody knew--

VAN

No! Nurses don't get killed. Somebody get me a phone. I'll prove it. I'll call her.

Van reaches for the phone, but Swanson pushes the receiver back on the hook.

SWANSON

I'm very sorry, Lynda, but it's true.

VAN

No, you're wrong. It's all a mistake, a sick mistake.

RED CROSS WOMAN

I'm so sorry. She...was on a plane... she was being transferred...Saigon... it was shot down.

VAN

I don't believe it.

CORETTA

Honey--

Van sits down and begins to shake.

VAN

I want my father. I want my mother.

Van breaks down and SOBS hysterically. Coretta comforts her.

CORETTA

Sssh. It's going to be okay.

VAN

I want to go home. Vietnam sucks. We don't belong here.

CORETTA

Honey, we all want to go home. We've just got to hold on and wait our turn.

VAN

You don't understand. I told her we'd be safe. We'd be safe...

FOCUS OUT

We HEAR "We'd be safe" ECHO through this FOCUS OUT, a visual swirl of jungle colors, mixed with red, creating a surrealistic impression. The ECHO then gives way to a soft reprise of HOW CAN WE HANG ON TO A DREAM by Tim Hardin.

FOCUS IN

INT. POST-OP--DAWN

The FLASHBACK is complete.

ANGLE ON Van dozing in the chair beside Gene's bed. Her hands are now in her lap. A limp HAND is evident in FRAME RIGHT.

WIDER ANGLE to include Gene, whose hand hangs limply off the side of his bed. The morning light shines brightly across them both.

INSERT SUBTITLE: June 1970

ANOTHER ANGLE as Van slowly awakens. She looks around, stretches, then takes Gene's pulse. Her face shows disappointment, but not surprise. She stands, takes the photo out of her pocket, puts it in Gene's lifeless hand, and gently places his hand across his chest. She then walks slowly to the post-op door leading outside. Wearily she pushes it open and is struck full by the sun.

The MUSIC FADES OUT.

CUT TO:

EXT. MESS HALL

ANGLE ON Van as she approaches the door. It is opened by two NURSES coming out.

NURSE ONE

Hey Van, hear you're getting out of this stinkhole.

VAN

Two weeks and counting.

NURSE TWO

What's the first thing you're going to do when you get back to the World?

Van looks inside the mess hall, grimaces, then looks back at them.

VAN

Go to McDonald's.

They LAUGH and walk on out of frame. Van ENTERS the mess, and we HEAR the two nurses SINGING.

NURSES

(O.S.)

We deserve a break today...

CUT TO:

INT. MESS HALL

ANGLE ON Van, Coretta and Jim sitting at a table finishing their breakfast. Jim hands Coretta a piece of paper.

JIM

Got a little something for you two shorties now that you're going home.

CORETTA

(batting her eyes at him)

Ah, finally...the confession of your love and devotion.

VAN

Uh, I'm trying to eat here.

JIM

Just read it, lieutenant.

CORETTA

Well, yes, sir, Captain, sir. I just love it when he pulls his rank, don't you?

Van GIGGLES into her coffee.

JIM

Ladies...

CORETTA

(reading)

To whom it may concern. The above-named individual is very shortly returning to the World after spending one year in the combat zone of Vietnam.

What is this?

JIM

Keep going. Keep going.

CORETTA
(reading)

In order that you may be adequately prepared to communicate with the named individual, it is highly suggested you thoroughly read and digest the following. First of all, her language will be totally Army-oriented. Please smile appropriately when she utters such terms as latrine, hooch, boonies, grunt, Victor Charlie, and roger that.

CLOSE ANGLE on Van who smiles and turns to look out the mess hall window. Over this, Coretta's VOICE continues.

POV of the usual goings-on in the compound.

CORETTA--CONT'D
(V.O.)

You must realize she has worn combat boots and fatigues for a year. Please gently remind her of correct, lady-like manners.

CUT TO:

A SERIES OF SHOTS over which Coretta's VOICE-OVER continues.

