

---

# HEROES

---

by

Robert Cormier

Written for the Screen by

David Wyn Jones

Black screen.

Super title:

HEROES

FADE IN:

EXT. STREET - DAY

A man carrying a rucksack stands on an empty street with his back turned to us. He is dressed in a black leather jacket, denim jeans and a baseball cap on his head.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

My name is Francis Joseph Cassavant.

I have just returned to Frenchtown in Monument. The war is over.

CLOSE UP ON:

FRANCIS' FACE, HEAVILY BANDAGED

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

And I have no face.

FRANCIS has severe injuries to his face and wears a scarf and a bandage.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

Sure, I have eyes and eardrums, but no ears to speak of, just bits of dangling flesh.

INT. ROOM.

FRANCIS shuts the door to his room.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

I am staying in the attic tenement in Mrs Belander's three-decker on Third Street. When I first arrived, I had been knocking on the door a while before she answered. She regarded me with suspicion and didn't recognize me at all. This was proof that the scarf and the bandage were working in two ways: Not just to hide what is left of my face, but also to hide my identity.

CUT TO:

INT. BOARDING HOUSE - DAY

MRS. BELANDER looks at FRANCIS from head-to-toe.

FRANCIS:

Hello, Mrs. Belander.

MRS. BELANDER does not respond.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

It was then when I realised she didn't recognise my voice. My larynx, as Dr. Abrams put it, was also damaged by the grenade and although I can speak, my voice is so much lower than it used to, and much more hoarse. Like a permanent sore throat.

MRS. BELANDER:

(inquisitively)

Are you a veteran?

FRANCIS:

Yes, ma'am.

MRS. BELANDER:

Poor boy.

FRANCIS follows MRS. BELANDER up the stairs.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

The tenement I am staying in is small, with low slanted ceilings. Two rooms, kitchen and bedroom. The bed looks more like a cot. But everything is very neat, windows sparkling, the floor cleaned with wax, the black stove shining with polish.

MRS. BELANDER holds out her hand.

MRS. BELANDER:

In advance.

She is holding a receipt from her book.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

Mrs. Belander was always generous when I did her errands and paid her tips for my ten-cent movie tickets at the Plymouth on Saturday afternoons.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

She had baked me a cake for my thirteenth birthday five years ago, which seems like a long time ago. I paid her a month's rent and she wrote out a receipt on the kitchen table.

The table has a red and white checked oilcloth. FRANCIS' nose begins to run, and he presses a handkerchief to it, as MRS. BELANDER hands him the receipt.

CLOSE UP OF RECEIPT:

"TENANT" in shaky handwriting.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

The receipt should have read my name. But it didn't.

CUT TO:

INT. ST. JUDE'S CHURCH - LATER

FRANCIS lights a candle on a rack.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

It didn't matter, though. All that matters is that I'm anonymous. I'm not Francis Joseph Cassavant any more. I'm an anonymous tenant in Frenchtown.

FRANCIS kneels down at the communion rail and says a prayer.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

I pray for my friend, Enrico, and hope that he will one day be able to go home and adjust to his condition. Although, "adjust" and "condition" are two terrible words.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY. (FLASHBACK)

ENRICO, sitting up in a HOSPITAL BED. He is missing his LEGS and his LEFT ARM. A NURSE is tending to him.

ENRICO:

Thank God I'm right handed.

BACK TO:

INT. ST. JUDE'S CHURCH - DAY - CONTINUOUS

FRANCIS is still kneeling at the communion rail, still praying.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

I also pray for the souls of my mother and father. When I was six, my mother died giving birth to my brother, Raymond, who lived only five and a half hours. My father died five years ago of a heart attack in the Rub Room of the Monument Comb Shop although I always felt he really died with my mother all those years ago. I offer up prayers, too, for my Uncle Louis, who gave me a place to live until I joined the army.

FRANCIS looks up at the symbol of Jesus crucified on the cross.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

I pray. For Nicole Renard, wherever she may be. And I finally pray for Larry LaSalle. It's hard for me to pray for him and I always hesitate before I can bring myself to do it. Then, I think of what Sister Gertrude taught us in the third grade, words she said came from the mouth of Jesus. Pray for your enemies, for those who have done you harm. It is easy to pray for those you love, but it counts more to pray for those you don't. So I offer up a "Hail Mary" for Larry LaSalle, then I'm filled with guilt and shame, knowing that I'm praying for the man I am about to kill.

FRANCIS looks towards the camera.

CUT TO:

INT. ROOM - NIGHT.

FRANCIS looking at himself in the mirror.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

Before going to bed, I stand in front of the mirror in the bathroom. My hair is a mess as usual, thin in some spots, thick in others.

FRANCIS applies VASELINE to his CHEEKS.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

For some reason, my hair began to fall out in clumps during my first few days in the hospital in France and it has grown back in the same way. (looks at his non-existent nostrils) I look at my caves and the way the shape of my mouth has changed because of my dentures.

FRANCIS rolls the DENTURES around in his MOUTH.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Dr. Abrams said I should have a better-fitting pair made in a few months when my gums stop shrinking. He also gave me his address in Kansas City where he will be in practice when he returns from the war.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. DR. ABRAMS' OFFICE - EXAMINATION ROOM - DAY

DR. ABRAMS:

Great strides have been made in cosmetic surgery, Francis. One of the few benefits of the war. Look me up when you've had a mind to.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

Enrico used to say...

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY.

ENRICO:

(MORE)

Dr. Abrams looks a lot like Abraham Lincoln. Maybe he should try that cosmetic surgery of his on himself.

FREEZE FRAME ON ENRICO

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

Enrico always had something to say. About anything and everything. Sometimes, I think that he talked so much to cover up the pain. Even when he laughed, you could see the pain flashing up in his eyes.

CUT TO:

FRANCIS, looking at ENRICO.

ENRICO:

(CONT.)

If you wanna forget Nicole, here's what you do.

He places a DECK OF CARDS on the table.

ENRICO:

(CONT.)

You get out of the army and get yourself to a home for the blind. There must be a good-looking blind girl somewhere just waiting for a guy like you.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

I looked to see if he was joking. Even when he was joking though, it was hard to tell because his voice was always sharp and bitter and the pain never left his eyes.

ENRICO:

(CONT.)

You're a big hero. A Silver Star hero. You should have no trouble finding a girl as long as she can't see your face. A blind girl, now, is right up your alley.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

(MORE)

I'm not a hero, of course, and I turn away in disgust...

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL BED - NIGHT.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

But later that night, I lie awake and wonder if I could really find a blind girl to love me. Ridiculous. What made me think that a blind girl would automatically fall in love with just anyone?

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY.

FRANCIS:

(annoyed)

Forget it.

ENRICO:

(gasping)

Forget what?

FRANCIS:

About the blind girl.

ENRICO:

What blind girl?

FRANCIS:

(exasperated)

Never mind.

ENRICO:

It's Nicole again, isn't it?

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

I didn't have to answer because we both knew it was true. Nicole Renard was always the girl for me. And even though I am home from the war, I wonder if I'll ever see her again.

CUT TO:

INT. ST. JUDE'S PAROCHIAL SCHOOL - ARITHMETIC CLASSROOM (1939)  
- DAY.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)



I first met Nicole Renard in the seventh grade at St. Jude's Parochial School during arithmetic. Sister Mathilde was standing at the blackboard illustrating a problem in decimals when the piece of chalk in her hand broke and fell to the floor.

FRANCIS gets up from his chair to retrieve the CHALK.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

We were always eager to keep in the good graces of the nuns who could be ruthless with punishments, using the ruler like a weapon, and ruthless, too, with marks on our report cards.

The CLASS DOOR suddenly opens, and MOTHER MARGARET, THE SISTER SUPERIOR, walks in, accompanied by a little girl: This is NICOLE RENARD. She is small and slender.

MOTHER MARGARET:

Students, this is Nicole Renard. She is a new student here, all the way from Albany, New York.

CUT TO:

FRANCIS, picking up the CHALK and handing it to SISTER MATHILDE, before sitting down again.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

The pale purity of her face reminded me of the statue of St. Thérèse in the niche next to Father Balthazar's confessional in St. Jude's Church.

CROSSFADE SLOW MOTION: NICOLE and FRANCIS locking EYES with one another.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

After that first meeting, Nicole Renard ignored me, although I was always aware of her presence in the classroom, or the corridor or the schoolyard. I found it hard to glance at her, both hoping and fearing she'd  
(MORE)

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

return my glance and leave me  
blushing and wordless.

CUT TO:

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY.

FRANCIS, looking at NICOLE, chatting to other GIRLS.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

But she never did. Was the look that  
passed between us that first day a  
wish of my imagination?  
Luckily, she became friends with  
Marie LaCroix, who lived above us on  
the third floor of our house on Fifth  
Street.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS.

