DEATH CAMP. A SHORT FILM BY SEAN COWEN

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FADE IN:

EXT. UNKNOWN LOCATION IN AFGHANISTAN, WITH A SCENIC VIEW OF SAND - MORNING

We HEAR the sound of whirling helicopters off in the distance. Five soldiers are SURROUNDING a fallen comrade, Private JOHN MCMILLAN. CLOSE on John's arms. They're not there.

FADE OUT SLOWLY TO DARKNESS, FOCUSING on John's face, which is filled with agony as his eyes look to the sky.

FADE IN:

INT. A BUS TERMINAL WAITING ROOM, POSSIBLY FROM THE 1930'S - IT'S DARK AND FILLED WITH SHADOWS.

We HEAR the sound of an overhead fan swirling as best as it can, though not with its heart in it. The lights are low and there's the FEELING of TIME in this room. WE HEAR...

VOICE (O.S.)

Next!

A good-sized woman, PRISCILLA, now stands in front of us, dressed in a white dress that looks like it may be from the 1930s. Or today, if vintage is back in style. She has an old-fashioned hat askew on her head, and she's WEARING some massive pearls that were once obviously shiny. She has a wide SMILE on her face that gets bigger, and the room now seems FILLED WITH LIGHT

JOHN is in the middle of the empty room, STARING hard at his hands. He's MOVING his fingers like a pianist at Carnegie Hall, and he looks to be in SHOCK. His perfectly pressed uniform looks like it hasn't seen a day of duty. There is a long PAUSE. We get CLOSER on his eyes and women will see tears in them. Men will, too, but they'll call it allergies. He's a soldier, after all.

PRISCILLA

That's you, son.

She has a soothing but firm voice and she's like that first-grade teacher that always kind of scared you, but you still knew you were safe with her. PRISCILLA is a black woman with kind eyes and perfectly manicured nails. She BECKONS him to walk closer.

This room CATCHES his thoughts and he LOOKS AROUND, taking it all in. The room is ethereal and lush, with those low lights and with the sound of soft

voices humming in the background, like the gentle humming of an air-conditioner.

PRISCILLA is STANDING behind the most abysmal, bleak, bureaucratic counter of all time. JOHN TAKES IN the room, and slowly WALKS FORWARD, STOPPING a foot in front of her.

He's been MOVING his piano player fingers the whole time. He TURNS AROUND and SEES no one else. It's just him in this big room. PRISCILLA SMILES at him again, and he visibly RELAXES. She REACHES OUT and TAKES HIS HANDS IN HERS, and LOOKS into his eyes. Her eyes TWINKLE and we SEE kindness written all over her face.

PRISCILLA

Now, sugar, here's the thing. You're dead.

JOHN suddenly PULLS his hands out of hers, She slowly REACHES OUT and TAKES THEM BACK, inside of her own. We SEE a million thoughts RUNNING through John's mind, all at once.

PRISCILLA

Hon, it's gonna be alright!

She SMILES at him, and we SEE his shoulders relax a bit.

PRISCILLA

Ten billion people before you have stood right where you stand. Whew!

She WIPES HER BROW, GRINNING.

PRISCILLA

I'm like Mac Donalds up in the sky!

SHE LAUGHS.

JOHN

But--

PRISCILLA

Sug, I know, I know. So many questions.

(a beat)

And you will get answers--

JOHN

But--

PRISCILLA

Sug, oh my sweet sugar, it's like this.

Here ...

She PAUSES, LOOKING AROUND THE ROOM, His eyes FOLLOW HERS.

PRISCILLA

This is like one of them 'ol Greyhound Bus Stations. A waiting place. We waited for you, and here you are now!

She SMILES, continuing.

PRISCILLA

And next, you're gonna ride ... a bus!

HE LOOKS CONFUSED. His fingers are still playing "Piano Man" inside her hands. She LOOKS at him up and down, and takes in his uniform, then CATCHING HIS EYES again.

PRISCILLA

Or in your case, a Humvee!

JOHN GRINS, HAPPY that she understands a bit about his life. Then he LOOKS even more confused. She continues.

PRISCILLA

Child, when you die, you come see me. I'm Priscilla!

She SMILES and LETS GO of his hands, PRIMPING HER HAIR. He doesn't respond but LOOKS completely IN SHOCK. Again.

PRISCILLA

And I hand you these.

She REACHES behind the counter and PULLS UP a small black Moleskin notebook and pen, and PUTS THEM in his hands that she's just PULLED towards her again.

JOHN

(slowly)

I really don't understand.

PRISCILLA

Well, you die and --

JOHN

I'm ... I'm ... dead?