Van walks through the compound in monsoon, covered with red mud.

CORETTA--CONT'D
(V.O.)

Please do not get hysterical if she continually throws her feet up on the furniture or on the walls.

Van and Barbara ride through the night streets of El Paso in a jeep, LAUGHING.

CORETTA--CONT'D
(V.O.)

The first few times she should ride in a vehicle, please remind her to close the door. Jeeps do not have doors. Do not allow her to throw her feet up on the dashboard.

Van and Coretta first arriving at their hooch with their gear.

CORETTA--CONT'D

(V.O.)

If she insists on putting blankets, flashlights, books, helmet and flak jacket under her bed, please do not remove these items until she is thoroughly convinced incoming rockets and mortars are not likely in your neighborhood.

Van treating a Vietnamese FAMILY in E.R. She tosses linen into a hamper outside in the hallway.

CORETTA--CONT'D

(V.O.)

Please be as polite as possible when she throws her dirty clothes out in the hall. And maintain your sense of humor when she calls you Mama-san.

Van et al at a wild Bastille party.

CORETTA--CONT'D

(V.O.)

Her language will be extremely foul. She has lived in a world of G.I.s for a year. Have patience, and if that doesn't work, sign her up for a convent. It is advisable not to let her mingle with relatives or friends for several days.

CUT TO:

INT. MESS HALL

ANGLE ON Van, Jim and Coretta who continues READING. Van has turned from the window and is enjoying the letter.

CORETTA

(reading)

If you have any green objects in the house, remove them.

VAN

Burn them!

CORETTA

(reading)

Do not let her go shopping alone. She is accustomed to a small PX. She may well buy six bottles of shampoo, twelve bars of soap, and four toothbrushes because you can never tell when the PX will

CORETTA--CONT'D

(reading)

be resupplied. Never make any sudden loud noises unless you are prepared to pick her up off the floor. And never, under any circumstances, mention the word--

We, and they, HEAR CHOPPERS.

CORETTA--CONT'D

(reading)

Helicopter. In short, this kid is coming home!

CUT TO:

EXT. COMPOUND--DAY

FULL SHOT as one CHOPPER has landed on the helipad and WOUNDED are being unloaded quickly and wheeled away. A second CHOPPER spins unsteadily in the air above, dipping and cutting off a third CHOPPER.

ANGLE ON Jim, Coretta and Van helping with the wounded. Jim notices the unsteady chopper.

POV of the CHOPPER still dipping. It then comes down fast, smoke beginning to billow from its engine area.

JIM

(O.S.)

What the hell's going on?

ANGLE ON Coretta, concerned.

CORETTA

Shit.

ANGLE ON the chopper as it plops down heavily. Hospital PERSONNEL scramble to it and unload more WOUNDED, while the PILOT, bleeding from the shoulder, carries his CO-PILOT, bleeding from the legs and stomach, to safety. Flames shoot up from the chopper engine.

We HEAR someone YELL.

MAN

(O.S.)

That fucker's gonna blow!

ANGLE ON Coretta wheeling a wounded SOLDIER from the chopper. She catches up with the pilot and co-pilot.

CORETTA

Is this everybody?

PILOT

I'm not sure. I think they're
all out.

We HEAR a SCREAM. Coretta's soldier speaks weakly.

SOLDIER

That's Jackson. He's still in
there.

CORETTA

(yelling to the crowd)
We got one more.

ANOTHER ANGLE as Coretta and the soldier reach the
crowd. No one has reacted to what she has said.

CORETTA--CONT'D

I said you forgot one.

CO-PILOT

No time.

CORETTA

We've gotta get him out!

ANGLE ON the fire spreading back along the fuel
lines toward the gas tank of the chopper.

ANGLE ON the co-pilot.

CO-PILOT

I said we ain't got time, lady!

ANGLE ON Coretta who gets up abruptly.

CORETTA

The hell we don't.

ANOTHER ANGLE as Coretta runs back toward the
chopper.

ANGLE ON Van who notices what Coretta is doing. She
is distressed.