NICOLE and MARIE LACROIX walk down the street at night.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

The girls often walked home from  
school together -- Nicole lived one  
street over on Sixth -- and I trailed  
after them, happy to be following in  
Nicole's footsteps. They giggled and  
laughed, their school books pressed  
against their chests, and I hoped  
that one of Nicole's books would fall  
to the ground so that I could rush  
forward and pick it up. Once in a  
while, Nicole visited Marie on the  
third floor, and I lurked on the  
piazza below, trying to listen to  
their conversations, hoping to hear  
my name. I heard only the murmur of  
their voices and occasional bursts of  
laughter.

FRANCIS is standing at the BANISTER of the PIAZZA.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

(MORE)

I waited for Nicole to come down the stairs so that I could get a glimpse of her and perhaps catch her attention. She'd come into view, my mouth would instantly dry up and I would look away, afraid that my voice would emerge as a humiliating squeak if I tried to say hello. A moment later, I'd hear her footsteps fading away and I'd plunge into an agony of regret, vowing to talk to her the next time.

FRANCIS watches as NICOLE and MARIE walk right past him.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Often, in the evening, when families gathered on the piazzas, the men drinking beer they had brewed in big crocks in the dirt-floored cellars and the women mending socks and knitting as they chatted, I'd seek out Marie and try to get her to mention Nicole Renard. Although we were separated by that chasm of being twelve years old, when boys and girls barely acknowledged each other's existence, Marie and I spoke to each other once in a while because we lived in the same three-decker.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT.

MARIE:

(PRE-LAP)

You know, Sister Mathilde has trouble with her digestion, right!?

FRANCIS:

Really?!

MARIE:

Yeah! Remember that arithmetic lesson we had two weeks ago? She had to leave the room in order to burp!

FRANCIS:

(laughing hard)

I know!

MARIE:

She even does her farts in the  
corridor!

MARIE imitates SISTER MATHILDE's farts, and FRANCIS laughs uncontrollably, before stopping.

MARIE:

Hey, Francis.

FRANCIS looks towards her.

MARIE:

(CONT.)

Do you like baseball?

FRANCIS:

Yeah. Why?

MARIE:

(CONT.)

My brother, Vincent, is an all-star shortstop for the Frenchtown Tigers in the Twilight Industrial League.

FRANCIS:

(amazed)

Really?

MARIE:

It's true.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

My father had been an all-star catcher for the Frenchtown Tigers years before. They called him "Lefty" because of his left-handed talents.

MARIE is still talking.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

During my conversation with Marie, I kept wondering how to bring Nicole Renard into it. She had no brothers and sisters about whom I could inquire. I didn't know whether she liked to read or who her favourite  
(MORE)

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

movie stars might be. Finally, I took the plunge. We had fallen into a comfortable silence, listening to the men arguing about the Red Sox, and I said...

FRANCIS:

(to MARIE)

Nicole Renard seems very nice.

MARIE looks inquisitively towards FRANCIS.

MARIE:

(staggered)

Yes. Yes, she is.

MARIE looks flabbergasted.

MARIE:

(CONT.)

Do you like her?

FRANCIS:

Who?

MARIE:

Nicole Renard.

FRANCIS:

(exasperated)

Er... I don't know.

MARIE:

Then why did you ask about her?

FRANCIS:

I...don't know.

MARIE:

(deadpan)

Francis?

FRANCIS:

(relenting)

OK, I like her.

FREEZE FRAME ON FRANCIS

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

At this point, I wanted to shout out that I loved her with all my heart from the rooftops. But I'd only look silly.

FRANCIS:

Please don't tell her, please.

MARIE:

(after a short pause)

Your secret's safe with me.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - NIGHT.

FRANCIS is once again standing at the PIAZZA.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

Was it really safe? I didn't know.  
And I didn't much care, either. All  
that mattered to me was that I wanted  
her to tell Nicole Renard that I  
loved her.

MARIE and NICOLE walk past FRANCIS.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Three days later, Marie and Nicole  
passed time together again on the  
piazza above me. I sat reading "The  
Sun Also Rises", realizing that  
Ernest Hemingway seldom used  
three-syllable words, which made me  
wonder if anyone, including me, could  
become a writer.

NICOLE:

(to MARIE, O.S.)

Bye-bye.

FRANCIS closes the book and sits on the bannister. NICOLE  
suddenly spots him.

NICOLE:

(to FRANCIS)

Don't fall off, Francis!

FRANCIS almost falls off, flabbergasted by NICOLE's voice, but  
regains his balance. NICOLE's words echo, as FRANCIS stands,  
shocked.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

That was the moment that Nicole  
Renard said my name. And I was too  
(MORE)

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

embarrassed to answer. I then began to wonder, does she think I'm stupid? Am I unable to have a conversation? Had she merely been teasing me? Or had she been really afraid that I might fall off the banister? The questions left me dazed with wonder. I never knew that love could be so agonizing. Finally, the big question: had Marie told Nicole that I liked her?

CUT TO:

EXT. LAURIER'S DRUG STORE - NIGHT.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

I never found out the answers to those questions. Marie and I never talked about Nicole again. Summer vacation had started and everyone had fallen into different routines.

PAN TO FRANCIS AND JOEY LEBLANC

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

One evening, as I hung out in front of Laurier's Drug Store with Joey LeBlanc and some other kids, I saw her walking across the street, her white dress a blur in the darkening evening. She looked our way and waved.

FRANCIS waves back at NICOLE, as does JOEY.

JOEY:

(to NICOLE)

Hey, Nicole, you've got a run in your stocking!

JOEY laughs at NICOLE, who tilts her head at the remark. She then walks away.

FRANCIS:

(to JOEY)

You know, you've got a big mouth, Joey.

JOEY:

Hey, come on, Francis, I was only kidding. What's the matter with you?

FRANCIS doesn't reply.

END FLASHBACK.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - DAY.

FRANCIS, FULLY BANDAGED, is walking in the streets.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

I feel like a spy in disguise as I walk the streets of Frenchtown, hidden behind the scarf and the bandage, making my way through the chilled morning, pausing on the corners, watching the people come and go, and then moving on when I feel their eyes on me filled with either pity or curiosity.

He walks past the BUTCHER standing in the doorway of the meat market, and the elderly MRS. ST. PIERRE who scowls her disapproval of him.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

I have places to visit now that I have returned and one of them is Sixth Street and the grey three-decker where Nicole Renard lived with her parents on the second floor at Number 212. I know that she doesn't live there any more and I have nothing to gain by going there but it's inevitable that I look at her house again.

EXTREME C/U ON FRANCIS, standing across the street, staring up at the blank windows of a BUNGALOW. A SMALL CHILD suddenly appears at the window on the second floor, as we CROSSFADE between FRANCIS and the little girl, looking almost at EACH OTHER, before the girl suddenly DISAPPEARS. FRANCIS turns and walks away.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)



Crossing the street, I climb the steps to the first floor piazza and look at the nameplates beside the black mailboxes. Nicole's name is no longer present.

The nameplates read: "LANGEVIN", "MORRISETTE", and "TOURIGNY". The "MORRISETTE" nameplate shines with newness and has taken the place of "RENARD".

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

CUT TO:

EXT. VILLAGE (1943) - NIGHT

MAN:

(PRE-LAP)

I don't know where they went, the Renards. They left without warning, in the middle of the night.

The man is NORMAN ROCHELEAU. He is three years older than FRANCIS. He is dressed in a MILITARY UNIFORM. We are in a village outside Rouen, France, as US Army soldiers sit down around a campfire.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

Norman Rocheleau and I had gone to St Jude's Parochial School and we talked about Sister Perpetua in the sixth grade who was notorious with the ruler. Extend your palm and the ruler would descend almost mechanically.

NORMAN lights a cigar.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Norman and I made a swap, my ration of Chesterfields, which I didn't smoke anyway, for his military edition of "The Great Gatsby" which I'd heard was a great novel. We continued to talk about the old days in Frenchtown as we drank *vin rouge* like the heroes in a Hemingway novel,  
(MORE)

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

sitting on the steps of a bombed-out farmhouse. As twilight softened the ragged edges of the broken houses and the wine began to lower my defences, I got up the courage to ask him --

FRANCIS:

(to NORMAN)

Hear anything about the Renards?

NORMAN:

You mean Nicole? - (Francis nods) - I heard you went out with her for a while.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

Hearing her name aloud on the evening air in a foreign country, I was unable to find my voice.

FRANCIS:

(to NORMAN, CONT.)

Yes, she was my girl.

NORMAN:

All kinds of rumours about her, Francis. She began to stay at home, didn't come out of the house except for the five-thirty morning mass with the nuns, that nobody else in their right mind ever goes to. She was like -- (gestures with the cigar, trying to find the right word) -- a hermit. Then she was gone. Her and her family. Left Frenchtown without telling anybody.

He turns towards FRANCIS.

NORMAN:

Have you heard anything from her?

FRANCIS:

No.

NORMAN squints curiously at FRANCIS.

NORMAN:

You're about fifteen, right? How did you get into the army?

FRANCIS:

I forged my birth certificate.

FREEZE FRAME ON FRANCIS

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

I didn't expect Norman to ask why I joined. Everyone wanted to go to war in those days to defeat the Japs and the Germans.