JOHN looks full of agony. WE SEE a degree of realization hit him, and his voice is GETTING SOFTER. Much softer. He gently SETS DOWN the notebook on the

counter.

JOHN

I'm dead.

JOHN SAYS THAT like a man who's heading to the gallows, or who's being forced to go to the mall with his wife. PRISCILLA backs up a bit and GETS A STRANGE LOOK on her face. She does a quick once-over, and starts to SHAKE HER HEAD.

PRISCILLA

Oh, no. No, no, no. Am I gonna have a CODE BLUE on my hands again? That's 2,579 today!

(in sotto voice)

I always speed up that 'you're dead' part too much.

JOHN is now visibly SHAKING and GRIPPING HIS HEAD. He SLAPS THE COUNTER. Hard.

JOHN

Ouch! Okay, that felt real.

JOHN PUNCHES HIMSELF in his left shoulder a few times.

JOHN

Damn! Ouch! That's definitely real pain!

He WIGGLES HIS FINGERS again. Then he PULLS his right hand back and LOOKS at it. He's STARING at it. HARD.

PRISCILLA

Hon, that's right. Take it in. Take it all in.

PRISCILLA sounds like his mother, with her soothing voice. She TAKES HIS HANDS in hers again, PICKS UP the notebook, and gently PLACES IT in his hands. She's SMILING.

PRISCILLA

Those ARE your hands, Sug. You got 'em back!

PRISCILLA looks deeply into his eyes. She PAUSES, as if unsure whether to continue. She presses on, her eyes glistening.

PRISCILLA

And He loves you so much, baby. So much!

(a beat))

Now, you hold onto that notebook and don't lose it!

JOHN SMILES, as if his own mother had just spoken to him. He now has a fullon GRIN. He's lost in the moment for a minute.

PRISCILLA

John, do you see that door over there?

PRISCILLA POINTS to a door off to JOHN's right. JOHN LOOKS CONFUSED and obviously hadn't noticed it before. Nor the SIGN over the door, with WORDS IN BRIGHT RED that say: **THIS WAY TO CAMP**. JOHN LOOKS CONFUSED again. Very confused. (a beat):

JOHN

Ma'am?

PRISCILLA

It's Priscilla hon!

JOHN

Er - Priscilla.

(a long beat, as he looks
 around the room again)

Is this a military camp?

(a beat)

Is that what Heaven is for me?

JOHN looks PANICKED again, and SPEAKS quickly.

JOHN

Oh, God, at least I hope this is Heaven!

PRISCILLA starts to LAUGH long and hard, and TEARS start to roll down her cheeks. She's almost HOWLING.

PRISCILLA

Whoooo, ho, oh, wheeeee. Every few decades I hear a new one!

PRISCILLA is now GIGGLING and starting to lose a bit of control. JOHN SMILES, caught up in her joke that he doesn't get.

PRISCILLA

Oh Sug, this isn't a military camp. It's a death camp!

JOHN LOOKS COMPLETELY SHOCKED. He GRABS for his gun that isn't there, and turns to RUN. PRISCILLA GRABS HIS ARM, and she HOLDS ON tightly. There is a

LONG BEAT as time stands still.

Her fingers SLOWLY CARESS his arm, and JOHN starts to calm down a bit. PRISCILLA has her Mom face back on. She RELEASES his arm and there's a PAUSE.

PRISCILLA

John David McMillan, this isn't that kind of camp. I'm so sorry, Sug. My mouth is just on a vacation or something today. John. Sug?

(a beat)

Death Camp is where you get to go for six weeks and have a whole barrel of fun!

JOHN now HAS THAT LOOK of the world's most confused man. Or that of most husbands who have just pulled out their wives shopping lists.

PRISCILLA

It's gonna be just like when you were in Junior High School, when you went to that Space Camp you loved so much!

JOHN has no idea how she knew that, but he's starting to RELAX a bit. PRISCILLA has her biggest GRIN of all on.

PRISCILLA

It's a Fun Camp!

(a beat)

It's a camp where you'll play, and learn, and where you'll make decisions about your next adventure!

PRISCILLA LETS GO of his hands, and she WALKS around the counter and STANDS right in front of him, STARING into his eyes. She PICKS UP his hands again, and gently STARTS SLOWLY WALKING HIM towards the $\bf This\ Way\ to\ Camp\ door.$

PRISCILLA

The camp counselors are gonna make you laugh. Oh, how they'll make you laugh! And hon?

(whispering))

We really want to see you laughing again, my sweet boy. You need to laugh again.

Everything is now HITTING JOHN. He's dead. He gets to go to a summer camp. He has his arms back. He's going to have an adventure. PRISCILLA GIVES JOHN a BIG HUG and they HOLD like that for a long beat. They release, and continue

WALKING towards the door. They PAUSE about half way there and TURN towards each other.