VAN

(yelling)
Coretta! You'll get killed!

ANGLE ON Coretta as she reaches the chopper and
disappears inside.

CLOSE ANGLE of the fire spreading closer to the gas tank.

ANGLE ON Van's stricken FACE as she watches.

VAN

Somebody's gotta do something.

ANGLE ON Coretta reappearing at the chopper door dragging a wounded MAN with great difficulty. She COUGHS harshly.

ANGLE ON Van and the pilot.

PILOT

Crazy broad. You're gonna die!

Van looks at him pleadingly. At first he cannot meet her eye, but then does so. He then looks at the chopper and then back at Van. Van looks away at the chopper.

POV of Coretta, struggling, but not giving up.

ANGLE ON Van and the pilot. Van turns to him with disgust and gets up to go help. He pulls her back and gets up himself.

PILOT

All right, all right. Goddammit!

He runs out of frame.

ANGLE ON the pilot as he runs toward the chopper.

ANGLE ON the fire approaching the gas tank. Flames higher, smoke thick.

ANGLE ON the chopper as the pilot gets there and helps Coretta lift the man and carry him toward the crowd who CHEERS.

ANGLE ON the chopper blowing up and we HEAR the EXPLOSION.

ANGLE ON the crowd, crouching, watching the blast in silence.

ANOTHER ANGLE as Coretta, the pilot and Van sit on the ground with the rescued man. The pilot shakes his head.

PILOT

Ma'am, I'd say you've got yourself a Bronze Star.

ANGLE ON Coretta who smiles wearily, COUGHING, catching her breath. She looks at the blaze.

POV of the burning CHOPPER.

CLOSE ANGLE of Coretta's tired, smoke-streaked FACE.

CORETTA

I'll settle for a ticket on the next plane home.

MALE VOICE

(O.S.)

Let's go, folks. We've got some work to do.

At this, she looks up and SIGHS heavily.

CUT TO:

INT. HOOCH--DAY

ANGLE ON Van and Coretta as they finish packing. All the personal stuff is missing from the room, giving it the stark, generic look it originally had. They work in silence.

ANOTHER ANGLE as two, GIGGLING, fresh-faced NURSES ENTER with their gear. They look very young in their shining, crisp new fatigues.

NURSE ONE

Did you see that anesthesiologist?
What a hunk!

NURSE TWO

Yeah. This is going to be a great year.

Van looks at Coretta with a half-smile.

ANOTHER ANGLE as the nurses PAUSE a few feet in from the doorway when they see Van and Coretta. They look a bit uncertain. HOLD on the four as if in tableau. After a moment, Van breaks the silence, picking up her bags.

VAN

You ready?

CORETTA

Does a V.C. shit in the jungle?

NEW ANGLE as Van and Coretta, luggage in hand, pass the nurses and PAUSE in the doorway.

VAN

Welcome to the war, kids. And
good luck.

They turn and leave the hooch. The doorway frames
the two as they move forward across the compound in
the afternoon sunlight.

Over this, we HEAR the HUM of jet engines.

CUT TO:

EXT. RUNWAY--DAY

STOCK SHOT of a World Airways JET as it taxies on
the runway and takes off.

INT. PLANE
MOVING SHOT

FULL SHOT of the CABIN with its seats full of tired,
apprehensive SOLDIERS. Van is the only woman. She
sits on the aisle, about midway in the cabin. The
atmosphere is tense, anticipatory. The intercom
CRACKS ON.

CAPTAIN
(O.S.)

Men, I want to welcome you to your
Freedom Flight.

CLOSE TWO-SHOT of Van and her seatmate, a haggard
SERGEANT with a bandage over one eye.

CAPTAIN--CONT'D
(O.S.)

It's all over now. You can say good-
bye to the land of Viet Cong. So
just relax and leave the driving to us.
We'll be home before you know it.

SERGEANT

Maybe. But we're not out of Vietnam
til we clear the airspace. I can
still feel the suction. Sucks so
bad, it sucks Freedom Birds right out
of the sky.