NORMAN:

Well, I'd better be going. My outfit is waiting for me.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

And that was the last time I saw him. He turned away and we saluted each other in a half-joking way, grinning, because we didn't think of ourselves as soldiers but only two Frenchtown boys in uniform. And I had not yet killed anybody.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. STREET - SAME

FRANCIS turns to go back down the steps of 212 Sixth Street, when a WOMAN holding a broom suddenly appears.

WOMAN:

You want something?

FRANCIS:

(trying to hide his face)

Uh...Do you know where the Renards went?

WOMAN:

(perplexed)

What?

The scarf has muffled FRANCIS' voice. He tries to straighten it.

FRANCIS:

(trying to pronounce the words distinctly)

The Renards. Where are they?

WOMAN:

They're not here. They're gone. All of them.

She starts sweeping the doorstep, almost as if she is trying to sweep FRANCIS away.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - LATER

MRS. BELANDER is standing in the doorway as FRANCIS carries two bags of groceries in his arms.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

Mrs. Belander is waiting when I return to Third Street, two bags of groceries from Henault's Market in my arms. I have stocked up on cocoa and bread and strawberry jam, and a variety of Campbell's soups in the red and white cans, mostly tomato, and bean and pea soup. Everything is soft because my gums are tender and it's hard for me to chew. I have also bought two bottles of pasteurized milk, a pound of butter and a wedge of Cheddar cheese, which I will store in the small electric refrigerator on the counter upstairs. I can keep going on a minimum of food because I lost my appetite somewhere in France and eat now only to sustain myself for a while.

FRANCIS places the groceries on the counter, while MRS. BELANDER puts the pot on the stove.

MRS. BELANDER:

I'll carry this soup up for you.

FRANCIS:

Thank you, Mrs. Belander.

MRS. BELANDER:

No boil, just heat. Oh, by the way, you didn't say your name.

FRANCIS turns towards her.

FRANCIS:

(lying)

Beaumont. Raymond Beaumont.

MRS. BELANDER:

(in French, subtitled)

Parents?

FRANCIS:

In Canada. We lived in Boston before, but they went back to Canada when the war came. I met a Frenchtown boy in the service. Norman Rocheleau. He told me about Frenchtown. He made it sound like a nice place to live.

Doubt flashes in MRS. BELANDER's eyes.

FRANCIS:

My mother and father are waiting for me in Canada. But I have to report to Fort Delta for treatments for a while.

MRS. BELANDER:

(in French, subtitled)

You speak French?

FREEZE FRAME ON FRANCIS

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

I shake my head, no. The only reason I can understand French is because of the eight years I spent with the sisters at St. Jude's but have never been able to speak the language correctly.

MRS. BELANDER:

(sighing)

Poor boy.

CUT TO:

INT. ROOM - NIGHT.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

I make myself a cup of cocoa, stalling, delaying the moment of going to bed, despite the cold. I long to go to sleep, but I know that the dreams will begin when I close my eyes and drift off.

INT. BATHROOM - SAME.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

In the bathroom, I apply more  
Vaseline to my cheeks.

CUT TO:

INT. ROOM - SAME.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Finally, I slip into bed. Mrs. Belander has provided me with extra blankets and I pull them up to my chin. I double the pillow under my head to prevent the phlegm from running down my throat, causing me to choke and cough. I can never trace the moment when I finally fall asleep, that blurred line between wakefulness and oblivion. While I wait, I silently recite the names of the guys in my platoon --

FRANCIS:

(to himself)

Richards, Eisenberg, Chambers, Smith...  
Eddie, Erwin, Blinky, Jack...

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

I don't want to think about them, those GIs in my platoon. I don't want to recite their names. I want to forget what happened there in France but every night the recitation begins, like a litany, the names of the GIs like beads on a rosary.

CUT TO:

EXT. VILLAGE - (1943) DUSK. (DREAM SEQUENCE)

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

I close my eyes and see them advancing in scattered groups through the abandoned village, ruined homes, debris-cluttered streets. Our rifles  
(MORE)

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

ready, late afternoon shadows obscuring the windows, doorways and alley entrances. I can hear Henry Johnson breathing heavily, and Blinky Chambers whistling between his teeth, and the village, too still, too quiet.

SONNY ORLANDI:

Jesus.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

When someone like Sonny Orlandi says something like that, it means they're scared. Scared shitless like everybody else. Clenched fists holding firearms, quiet curses floating on the air, but unlike the war movies at the Plymouth, nobody displaying heroics or bravado. We are probably taking the final steps of our lives in this village whose name we don't even know and other villages are waiting ahead of us and Eddie Richards asks of nobody in particular--

EDDIE RICHARDS:

What the fuck are we doing here, anyway?

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Poor Eddie has been clutching his stomach for the past three days because of his diarrhoea, carrying the stink all around him to the extent that everybody has been avoiding his presence.

BLAM! Gunfire suddenly breaks out, and the platoon opens fire on two German soldiers in white uniforms. The platoon runs for cover, and takes shelter in a narrow alley. FRANCIS spots one of the soldiers, and opens fire, and the soldier's head explodes like a ripe tomato, and the other is cut in half, with both halves tumbling to the ground.

INSERT CUT: FRANCIS turns over in his bed -

GERMAN OFFICER 2:

Mama! Mama!

He is screaming in excruciating pain. FRANCIS looks down at him and the OTHER SOLDIER. They are BOYS with apple cheeks, too young to shave. Just like him.

EDDIE:

Hey, Francis, come on!

EDDIE and FRANCIS scramble out of the ALLEY and into the woods, and stumble upon JACK SMITH, BILLY O'BRIEN and HENRY JOHNSON all wounded, with HENRY's chest ripped open by shrapnel, and JACK and BILLY dead.

END DREAM SEQUENCE

INT. ROOM - MORNING.

FRANCIS jerks awake in his room, breathing heavily.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

The morning sun slashes my eyelids  
and I blink at daylight spilling  
through the window. I have survived  
another night, endured the dreams and  
the memories again, although I'm not  
sure any more which are the dreams  
and which are the memories.

FRANCIS coughs hard.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

My limbs are stiff, and the raw  
places of my flesh sting, but I grope  
from the bed, coughing, my throat  
filled with phlegm. Ignore it all, I  
say. Count your blessings. I'm back  
in Frenchtown, and my body is still  
functioning. I have a nice dry place  
to stay and a mission to perform. And  
maybe this is the day that Larry  
LaSalle will appear on the streets,  
and I will be able to carry out that  
mission.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - LATER.

FRANCIS:



(v/o)

I tell myself that I will not visit the Wreck Centre, that there is nothing to gain by going there, just as the visit to Nicole's house on Sixth Street brought back only loneliness and regret. Yet even as I acknowledge the futility of such visits, I am walking in the direction of the Wreck Centre at the far end of Third Street, bending against the never-ending March wind.

A hand grips FRANCIS' shoulder.

MAN:

Land mine?

The man is ARTHUR RIVIER, who looks at FRANCIS curiously.

ARTHUR RIVIER:

Grenade?

FRANCIS does not reply.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

Before he enlisted in the army, Arthur Rivier was a star first baseman for the Frenchtown Tigers and hit booming home runs over the fence at Cartier's Field. I remember when he returned on furlough in his khaki uniform with the corporal stripes, along with the other servicemen home temporarily from the war. I wanted to be like them, these heroes, fighting the Japs and the Germans, going off to battles on land and sea. I was impatient to reach the age when I could join them in that great crusade for freedom.

ARTHUR:

(pointing to the St. Jude Club entrance)

Come on. I'll buy you a drink.

CUT TO:

INT. ST. JUDE CLUB - SAME - CONTINUOUS

MUSIC CUE: "Don't Sit Under the Apple Tree" by The Andrews Sisters

FRANCIS and ARTHUR enter the club.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

The club is where the young men of Frenchtown gather to shoot pool and play poker and drink beer and wine and hold Saturday night dances for their girlfriends after a long week at the comb and button shops. The rules require a member to be twenty-one years old before joining and every Frenchtown boy looks forward to that birthday.

ARTHUR:

You deserve a good drink, pal.

MAN:

Hey, Arthur. How you doin', buddy?

BIG BOY BURGERON, ARMAND TELLIERE and JOE LAFONTAINE turn towards FRANCIS.

ARTHUR:

(to FRANCIS)

What will you have, buddy?

FRANCIS:

Beer.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

The first time I drank beer was in the English hospital when Enrico bribed a male nurse on the late shift to bring us a few bottles. The beer was warm and bitter but at least a change from the medicine I had to swallow every day.

FRANCIS lifts his scarf to gulp his beer.

ARTHUR:

(to BIG BOY)

Hey, now that the war is over, what do you think would be better to be a cop or a fireman?

BIG BOY:

Definitely a fireman. Those guys have the best career because you don't need to march or walk as a fireman.

ARTHUR:

Well, with my luck, as a cop, I'd end up walking a beat. And I'm not walking any more, the infantry spoiled my feet.

ARMAND:

I could never climb a ladder. Besides, cops will be riding in cars on patrol from now on. Walking or riding, no more piece work at the shop for me.