The red letters LOOK MUCH BRIGHTER now. So does the whole room. It is FILLED WITH LIGHT. And suddenly, it's a BEAUTIFUL room. JOHN never noticed how stunningly beautiful it was until this very moment. He starts to TAKE IT ALL IN, looking at all corners of the room.

PRISCILLA

And that's where you're headed right now!
(a beat)

You know what NOW means, don't you son? Think of me as your Drill Sergeant in the sky.

PRISCILLA starts to LAUGH again, but we HEAR it as howling.

PRISCILLA

Oh I crack myself up sometimes. Every few centuries!

JOHN GRINS, and they continue to WALK towards the door. They're both SMILING WIDELY now.

PRISCILLA

Now march, soldier!

(in sotto voice)

I so love to boss these pretty boys.

JOHN

Ma'am?

HE LOOKS deeply into her eyes. They've STOPPED right in front of the door. Then JOHN TURNS AWAY and NOTICES THE DOOR for the first time, really looking at it. He's STARING HARD at all the door's details, and he MOVES HIS HAND along the intricate wood carvings in the door. It reminds him of something, but he can't remember what.

PRISCILLA

It's Priscilla!

JOHN

Priscilla? Is it fun?

JOHN suddenly is FILLED WITH TEARS. Tears which he hadn't had for his last four Tours of Duty, or even when both of his arms were blown off by a

roadside bomb. NOW, HE HAS TEARS. And they're FLOWING TEARS, held back for a very long time.

JOHN

Is it fun?

PRISCILLA GRABS JOHN and PULLS him in tight again. They HUG for a long BEAT, then break away.

PRISCILLA

Oh child, you're gonna laugh so hard your lungs will squeak!

JOHN SMILES and PRISCILLA SMILES with him. There's nothing but LOVE and WARMTH in the air now.

PRISCILLA

You'll cry so much that you'll think you were at a Chick Flick movie marathon!

(a long beat)

And John? You'll find more love than you've ever imagined. Love that you never even knew existed. Oooo, you are in for the ride of your life.

JOHN

In a Humvee?

PRISCILLA LAUGHS so hard it's like the room is SHAKING.

PRISCILLA

Child, every few centuries. Every few centuries! You made 'ol Priscilla laugh a whole bunch today!

PRISCILLA TURNS to JOHN.

PRISCILLA

Baby doll?

JOHN

Yes, ma'am? I mean, Priscilla!

PRISCILLA

Time to go choose your next adventure! (a beat)

Oh, and can you do something for me?

JOHN LOOKS THRILLED that he can help PRISCILLA now.

JOHN

Anything!

PRISCILLA starts to get TEARS in her eyes again. She LOOKS VULNERABLE and she's opening herself up to JOHN.

PRISCILLA

When you see my son, William...

(a beat)

Willy - He was a soldier, too, a long time ago. When you see my little boy, will you tell him that he still makes me proud every single day?

JOHN

Ma'am?

PRISCILLA

Priscilla!

THEY'RE BOTH SMILING now, and PRISCILLA is OPENING the door. As the door OPENS, we see ethereal light ENGULF their faces. It's a peaceful light.

JOHN

Priscilla, if he's your son, I'm pretty sure he already knows that!

After a LONG BEAT, they HUG for one last time. She GENTLY PUSHES HIM towards his camp, SMILING BROADLY the whole time.

PRISCILLA

Go on, baby boy. Get to that death camp and and start enjoying life! Er - your after life.

(she laughs; a beat)

Oh, you know what I'm saying. it's all good!

JOHN LOOKS BACK at PRISCILLA one last time. He SMILES at her, and we see TEARS rolling down his cheeks. He WIGGLES HIS FINGERS one last time.

JOHN

I'm ready!

JOHN TURNS and ENTERS the DOOR. After he goes through the door, the door and sign DISAPPEAR. PRISCILLA has a huge GRIN on her face as she WALKS back to

the counter. As she's walking, the room has become NOTICEABLY DINGIER AND DARKER, and we're back in our 1930's Greyhound Bus Station.

PRISCILLA

Next!

A SOLDIER suddenly APPEARS before our eyes, dressed in combat gear, and he's STANDING in the middle of the room, looking very PERPLEXED. He stares at his LEGS with an astonished look. He starts to wiggle his legs and he suddenly moves around the room like he's a Russian ballet dancer. In combat gear. He glides for a bit, then he STOPS ABRUPTLY.

TEARS start to stream down his face as he becomes more confused than ever. He finally SEES Priscilla behind the counter and he looks really lost. He STARES right into her eyes.

PRISCILLA

Have I got a story for you, honey child!

FADE TO BLACK.