NEW ANGLE of the cabin, everyone deep in their own
thoughts, silent.

A SERIES OF CLOSE SHOTS of five or six SOLDIERS:
worried, teary-eyed, stoic, wounded, dazed, etc.

CLOSE ANGLE of Van, her face blank.

CAPTAIN

(O.S.)

I thought you would like to know we are officially out of Vietnam air-space.

She SIGHS heavily with relief.

SERGEANT

(O.S.)

Did we make it?

Startled, she looks at the sergeant.

POV of the sergeant.

SERGEANT

(yelling)

I said, did we make it?

The cabin comes to life.

ALL

(O.S.)

Yes!

SERGEANT

Does it suck?

ALL

(O.S.)

Hell, yes!

NEW ANGLE to include Van, the sergeant and several rows around them.

SERGEANT

Is it going to suck us back?

Van answers with the others.

ALL

Hell, no!

SERGEANT

Can you feel it?

ALL

No!

ANGLE ON Van closing her eyes.

SERGEANT

(O.S.)

Can you hear it?

ALL
(O.S.)

No!

SERGEANT
(O.S.)

What can't you hear?

Van opens her eyes, answering with the rest.

ALL
(O.S.)

Vietnam!

FULL SHOT of the cabin.

SERGEANT

What does Vietnam do?

ALL

Vietnam sucks!

WE HEAR CHEERS. Everyone shakes hands, etc., obviously relieved and elated.

CUT TO:

INT. CABIN--DARK

It is now quiet, bathed in darkness, with its occupants asleep or deep in thought. Overhead reading lights punctuate the overall dimness.

ANGLE ON Van who looks around her, puts away her magazine and turns off her overhead light. The moon outside her row window filters across her two sleeping seatmates and onto her face. She closes her eyes and tries to sleep also, but after a moment, she opens them again, staring ahead. She is afraid.

We HEAR the SKIDDING of a plane as it lands.

CUT TO:

EXT. RUNWAY--DAY

ANGLE ON Van as she checks her gear. OTHERS push to deplane.

NEW ANGLE as she moves slowly along the aisle with her gear, moving toward the door. At the doorway she hesitates, looking out at the ground below.

POV of an empty area, devoid of any kind of

welcoming committee, in the early light. There are only base PERSONNEL scurrying around in normal fashion.

ANGLE ON Van, disappointed, as she descends the open stairway. A SOLDIER hurries past her, pausing long enough to comment.

SOLDIER

So much for the marching bands, huh?

CUT TO:

EXT. BASE TERMINAL

ANGLE ON Van and other SOLDIERS as they are herded onto Army buses without ceremony.

CUT TO:

EXT. ROADWAY

ANGLE ON the BUSES as they travel along the open highway.

ANOTHER ANGLE as they turn off the main road, taking an exit ramp marked OAKLAND ARMY TERMINAL.

CUT TO:

EXT. TERMINAL

ANGLE ON the TERMINAL as the buses pull up in front and the PASSENGERS throng out and into the building.

CUT TO:

INT. TERMINAL

SOLDIERS are everywhere, rushing around and mobbing the different counters.

ANGLE ON Van at the information counter, first in a line of about twenty.

ANOTHER ANGLE (CLOSER).

VAN

But I've got to get to San Francisco International.

The OFFICER behind the counter is irritated and unimpressed.

OFFICER

Look around you, lieutenant. There's a transit strike on. There's nothing we can do.

VAN

You don't understand. My parents are waiting and--

OFFICER

I said there's nothing we can do. I'm sorry, but you'll just have to find your own way out of here. Next.

Angry, she grabs her hear and pushes off through the throng.

CUT TO:

EXT. HIGHWAY

ANGLE ON Van hitchhiking, weighed down by her gear.

ANOTHER ANGLE as CARS WHIZ by her as she walks.

NEW ANGLE as she trudges along. We HEAR a car horn BEEP. Into the frame comes a CAR which has slowed down. As she looks in at the DRIVER with relief, he suddenly gives her the finger and speeds off. We HEAR the tires SQUEAL.