JOE:

College for me. The GI Bill. Government's willing to pay, so I'm going.

ARTHUR:

(laughing)

You didn't even graduate from high school!

All the GUYS, except for FRANCIS, laugh at JOE's words.

JOE:

I can make up the studies. They're going all-out for veterans. I'm going to college, and I'm gonna be a teacher.

ARMAND:

Sister Martha must be turning over in her grave!

ARTHUR:

That would be a trick. I saw her last week. Still knocking guys around in the eighth grade. No bigger than a peanut and she still knocks them around.

BIG BOY:

(laughing)

The way she knocked you.

END MUSIC CUE

MUSIC CUE: "I'll Be With You In Apple Blossom Time" by The Andrews Sisters

ARTHUR:

(to FRANCIS)

You don't talk so much, do you?

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

I want to ask about Larry LaSalle, if anyone knows when and if he's coming back but I don't wanna call more attention to myself. The scarf and the bandage are enough to cause curiosity.

ARTHUR:

It's OK. You've earned the right not to talk.

CLOSE UP ON FRANCIS

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

What if I told him that I was Francis Cassavant, who chased balls behind the bases when the Frenchtown Tigers played their crosstown rivals, the West Side Knights, for the Monument championship? That I'm not the hero he thinks I am, not like the other veterans here in the St. Jude Club.

END MUSIC CUE.

EXT. ST. JUDE CLUB - LATER.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

As the big argument about cops and firemen continues, I slip out of the bar unnoticed, into the March dampness of Third Street. I make my way through the throng of shoppers and school kids leaving St. Jude's School, my identity protected by the  
(MORE)

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

scarf and the bandage. My head is light from the beer because I haven't eaten since my breakfast when I forced myself to drink the coffee and eat the oatmeal.

FRANCIS walks towards an abandoned, boarded up building.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

I am on my way, of course, to the Wreck Centre.

The SIGN on the building, with the words: "FRENCHTOWN REC. CENTRE" faded and barely visible above the front door. The door's red paint has turned pink. FRANCIS' nose starts to run, and he wipes it on his scarf.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Some people always used to say that the Wreck Centre was a place of bad luck. Others said it was a place of doom. It was once known as Grenier's Hall, and the children of Frenchtown, including myself, often heard its tragic story.

FRANCIS looks up at the building.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

It wasn't always tragic, however. The hall had been a happy place filled with happy events, like gala dances and fancy balls to mark occasions like New Year's Eve and the Fourth of July. It became a traditional place for wedding receptions, the bridal party marching the length of Third Street to the hall after the wedding mass at St. Jude's. Until the wedding of Marie-Blanche Touraine.

INT. WRECK CENTER (1939) - DAY (FLASHBACK)

A wedding reception is taking place in the hall.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Marie-Blanche had married an Irishman by the name of Dennis O'Brien from the Plains, North Monument, after breaking off her engagement to Hervey Rochelle, the shipping room foreman at the Monument Comb Shop.

MARIE-BLANCHE and DENNIS are cutting the wedding cake, when HERVEY bursts in, holding a gun.

HERVEY:

Marie! You're dead, you fucking bitch!

BLAM! HERVEY opens fire, striking MARIE-BLANCHE in the abdomen, before shooting DENNIS in the back.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

When Marie-Blanche and Dennis were shot on their wedding day, it was the end of Grenier Hall as a festive gathering place.

CUT TO:

INT. TOOL SHED - LATER.

Police find HERVEY in the shed. His head is in a noose, and his eyes are open, blood-shot and lifeless, as is his body.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Hervey was found hanged later that evening in the tool shed behind the comb shop. And the doors were sealed and the windows shuttered.

END FLASHBACK.

BACK TO:

EXT. WRECK CENTER - DAY.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Children shivered as they listened to the story of that day of doom and always hurried by the abandoned building. Some claimed that on windy nights when the moon was full, the sounds of moaning and weeping could  
(MORE)

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

be heard if you pressed your ear against the front door. It became a Frenchtown tradition for children to listen at the door at midnight on the night of a full moon as a rite of passage. Before my turn arrived, however, Grenier Hall was given a reprieve and began a new existence.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

EXT. STREET (1939) - DAY.

A CROWD of people gather around the Wreck Center.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

I was in the seventh grade, the year that Nicole Renard came into my life, when the hall's transformation began. People rushed to the site one Saturday morning as word spread through the streets that carpenters and painters were attacking the building in a frenzy of activity.

FRANCIS watches on as trucks and vans pull up outside the Wreck Center. The words "CITY OF MONUMENT" are emblazoned on the side of the van. A team of WORKMEN appear from it.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

We learned that the workmen were from a new municipal programme. Over the next few days, the men worked frantically, scraping and painting, replacing doors and windows, tarring the roof.

A SERIES of EXTREME CLOSE-UPS of WORKMEN working on the Wreck Center.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

But the work was haphazard. Workers dropped hammers....

A hammer falls onto the ground in front of a woman and her child.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Spilled paint....

A WORKER knocks over a couple of paint tins.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Stumbled over each other...(worker falls over) and occasionally pulled brown paper bags from their pockets and took quick gulps from hidden bottles.

BARBER:

It's like watching a Marx Brothers movie.

The BARBER is EUGENE ROULEAU, as we FREEZE on him:

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Eugene Rouleau was the local barber. His tongue was as sharp as his razor, he never held back with his opinions, especially about the Japs.

CUT TO:

EXT. WRECK CENTER - DAY.

WORKERS pull back a sheet to reveal the newly-refurbished Wreck Center.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

When the workers finally completed the job, the building still looked unfinished. The white paint didn't completely cover the dark patches of mildew on the clapboards and the shutters sagged next to the windows.

MAN IN CLOTH CAP:

(pointing)

Hey, look!

The sign "FRENCHTOWN REC. CENTER" is hung, but quickly slides from its place above the front entrance until it hangs at a drunken angle above the door.

ALBERT LAURIER:

(shaking his head in disapproval)

It's still a bad luck place.



FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

People nodded their heads in agreement, remembering the wedding reception of Marie-Blanche Touraine.

CUT TO:

EXT. WRECK CENTER - NIGHT.

A YOUNG BOY dressed in a cloth cap and braces crosses out the words "REC. CENTER" on the sign.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

That night, someone crossed out the words on the sign and replaced them with "Wreck Centre" in bright red paint. Although the sign was removed and restored to its original wording, the place was known forever as the Wreck Center to the people of Frenchtown.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. WRECK CENTER - DAY.

The big red doors of the Wreck Center are open as KIDS stand outside as a TALL, SLIM MAN steps into view, a lock of blond hair tumbling over his forehead, a smile that reveals dazzling movie-star teeth.

MAN:

(to the KIDS)

Good morning. My name is Larry LaSalle.

JOEY:

(whispering)

Is that his real name?

LARRY:

Yes, you heard that right.

The CROWD erupts with APPLAUSE as we FREEZE ON LARRY:

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

Larry LaSalle had the broad shoulders of an athlete and the narrow hips of a dancer. In fact, he was both.

CUT TO:

EXT. BASEBALL FIELD - DAY.

LARRY strikes a home run at the sandlot.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

He swung the bat with authority as he hit home runs in games at the sandlot next door and later led us through vigorous exercises and calisthenics.

CUT TO:

INT. DANCE FLOOR.

LARRY dances with a GIRL in a pink dress.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

He was also a dancer, with a touch of Fred Astaire in his walk, his feet barely touching the floor. He could tap-dance with machine-gun speed and make daring leaps across the stage. But he was most of all a teacher, leading classes in dancing, arts and crafts, organizing a choral group, directing musical shows.

INT. WRECK CENTER - DAY.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

The Wreck Center became my headquarters in the seventh and eighth grades, a place away from the sidewalks and empty lots of Frenchtown. I had never been a hero in such places, too short and uncoordinated for baseball and too timid to join the gangs that hung around the street corners.

CUT TO:

INT. PLYMOUTH THEATER.

FRANCIS and JOEY are sitting in the Plymouth theater.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

I didn't have a best friend, although Joey LeBlanc, who lived on the first floor of my three-decker, often went  
(MORE)

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

with me to the Plymouth on Saturday afternoons. He kept up a steady commentary during the movie, like a radio announcer describing the action. He didn't like to read and I loved roaming the stacks of the Monument Public Library, where I discovered Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe and Jack London and rushed home with an armful of books.

INT. UNCLE LOUIS' HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Home was now the tenement where I lived with my Uncle Louis, my father's brother, a silent giant of a man who was a yardman at the Monument Comb Shop. He took me in after my father died, cooked our meals and cleaned the apartment.

INTERCUT: UNCLE LOUIS drinking a BOTTLE OF BEER while listening to the RADIO.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

He drank three bottles of beer while listening to the radio, volume turned down, until his bedtime at eleven o'clock. He seldom spoke but I never doubted his affection. He patted me on the head passing by as I read my books at the kitchen table and listened solemnly as I told him of my day in school, a duty he required every night at supper.

UNCLE LOUIS:

You know, you're a good boy, Francis.

UNCLE LOUIS gives FRANCIS fifty cents.

INT. WRECK CENTER - DAY.

FRANCIS is performing push-ups.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

The loneliness of the tenement drove me to the Wreck Center after school and weekends. Without talent for singing or dancing or arts and crafts, I finally joined callisthenics after Larry LaSalle made a speech urging everyone to participate in at least one activity. I picked a spot in the back row to avoid calling attention to myself, and Larry LaSalle didn't embarrass me by calling me to the front row where the shorter kids belonged.

MONTAGE OF LARRY IN THE WRECK CENTER, showing the KIDS how to make strips of leather into keychains, old wine jugs into lamps, lumps of clay into ashtrays.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Larry LaSalle was everywhere in the center, showing how strips of leather could be made into keychains, old wine jugs into lamps, lumps of clay into ashtrays.

CUT TO:

INT. WRECK CENTER - NIGHT.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

He even somehow tamed the notorious schoolyard bully, Butch Bartoneau, convincing him that he could sing, coaching him patiently day after day, until Butch's version of "The Dying Cowboy" brought tears to the eyes of everyone in the Wreck Center's first musical production, "Autumn Leaves".

JOEY:

He still beats up kids in the fuckin' schoolyard, you know.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Under Larry LaSalle's guidance, Edna Beauchene, tall, gawky and shy, became the hit of the show, dressed like a bum and dancing an intricate routine with ash-cans, winning applause like a Broadway star, as Larry used to say....

LARRY:

You people are all stars.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Rumours told us that Larry LaSalle had also been a star, performing in nightclubs in New York and Chicago.

INTERCUT: A KID, holding a newspaper clipping, walks into the Wreck Center.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

One day, someone brought in a faded newspaper clipping, showing him in a tuxedo, standing beside a nightclub placard that read "Starring Larry LaSalle". We knew little about him, however, and he discouraged questions. We knew that he was born in Frenchtown and his family left to seek their fortunes elsewhere. Larry had taken dance lessons at Madame Toussaint's studio downtown as a boy and had won first prize in an amateur contest at Monument City Hall when he was nine or ten. Why did he turn his back on show business and return to Frenchtown?

BACK TO:

INT. WRECK CENTER - NIGHT.

EXTREME CLOSE UP ON LARRY, watching the performance.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

No one dared to ask him although there were dark hints that he had  
(MORE)

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

got into trouble in New York City, a rumour Joey LeBlanc delighted in repeating, with raised eyebrows and a knowing look. Dazzled by his talent and his energy, none of us dwelt on the rumours. In fact, the air of mystery that surrounded him added to his glamour. He was our champion and we were happy to be in his presence.

CUT TO:

INT. WRECK CENTER - DAY.

NICOLE is on the dancing floor at the Wreck Center.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Nicole Renard began coming to the center that first winter and joined the dancing group. She had taken lessons in Albany and instantly caught the attention of Larry LaSalle.

FRANCIS is sitting down, watching NICOLE dance.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

I'd watch her glide across the floor, catching flashes of her white thighs, as she twisted and turned. She seemed to exist in the world of her own, like a rare specimen, bird-like and graceful as she danced, separate from the rest of the dancers. She didn't join any of the classes or do exercises or crafts and would simply leave when the dance classes were over.

CUT TO:

EXT. WRECK CENTER - DAY.

NICOLE walks out of the entrance of the Wreck Center.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

One day as she headed for the exit,  
drops of perspiration on her forehead  
like raindrops on white porcelain.

NICOLE:

Hello, Francis.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

That same strange teasing in her  
voice that I'd heard when she'd  
warned me about falling off the  
bannister. I gulped, coughed, and  
managed to say....

FRANCIS:

(to NICOLE, nervously)

Hello.

FREEZE FRAME ON FRANCIS

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

But I was unable to bring her name to  
my lips. She paused, as if to say  
more, our eyes meeting in the same  
connection I had felt in Sister  
Mathilde's classroom.

NICOLE walks past FRANCIS as he stutters.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Then, she was gone, leaving behind a  
sweet fragrance mixed with the musky  
smell of her perspiration, and the  
after-image of her body leaving  
through the air. She didn't remind me  
of St. Thérèse any more but of the  
girls in certain magazines at  
Laurier's Drug Store that set my  
heart racing and made my knees  
liquid.

CLOSE UP ON FRANCIS, looking at NICOLE.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Nicole Renard's visits to the Wreck  
Center made my life there complete.

(MORE)

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

That's why Joey LeBlanc angered me when he said he could feel that old doom hanging over the place.

One day....

JOEY:

(PRE-LAP)

I'm telling you, this place is fuckin' doomed! Just you wait, Francis! Just you wait til' I fuckin' prove you right!

FRANCIS:

You know you talk too much, Joey!

JOEY:

(after a few seconds of silence)

Wait and see, Francis. Wait and fucking see!

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. WRECK CENTER - PRESENT.

It has started to rain as FRANCIS, now BANDAGED once more, turns away from the Wreck Center.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

As I walk away from the Wreck Center in the rain, I realise that poor Joey LeBlanc, who died on a beach on Iwo Jima in the South Pacific, was right all along.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET - SAME.

FRANCIS walks down the street as the rain comes down.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

I have been in Frenchtown almost a month now, and March has turned into April but the clouds are still thick and low, and rain falls almost every day. I walk the streets and people begin to nod at me or greet me with a smile because I have become a familiar figure.



Residents greet FRANCIS as he walks down the street.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

My army fatigue jacket tells them I am a veteran and this is a season when all the veterans are welcome everywhere. Lingerin in front of stores, standing on the front steps of St. Jude's Church at the corner of Third and Mechanic, I watch for Larry LaSalle, for his Fred Astaire strut and movie-star smile. (pulls out his bag) I think of the wrapped up gun in my duffel bag and I'm impatient for him to come back.

CUT TO:

EXT. CONVENT - LATER.

FRANCIS stands outside the CONVENT.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Sometimes, I stand in front of the convent and wonder whether the mystery of what has happened to Nicole is hidden within those walls.

CUT TO:

INT. ST. JUDE'S CLUB - LATER.

FRANCIS enters the bar, where other VETERANS are waiting.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

The veterans in the St. Jude's Club always greet me with big hellos and slaps on the back and make room for me at the bar or in the crowd watching a close game of pool. They respect my silence and my anonymity. The talk now is of Chevies and Fords coming from the Detroit factories and the freedom of walking down Third Street without saluting an officer and wearing civvies instead of the uniform.

ARTHUR, ARMAND and JOE are talking to each other as we ZOOM IN on FRANCIS, sitting with a GLASS OF BEER.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Arthur, Armand and Joe are always there, fixtures in the club until they become cops or firemen or go to college or back to the shops, but this is the pause between one life and another and they drink beer and wine, and shoot pool and talk, always the talk, reminiscing about the days before the war, the nuns at St. Jude's, the long sermons of Father Balthazar, the ball games in Cartier's Park and the mystery of the stranger visiting Frenchtown years ago who hit a home run in almost every game and who many thought was a major league player in disguise, like Babe Ruth or Lou Gehrig. I let my glass of beer grow stale and flat on the bar because I want to remain sharp and alert at all times, in case Larry LaSalle should walk in or someone might mention his name.

The BARTENDER cleans a glass while looking at FRANCIS staring down at his glass.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

The old Strangler lets me nurse my beer and doesn't mind if I don't order another. He is the bartender, the sweeper and the settler of arguments. Arthur says he used to wrestle in the carnivals that came to Frenchtown, taking on the travelling champion who challenged local wrestlers.

INSERT CUT: The STRANGLER has his opponent in a stranglehold.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

He was called the Strangler because of his famous stranglehold on opponents.

BACK TO:

INT. ST. JUDE'S CLUB - SAME.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

The reason his voice was so hoarse was because he was hit in the Adam's apple by a carnival champ, according to Arthur.

The STRANGLER's hair is grey and sparse, his eyes clear and watchful and his muscles under his white shirt, his bow-tie moving when he talks.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

There always comes a moment when a sudden quiet falls in the club, as if everyone has become weary and yet it's too early to go home. The jukebox is also quiet. I watch and see things. I see the twitching in the corner of Arthur's mouth, the way his lips seem tugged by invisible fingers.

ARMAND stares into space, looking into the corner, with a sudden flash of terror in his eyes. A man is seen tugging at his pinned-up sleeve where his arm should be. This is GEORGE RICHELIEU. He turns to the others.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Has anybody heard when Larry LaSalle's coming back?

FRANCIS sounds surprised. ARTHUR looks at him curiously, before turning away and raising his glass.

ARTHUR:

Here's to Larry LaSalle, the patron saint of the Wreck Center.

ALL:

(in unison)

To Larry!

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

I wonder if he is making a joke or being sarcastic, but he nods meaningfully to me, holding his glass high.

JOE:

And to the kids who were lucky to know him.

All of the locals in the bar join in and the old STRANGLER pours himself a glass of red wine.

STRANGLER:

(growling)

To the Silver Star and the men who wear it, and to Larry LaSalle, the best of the best.