MALE VOICE

(O.S.)

Welcome home, asshole!

ANGLE ON Van, confused, momentarily taken aback.

ANGLE ON the SUN beating down relentlessly.

ANGLE ON Van, haggard and sweaty, still trudging along the shoulder. A Volkswagon BUS, obviously repainted and sporting a large peace sign on either side, passes her slowly and STOPS just in front of her. Hopeful, she hurries toward it.

ANOTHER ANGLE as she reaches the van and looks in.

POV of two typical HIPPIES, female driving, male passenger. They both smile at her.

VAN

(O.S.)

Going anywhere near the airport?

MALE

Sure are.

ANGLE ON Van who moves to put her gear into the side door of the van as it is opened for her.

VAN

Great. Thanks.

And just as she attempts to swing a bag into the van, the door is quickly SLAMMED shut, causing her to drop the contents on the road. She looks up at the passenger with dismay.

VAN--CONT'D

Wha--

POV of the passenger who looks at her with distaste.

MALE

We're goin past the airport, sucker,
but we don't take Army pigs.

He then spits on her.

CLOSE ANGLE of Van, stunned.

ANGLE ON the hippies, sneering.

FEMALE

Fuck you, Nazi bitch!

ANGLE ON Van as the van quickly pulls away. She is left staring after it, crushed.

NEW ANGLE of Van, again walking along the shoulder, no longer thumbing. Ahead of her, parked on the side of the road, is an old, beat up CAR.

ANOTHER ANGLE as she reaches the car and is about to walk by it when an old BLACK MAN steps out from behind the wheel. She STOPS, eyeing him warily, as he limps over to her.

OLD MAN

I don't know where you're goin, little girl, but I been by here four times since early mornin and you ain't got a ride yet. Come on. I can't let you spend your whole life on this road.

CUT TO:

INT. CAR
MOVING SHOT

ANGLE ON Van, silent and brooding, staring blankly out the window.

ANGLE ON the man as he looks at her out of the corner of his eye.

ANGLE ON Van, as before.

OLD MAN

People ain't all bad. It's just some folks're crazy mixed up these days.

CLOSE TWO-SHOT with Van in the f.g. and the man in the b.g.

OLD MAN--CONT'D

You keep in mind that it's gotta get better, cause it can't get any worse.

Looking at her, he shakes his head and turns back to his driving.

We then HEAR a TOILET FLUSH.

CUT TO:

INT. LADIES ROOM

ANGLE ON Van, now in her green summer uniform, coming out of a stall roughly stuffing her fatigues into her duffle bag.

CLOSE ANGLE of the TRASH BARREL as a pair of COMBAT BOOTS land in it.

CUT TO:

INT. SAN FRANCISCO AIRPORT TERMINAL--DUSK

ANGLE ON Van standing in a ticket line. Behind her is a CORPORAL. He bends over to WHISPER in her ear.

CORPORAL

Can you hear it?

VAN

Nam still sucks, but I can't hear it anymore.

ANOTHER ANGLE (CLOSER) of Van.

CORPORAL

(O.S.)

Sure you can. Everybody does. It never stops.

She visibly stiffens at this.

CUT TO:

INT. JET--EVENING
MOVING SHOT

ANGLE ON Van asleep in a window seat. We HEAR the DRONE of the engines. In front of her on her pull-down tray is an empty glass, three empty nip bottles of Cutty Sark and an ashtray full of butts.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. GYMNASIUM--NIGHT

This DREAM SEQUENCE takes place on prom night. There are festive decorations all around the room, with hundreds of young COUPLES, in gowns and tuxedos, dancing to the slow, rhythmic MUSIC--COLOR MY WORLD by Chicago.

ANGLE ON Van, in fatigues and combat boots, as she walks unnoticed through the crowd. Suddenly she spies a tall, blond BOY and his GIRL in the middle of the other dancers.

VAN

Gene? Katie?