ARTHUR:

(to the STRANGLER)

Hey, Strangler, you got the scrapbook?

The STRANGLER sets down his glass, reaches under the bar and pulls out a big black leather book. He glances towards FRANCIS.

STRANGLER:

Your fellow comrades, they're all in here.

The cover reads "Frenchtown Warriors" in white block letters. He riffles through pages of newspaper clippings and pictures of men and women, all in uniform. He holds up the scrapbook at a double page, with headlines, articles and pictures of LARRY LASALLE. The biggest headline at the top of one page proclaims: "Lt. LaSalle Earns Silver Star".

STRANGLER:

(croaking)

There are lots of medals for outstanding service but only the Silver Star is for heroism and for gallantry.

Another headline halfway down the page reads: "LaSalle Captures Enemy, Saves Fellow Marines".

ARTHUR:

The dancer has become a hero.

ARTHUR realises who the BANDAGED figure is with him and the rest of the veterans. He leans towards FRANCIS.

ARTHUR:

(CONT.)

That voice when you asked about Larry LaSalle. I know that voice. You're Francis Cassavant! You used to...

FRANCIS:

(in a low voice)

Chase balls during the games at Cartier's Field.

ARTHUR's eyes widen and he points to a picture in the book.

ARTHUR:

You know, you have your own Silver Star, Francis. You're in the book, too.

He turns to the CROWD, but FRANCIS desperately touches his shoulder.

FRANCIS:

Arthur, please...don't make a fuss. Let me stay like this, please.

ARTHUR:

Oh, come on, Francis, you're a goddamn hero! You deserved to be recognized!

He shakes his head in disbelief.

ARTHUR:

(CONT.)

Francis fucking Cassavant. Falls on a grenade and saves--how many men was it, Francis? How many men were you willing to die for?

FRANCIS lifts up his scarf and sips his BEER, avoiding the question.

ARTHUR:

(CONT.)

OK, you have my respect. You don't wanna talk about it, I won't either.

He pats FRANCIS on the back.

ARTHUR:

(CONT.)

I'll keep your secret.

The STRANGLER places the book back under the counter and he swipes at the top of the bar with a damp rag.

STRANGLER:

It's good that I don't have to keep adding to the book any more. (Turns towards FRANCIS) No-one knows when he's coming back. But they all come back to Frenchtown sooner or later.

ARTHUR nudges FRANCIS.

ARTHUR:

Hey, weren't you the ping-pong champ at the Wreck Centre?

FRANCIS:

(correcting him)

Table tennis.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

I correct Arthur gently, remembering Larry LaSalle and my brief moment as the table tennis champion at the Wreck Centre.

BEGIN FLASHBACK

EXT. WRECK CENTER (1941) - DAY.

LARRY:

(PRE-LAP)

What's the matter, Francis?

FRANCIS:

Nothing.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

He found me sitting alone on the back steps of the Wreck Center, looking at nothing in particular. There was nothing in my world that was worth looking at. Inside the Wreck Center, the chorus was rehearsing for the "Follies and Fancies" production, singing "Happy Days Are Here Again".

LARRY:

It must be something.

He sits down on the step beside FRANCIS.

FRANCIS:

I'm crap at everything. I can't sing,  
I can't dance, and I'm no fuckin'  
good at baseball. I can't even get up  
the nerve to have a normal  
conversation with Nicole Renard  
either.

CLOSE UP ON LARRY looking at FRANCIS.

FRANCIS:

(to himself)

Jesus Christ, Francis, snap the fuck  
out of it!

LARRY:

(after a few seconds of silence)

You know I've been watching you,  
Francis. During callisthenics. You  
have outstanding reflexes. You have a  
natural athletic gait.

FRANCIS:

Gait?

LARRY:

Gait. G-a-i-t. I think I have the  
perfect sport for you.

FREEZE FRAME ON LARRY

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

In spite of my doubts, my interest  
quickly piqued. Larry LaSalle's  
opinion could never be dismissed.

LARRY:

(CONT.)

Look, today is Tuesday. The Center's  
closed for renovations for a couple  
of days to bring in new equipment. Be  
here Friday afternoon. You're going  
to be a champion.

FRANCIS:

I'll be here.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

I promised Larry I'd be there. Where  
else would I be?

INT. WRECK CENTER - DAY.

Caption: THREE DAYS LATER....

FRANCIS arrives at the WRECK CENTER to find it rearranged. A small stage has been built at the far end of the hall and two SPOTLIGHTS installed.

LARRY:

(walking in)

Don't worry about the lights. There  
for the musical shows.

LARRY picks up a white plastic ball and bounces it a few times on a ping-pong table.

FRANCIS:

Is this ping-pong?

LARRY:

No, table tennis. Ping-pong is a  
game, table tennis is a sport. Known  
all around the world. It's a sport  
you're going to dominate with your  
quickness and your reflexes.

LARRY points to two paddles on the table.

LARRY:

Alright, let's get going.

FRANCIS picks up the red paddle.

LARRY:

Now, first things first: When you try  
and serve, make sure you stand alert,  
lean forward, bend your knees  
slightly, hold the paddle in your  
right hand, level with your belt. Got  
it?

FRANCIS nods accordingly.

LARRY:

Good.

LARRY goes to the opposite side of the table and hits the ball to FRANCIS, who swings the paddle and strikes the ball, causing it to sail over the net. LARRY returns the ball, as does FRANCIS. The ball BOUNCES on LARRY's side, before returning to his. Bounce and return again.

SLOW MOTION: The ball spinning to FRANCIS' right. He reaches alertly, and strikes it with his paddle and watches it fly across the net.

LARRY:



(amazed)

Beautiful. You returned the spin.

LARRY and FRANCIS continue to play ball, as a CROWD of KIDS gathers.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

We played for almost an hour, as kids gathered to watch this new sport. Sweat pasted my shirt to my body and glued the paddle to my hand. I missed some shots, particularly the balls with spin which made them go wildly askew, but returned most of them. The crowd often cheered Larry LaSalle and once or twice a cheer went up when I made a lunging return.

FRANCIS fires a shot back past LARRY.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

Nobody had ever cheered me before. Eventually, he threw the paddle down, called a halt and led me to the new vending machine where he bought me a Coke.

LARRY:

Congratulations, Francis, you're a natural. Besides the reflexes, you have what I call sweet anticipation. It's what natural athletes have, anticipating where the ball will land, whether it's baseball, football or table tennis.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

I stood spellbound by his words.

LARRY:

You also have a great return. That's the key, Francis. Let the other players make the moves, put on the spin, kill the ball. You just keep returning it, good and steady. Your  
(MORE)

LARRY:

(CONT.)

opponent will get frustrated,  
careless, make a mistake.

LARRY gulps his Coke down in one long swallow.

LARRY:

(CONT.)

Tomorrow, I'll teach you the chop on  
defence and the spin on offence.

MONTAGE OF LARRY coaching young BOYS and GIRLS in the Wreck  
Center.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

And that's how it started. Just as he  
had lured awkward girls into ballet  
classes and ball players and bullies  
into being singers and dancers, so  
did he bring a sudden importance to  
table tennis. He gave lessons  
tirelessly, arranged contests,  
encouraged girls to take up the  
sport.

FRANCIS plays a match of table tennis.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

I spent hours at the tables, playing  
game after game, sharpening my chops  
and spins but focusing mostly on  
returns, trying to stay loose,  
flowing with the ball. My opponents  
often became frustrated, as Larry  
LaSalle had predicted, faces turning  
scarlet with anger while I stayed  
calm and composed, waiting for a  
mistake to be made. I didn't develop  
a spectacular kill-shot like Joey  
LeBlanc. My spins were not as sharp  
as Louis Arabelle's, who played with  
a smoothness that was deceptive: he  
stroked the balls almost lazily but  
they took unpredictable trajectories,  
(MORE)

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

never landing where they were expected. Yet I won my share of games and sometimes rang up a string of victories.

FRANCIS looks for NICOLE in the CROWD.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

I often searched for Nicole among the spectators, especially if I was having a fine game. But she was seldom present. One afternoon, as I defeated Joey LeBlanc with five successive points that left him speechless for once, I turned to find her eyes on me.

NICOLE brings her hand to her lips and flings it away. FRANCIS looks astonished.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Suddenly, I wondered, did she actually blow me a kiss? Impossible. Or was it? The paddle slipped from my hand and dropped to the table. When I looked up again, she was gone.

NICOLE is no longer visible in the CROWD.

CUT TO:

INT. WRECK CENTER (DANCE CLASS) - DAY.

NICOLE dances with LARRY on the dance floor.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Nicole was the most talented of all the girls in the dance classes, her slender body dipping and turning without effort, as if her bones were elastic. Jealousy streaked through me as Larry LaSalle tossed her in the air, letting her fly, defying gravity for a breathless moment, then caught her, pressing her close, their faces  
(MORE)

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

almost touching, their lips only an inch or so from a kiss, before he allowed her to slip down against his body. He applauded her, his eyes looking deeply into hers, as she lay at his feet.

INT. WRECK CENTER - NIGHT.

LARRY holds up a SPOTLIGHT above the stage as NICOLE performs.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

For the December production, he built an entire number around her and a song called "Dancing In The Dark". She glided in and out of shadows as the music played on a phonograph, and Larry LaSalle manipulated a spotlight he had installed especially for her performance.

INT. WRECK CENTER - DAY.

LARRY and FRANCIS play a game of table tennis.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Larry continued to give me lessons at the table and we played countless games against each other. His eyes shone with admiration when I made an unusual shot.

LARRY:

My ambition for you, Francis, is to have you beat me.

MONTAGE OF LARRY smashing shot after shot past FRANCIS.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

But Larry always won, with an array of attacks and returns that seemed effortless but always found their mark.

EXT. WRECK CENTER - DAY.

CLOSE UP SHOT OF A POSTER with the words "FRENCHTOWN DOUBLEHEADER" outside the Wreck Center.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

As the first weekend of December approached, excitement ran high through the Wreck Center when Larry LaSalle announced a "doubleheader" -- a table tennis tournament on Saturday, followed by the musical show "Follies and Fancies" on Sunday.

LARRY:

(to FRANCIS)

Nicole is the star on Sunday, but I want you to be the star on Saturday. Now, I'm not supposed to play favourites, Francis, but you and Nicole are special to me.

FREEZE FRAME ON LARRY

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

When Larry started talking about Nicole, for a moment, I wondered if he suspected my secret love for her.

INT. WRECK CENTER - DAY.

CAPTION: Saturday

FRANCIS walks into the Wreck Center, surrounded by KIDS gathered round a silver trophy shaped like a player posed to serve a ball.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

When I saw that trophy in the Wreck Center, I immediately pictured Nicole handing it over to me while I accepted it with the modesty of a true champion. I was not scheduled to play until the afternoon through an elaborate system Larry had devised to allow the ordinary players to eliminate themselves. The better players, like Louis Arabelle, Joey LeBlanc and me, were reserved to take on the morning winners.

The CROWD applauds as two KIDS play a match, as FRANCIS walks round the centre and comes to a window, and stares out of it. Then, he senses a presence nearby, a sudden disturbance in the air. He turns round and sees---

FRANCIS:

(surprised)

Nicole.

NICOLE:

Hello, Francis.

FRANCIS:

What are you doing here?

NICOLE:

I came to see you play here today.

FRANCIS:

Really?

NICOLE:

Of course. I love to watch you play.

FRANCIS:

(in disbelief)

You do?

NICOLE:

Yes, is that a problem?

FRANCIS:

(surprised)

No, it's just....I love to watch you dance.

NICOLE:

(amazed)

Really?!

FRANCIS:

Yeah.

NICOLE:

Right. Well, I'm having a party after the show tomorrow afternoon at my house. Larry says that's what people in showbusiness do. Will you come, Francis?

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

Her words filled me with both delight and agony, delight at her invitation and the instant agony of jealousy,

the way she had casually said his name - not Larry LaSalle or Mr. LaSalle, as all the kids referred to him, but "Larry", spoken off hand as if they were more than teacher and pupil.

UMPIRE:

(O.S)

Ladies and gentlemen, the semi-finals are about to begin.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

As the umpire called for me, Nicole said ---

NICOLE:

Good luck, Francis.

FRANCIS walks away from NICOLE, as we CUT TO:

A MONTAGE OF FRANCIS hitting ball after ball over the net.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

Two hours later, I had survived more games than I could count, time passing in a blur as the ball zoomed back and forth across the table. Serve and return. Spin and chop. The kill shot and the soft shot. My opponents went down in rapid succession.

JOEY LEBLANC slams his paddle down in disgust.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Finally, Joey LeBlanc, who was having a bad day with his serves, lost by a wide margin, 21-12, and went off muttering to himself.

JOEY:

(to himself)

Fuck!

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Never before had I known such a sense of destiny. I felt invincible,

impossible to defeat, the ball always under my control.

MONTAGE OF SPECTATORS cheering, gasping and falling silent as the match progresses.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Between games, my eyes sought Nicole and often spotted her smiling encouragement. The center seemed vacant when I looked and did not see her.

The SPECTATORS cheer LOUIS ARABELLE at the other table.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Louis Arabelle also had been winning contest after contest at the other table, drawing his own cheers and applause. We glanced at each other between games and exchanged grins. It seemed inevitable that we would meet in the final contest of the day. Each time I heard a burst of applause for the next table, I knew that Louis had scored another spectacular point.

SLOW MOTION: LOUIS and FRANCIS are now on the same table.

INTERCUT LOUIS/FRANCIS

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

At last, it was Louis and me. Standing across the table from each other. Both of us undefeated. Louis, tall and rangy with long arms and legs, ready to play his deceptive game, never tense, never hurrying. I prepared myself for his soft strokes and dizzy spins and chops.

LOUIS hits five shots past FRANCIS, catching him off-balance with the ferocity of the ball as it flies over the net towards him. A hush falls over the crowd.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)



Even when Louis had taken five quick points with his first round of serves, I didn't panic, in fact I told myself to relax: this was a day in which I could not lose.

FRANCIS fires back five shots past LOUIS.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

My own five serves sent the game into a tie-breaker and after that I simply planted myself six feet from the table and concentrated on the return. Louis lost three points in a row and for the first time I saw him flushed with frustration, trying harder, frowning and, finally, making mistakes.

FRANCIS hits a superlative shot past LOUIS.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

I reached 21 points to his 18 simply playing the game Larry LaSalle had taught me, being patient, remaining cool and composed while Louis pressed harder.

LOUIS misses FRANCIS' last shot, and the CROWD explodes into applause.

FRANCIS:

(joyously)

YES!

FRANCIS turns around to reap the applause, as LARRY cuts through the CROWD holding the trophy high above his head, with NICOLE beside him. She looks towards FRANCIS, and takes the trophy from LARRY and hands it over to FRANCIS. The CROWD falls silent.

JOEY:

(to LARRY)

You better watch out, Mr. LaSalle, Francis has got your number.

The CROWD cheers JOEY's words, leaving FRANCIS embarrassed.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

I wished I could find a way of gagging Joey LeBlanc and keeping his mouth shut. Then a cry rose from the crowd...

CROWD:

La-ree...La-ree...

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Calling him by his first name, finding the courage to do together what no one would do alone.

CROWD:

(CONT.)

La-ree...La-ree...

FRANCIS' smile suddenly fades.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

Cringing inside, my moment of triumph tarnished and trashed. I knew they wanted Larry LaSalle and me to play for the real championship of the Wreck Center. And then....

CROWD:

Fran-cis....Fran-cis...

The CROWD continues to shout and applause, and whistle.

JOEY:

You can do it, Francis!

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

Larry LaSalle inclined his head towards me, his shoulders raised in resignation, and then said....

LARRY:

It's up to you, Francis. How can we say no to the crowd and disappoint them?

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

Suddenly, I thought: maybe I can beat him. My play during the afternoon had been almost flawless, even the game

(MORE)

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

with Louis Arabelle, who was the best of them all, had been an easy win. Like the gamblers in the casinos who go on a winning streak, impossible to lose. Maybe I was on that kind of streak. I nodded towards Larry LaSalle and picked up my paddle. Glanced again at Nicole and saw her smile of approval. Planted my feet firmly on the floor and took a practice swing.

The CROWD cheers and the game begins. FRANCIS serves first before LARRY hits back, with FRANCIS returning the serve, and LARRY doing the same, and repeat until suddenly FRANCIS hits a shot so hard that it throws LARRY off balance.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

My point. Next point his, then mine again. Then his.

Much later....

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

We were halfway through the game, the score standing at 13-12, my serve, when I realised that he was letting me win, was guiding the game with such skill that no one but me realised what he was doing. He cleverly missed any returns by what seemed like a thousandth of an inch, feigning frustration, and placed his returns in seemingly impossible spots, but within my reach.

The noise of the CROWD recedes, diminished to a hush, broken only by the plopping of the ball on the table, the soft clunk of the ball on the rubber dimples of our paddles. A giant sigh rises from the crowd as FRANCIS focuses on the game.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

At that point, two games were being played at the same time, the sharp, take-no-prisoners game the hushed audience was observing and the subtle tender game in which Larry LaSalle was letting me win.

CLOSE UP ON SCOREBOARD: LASALLE 19-20 CASSAVANT

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

I was just one point away from victory. I resisted meeting Larry LaSalle's eyes. It was still his serve. Suddenly, I realised he could take the championship away from me. He could easily win the next two points. He could win it so easily and so humiliatingly that the crowd and Nicole would know instantly that he had been toying with me all along.

LARRY hits a perfect serve which FRANCIS returns with some aplomb. They enter a see-saw cycle, hit and return, repeating endlessly, near-misses and lunging stabs, until finally the ball comes to his side, a breathtaking shot that veers to the table's edge, causing the crowd to gasp. FRANCIS LUNGES forward to return the ball, with LARRY unable to do the same. The CROWD cheers for FRANCIS, led by LARRY, who grabs his hand and closes up to FRANCIS.