POV of the COUPLE as they turn to her.

ANGLE ON Van whose face changes from one of delight to one of horror.

POV of the COUPLE whose faces are nothing more than bloody flesh. The girl LAUGHS.

ANGLE ON Van, SCREAMING.

MATCH CUT TO:

INT. JET--NIGHT
MOVING SHOT

ANGLE ON Van, SCREAMING herself awake.

ANOTHER ANGLE (WIDER) reveals her seatmate, an elderly BUSINESSMAN, shaking her with alarm. PEOPLE around them are staring. Van is drenched with sweat and trembling.

BUSINESSMAN

Somebody get me a blanket here.

ANOTHER ANGLE as a STEWARDESS brings a blanket which the man puts over Van. She clutches it, still shivering.

BUSINESSMAN--CONT'D

Are you all right?

Van, now embarrassed, is calmer.

VAN

Yes...I...it was only a bad dream.

STEWARDESS

Can I get you anything?

Van turns to the window, blinking and disoriented.

VAN

No, nothing. Thanks.

CUT TO:

INT. DISEMBARKMENT CORRIDOR--NIGHT

ANGLE ON Van, amongst other PASSENGERS, walking tentatively through the corridor on her way to the terminal waiting area. She STOPS, wiping her palms on her suit, taking a deep breath.

ANOTHER ANGLE as she walks on and rounds a corner.

ANGLE ON a CROWD of people greeting passengers in the usual fashion, with the usual expectant atmosphere.

CLOSE ANGLE of Van, looking for a familiar face.

DAD

(O.S.)

Lynda! Lynda! Over here!

She turns her head and smiles broadly.

POV of MOM and DAD, eager and smiling, waving at her. They are typical, Middle-America parents in their fifties.

ANGLE ON the three rushing together, enveloping one another in hugs and kisses. All are CRYING.

ANOTHER ANGLE (CLOSER) of the three.

VAN

You don't know how great you two look.

DAD

You too, honey.

MOM

At least they fed you over there.

DAD

And speaking of food, let's get out of here. Your mother made your favorite, and it's sitting home getting cold.

VAN

Lasagna?

Mom nods, tearfully.

VAN

Well, what're we waiting for?

NEW ANGLE as the three walk arm-in-arm out into the night.

CUT TO:

INT. HOME--NIGHT

This is a typical suburban home of a family proud to be American.

ANGLE ON Van at the dining room table where she sits eating lasagna with Mom, Dad and her eighteen year old sister, MARY, who opens a small box and pulls out a ring.

MARY

It's gorgeous, Lyn. I love it.

VAN

I got it in Hawaii on my R and R. Had Mary Van Devanter written all over it.

MARY

It's great. Thanks.

MOM

You know you didn't have to bring us back anything.

DAD

Just yourself in one piece. That's present enough.

VAN

I just missed you all so much.

MOM

And we missed you, honey.

DAD

How long's your leave?

VAN

Two weeks. Then I'm off to Walter Wonderful--Walter Reed. Five more months and I'm out. A civvie again.

ANOTHER ANGLE as Van, finished with her dinner, lights up a cigarette, much to everyone's surprise. Dad ia about to object, but Mom lays a hand on his to stay his protest.

DAD

So, Lyn, when did you start that?

VAN

I know. I'm sorry.

(stubs out the cigarette)

It's a fucker of a habit ot break.

We HEAR the SOUND of silverware hitting a plate.

ANGLE ON Mary stifling back a GIGGLE.

ANGLE ON Dad who stares at Mom.

ANGLE ON Van who realizes that she has sworn and grimaces.

ANGLE ON Mom who calmly stands up and starts collecting dishes off the table.

MOM

Lynda, could you help me please?

ANOTHER ANGLE of the table as Van too stands up and begins to clear.

NEW ANGLE as Van follows Mom into the kitchen, leaving the other two still seated.

DAD

What's so funny?

MARY

Didn't you hear her say--

DAD

Mary, I fail to see any humor in the situation.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN

ANGLE ON Mom who SCRAPES plates into the trash.

ANOTHER ANGLE as Van approaches and does the same thing, aware she has made a faux pas.

VAN

Mom, I--

MOM

I don't know what kind of language you used in--over there, but around this house that word is not to be spoken.

VAN

I know, I'm sorry. It slipped out.

Mom turns to Van and embraces her tightly.

MOM

I know you are, honey. It's going to be difficult for all of us.

EXIT Mom, leaving Van to SIGH. She slaps herself on the cheek for her verbal slip. HOLD. She looks uncertain.

Over this, we HEAR the CLICK of a slide projector and the HUM of its motopr.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM--NIGHT

The FAMILY sits looking at the screen, while Van controls the projector. The screen gives off the only light in the room. We HEAR the CLICK again as Van changes the slide.

CLOSE ANGLE of Mary in profile, lit only by the screen.

VAN

(O.S.)

Mare, this is where all those parties were held.

MARY

The Bastille, right?

VAN

(O.S.)

Right. And we stormed it more than once, I can tell you.

CLOSE ANGLE of Dad's profile, also lit by the screen.

We HEAR a CLICK as the light flickers on his face.

VAN
(O.S.)

Coretta Jones, my hoochmate and best friend in Nam.

DAD

A fishbowl? Rather unorthodox for Army issue, isn't it?

ANGLE ON Van, staring hard at the screen.

VAN

I wouldn't've gotten through it without her, Dad. They put her in for a Bronze Star with a V-device for valour. When it came through, the V-device was missing. She was told they didn't award things like that to nurses.

We HEAR a CLICK as Van wipes a tear from her cheek discreetly.

VAN--CONT'D

This is the O.R. where I spent most of the war.

We HEAR a CLICK.

CLOSE ANGLE of Mom's profile.

VAN--CONT'D

(O.S.)

And this is post-op.

Mom winces a bit.

We HEAR a CLICK.

VAN--CONT'D

(O.S.)

Triage. I took this the day I left. It's typical of what went on almost every day.

Mom looks very distressed.

ANGLE ON Mom and Dad who exchange worried glances.

We HEAR a CLICK.

VAN--CONT'D

(O.S.)

And this--

MOM

Lynda, isn't there something a little less gruesome you could show us?

ANGLE ON Van, surprised.

VAN

It was an ugly year, Mom.

WIDE ANGLE to include all family members. Mom gets up, looking sad, goes to Van and embraces her.

MOM

Honey, I don't think you really want to show these slides. Maybe you ought to just put them away for a while.

Dad also gets up and abruptly turns on the overhead light, a shocking contrast to the dimness it replaces.

DAD

(uneasily)

How about some coffee?

Awkwardly he moves off toward the kitchen, Mom in tow.

VAN

But Mom, Dad, I...

ANOTHER ANGLE as Mary comes to her.

MARY

Lyn, I'd like to see them. I want to know what it was like for you over there.

HOLD on the two sisters: Mary so fresh and innocent, Van so worn and tired. Van looks at Mary, then at the screen. She then begins to put away the slides.

VAN

It sucked, Mare. That's all you need to know.

ANOTHER ANGLE as Van intently puts away the slides. Mary stands helplessly behind her, unable to pierce the wall Van has just put up between them.

Over this, we HEAR soft MUSIC in the b.g.--SONGS TO AGING CHILDREN COME by Joni Mitchell.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM

ANGLE ON Van as she ENTERS with her box of slides. She STOPS and looks around the room.

POV of her girlish room with high school photos, stuffed animals, lacy curtains, etc. It is all pastels and innocence.

MATCH ANGLE (FLASHBACK) of her hooch room in Vietnam, with its stark dreariness, dimness and lack of color.

ANGLE ON Van as she now walks to her closet with the box and buries it deep inside. She then closes the closet door, leaning her back against it, closing her eyes. She SIGHS heavily. HOLD as the MUSIC continues.

ROLL CLOSING CREDITS

FADE TO BLACK
THE END

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