LARRY:

(whispering)

Thank you.

LARRY turns FRANCIS over to the CROWD as the cheers continue, his name endlessly shouted. Later, FRANCIS looks for NICOLE, and finds her waiting for him.

NICOLE:

You are my champion, Francis.

She kisses FRANCIS on the CHEEK.

NICOLE:

(CONT.)

See you tomorrow.

NICOLE walks away, as we PAN on FRANCIS staring at her.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

After that, I was looking forward to seeing her tomorrow. But tomorrow was 7th December 1941.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. ST. JUDE'S CLUB - NIGHT.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Arthur Rivier is slumped against the brick building at the entrance of Pee Alley and I know instantly that he is drunk. The street light catches his open mouth and the dribbles of saliva on his lips and chin. Almost midnight, and Third Street is deserted. Restless in the tenement, I had decided to walk the streets, telling myself that it was possible for Larry LaSalle to show up in Frenchtown at night as well as during the day.

ARTHUR drunkenly staggers to his feet and blinks as he sees FRANCIS approaching.

FRANCIS:

You OK?

ARTHUR's eyes are bloodshot, his lips turned downwards like the mask of Tragedy high above the stage at the Plymouth.

ARTHUR:

(drunkenly)

Nobody talks about the war. They talk about GI Bills and going to college and getting married and joining the cops or the firemen but they don't talk about the war.

FRANCIS places his arm around ARTHUR's shoulder to support him as his body threatens to slide down the wall, he lifts his head to the night.

ARTHUR:

(CONT.)

I wanna talk about it, Francis, my war. And your war, too. Everybody's war. The war no-one wants to talk about.

FRANCIS:

What war?

ARTHUR:

The scared war. God, I was scared, Francis. I shit my pants. One day, running across an open field, so scared I shit my pants, bullets at my feet and everything let go.

ARTHUR turns towards FRANCIS.

ARTHUR:

Weren't you scared?

FRANCIS:

Everybody was scared.

ARTHUR:

(scoffs)

Heroes. We weren't fuckin' heroes. The Strangler and his scrapbook. No heroes in that fuckin' scrapbook, Francis. Only us, the boys of Frenchtown. Scared and homesick and cramps in the stomach and vomit. Nothing glamorous like the write-ups in the papers or the newsreels. We weren't heroes. We were only there.

ARTHUR closes his EYES and slumps against the wall, as if the words he has spoken has used up all his energy. Shadows loom in the alley's entrance and FRANCIS looks up to see ARMAND and JOE silhouetted against the lights of Third Street.

ARMAND:

Poor Arthur.

ARMAND comes towards ARTHUR and places his arm around him, touching his face lightly. A deep snore flares ARTHUR's nostrils and flutters his lips as we PAN UP:

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

Poor all of this, I think, as I watch them lurching away with Arthur Rivier between them. A cold wind buffets the buildings and sends me hurrying back to Mrs. Belander's tenement.

BEGIN FLASHBACK.

INT. RECRUITING OFFICE (1941) - DAY.

LARRY LASALLE signs a form in the recruiting office.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Larry LaSalle was one of the first Frenchtown men to enlist in the armed services, announcing his intention on Monday afternoon, following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, a few hours after President Roosevelt's address on the radio declared that a state of war existed between Japan and the United States.

LARRY shakes the hand of the CONSCRIPTOR, and a PHOTOGRAPHER flashes his CAMERA, taking a photo.

INSERT: PHOTO OF LARRY AND CONSCRIPTOR IN NEWSPAPER HEADLINE.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

There was patriotic fever, mixed with rage over the sneak attack in the Pacific, throughout the nation.

INT. WRECK CENTER - LATER.

LARRY stands in the Wreck Center in a MARINE'S UNIFORM, the movie star smile gone, replaced by grim-faced determination.

LARRY:

We can't let the Japs get away with this. (Holds his hand to his head)  
None of that, kids. I'm just doing what millions of others are doing.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Larry's action became for us the beginning of wartime in Frenchtown. Other enlistments followed as fathers and brothers joined the armed forces.

EXT. MONUMENT SQUARE - DAY.

A CROWD of people gather round buses to say goodbye to the men who are enlisting.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

People gathered daily in Monument Square to say goodbye to the men being carried by buses to Fort Delta

to enlist in the army and air force,  
and by train to the headquarters of  
the marines and navy in Boston.

INT. FACTORY - NIGHT.

A group of WORKMEN take SHELLS and MACHINE GUNS from the back  
of TRUCKS into a storage factory.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

All the factories in Frenchtown went  
on twenty-four-hour schedules as they  
began to manufacture material for the  
war effort.

INT. UNCLE LOUIS' HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT.

FRANCIS and UNCLE LOUIS are eating supper at the dinner table.

UNCLE LOUIS:

(PRE-LAP)

We don't make guns and bombs, but our  
men need everyday things, like combs  
and brushes, knives and forks. Life  
goes on, even in the service.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

I heard rumours that the Monument  
Comb Shop where Uncle Louis worked  
was producing secret material in a  
special section of the factory.

UNCLE LOUIS:

(putting a finger to his lips)  
Shhhh!

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Suddenly, a thrill went through me -  
a wartime secret in Frenchtown!  
Should we be on the lookout for  
spies?

CUT TO:

EXT. LAURIER'S DRUG STORE - DAY.

A group of YOUNG KIDS hang out in front of Laurier's Drug  
Store.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)



Larry LaSalle's enlistment caused the Wreck Center to close for what people now called "the duration". The kids of Frenchtown hung out in St. Jude's schoolyard or in front of Laurier's Drug Store. Within a short time, the absence of young men on the Frenchtown streets was noticeable.

INT. ST. JUDE'S CHURCH - DAY.

FATHER BALTHAZAR is conducting the Sunday mass.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

At the Sunday masses, Father Balthazar prayed from the pulpit for the safety of our men and women in the services.

EXT. STREET - DAY.

WOMEN in UNIFORM walk the streets of Frenchtown.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Women, too, had begun to show up in uniform. They were called Waves and Spars and walked the streets with a pride in their step that wasn't there when they were shop girls in the factories.

INT. LAURIER'S DRUG STORE - DAY.

FRANCIS is sweeping the floors of the drug store.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Young people and women took over some of the jobs in stores and factories. Mr. Laurier hired me to work part-time, after school and on weekends, at his drug store. I ran errands, swept the floors, took out the garbage and filled the shelves with stock from the back room. My special pleasure was stocking the candy cases with Tootsie Rolls, Butterscotch Bits and the big five-cent candy bars like Baby Ruth

and Mr. Goodbar. Mr. Laurier, always suave and dapper in his white shirt and black bowtie, paid me two dollars and fifty cents a week, and treated me to a chocolate frappe on Saturday afternoon after handing me the money.

NICOLE RENARD enters the drug store.

NICOLE:

(to FRANCIS)

Hey, Francis.

FRANCIS:

Hey, Nicole. How are you?

NICOLE:

I'm fine. How's the job?

FRANCIS:

Great! Uh, what can I get you?

NICOLE:

Three Butterscotch Bits, please.

FRANCIS obliges.

FRANCIS:

A penny. So, I heard you've been going to the public library.

NICOLE:

Yeah, I've just finished reading A Farewell To Arms, I cried after reading the final pages.

FRANCIS:

You know, that's my favourite novel.

NICOLE:

It is? (He nods) Have you read "Rebecca"?

FRANCIS:

No, but I saw the movie.

NICOLE:

I did too, but I liked the book better. Which do you like best, movies or books?

FRANCIS:

Both.

NICOLE:

Me too.

Suddenly, the pair is silent. FRANCIS takes a deep breath.

FRANCIS:

Would you like to go to the movies  
sometime?

NICOLE:

(flabbergasted)

Of course. That would be great.

INT. PLYMOUTH THEATER - DAY.

NICOLE and FRANCIS are at the Plymouth, watching a movie.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

Saturday afternoons at the Plymouth  
downtown became our weekly date - the  
word made my head spin: I was  
actually dating Nicole Renard. We met  
in front of the theater and she  
insisted on buying her own ticket  
although she allowed me to treat her  
to Milk Duds from the vending machine  
in the lobby. The theater was always  
crowded and raucous, the Saturday  
matinees a special time for kids,  
with a cowboy serial and two movies.

A newsreel plays on the big screen.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

The Movietone News brought reminders  
of the war that was raging around the  
globe as the grim narrator spoke of  
places that had been unknown to us a  
few months ago - Bataan in the  
Pacific, Tobruk in Africa. We cheered  
our fighting forces and booed and  
hissed when Hitler came on the  
screen, his arm always raised in that  
hated salute.

EXT. STREET - LATER.

FRANCIS and NICOLE walk down the street.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

On the way home, we talked not only  
about the movies we had seen but  
about a thousand other things. I was

amazed at the lack of pauses in our conversation, how I always managed to have something to say. She had a way of teasing, which coaxed me into forgetting my shyness.

NICOLE:

What do you want to do besides be a champion at table tennis?

FRANCIS:

I don't know.

NICOLE:

Oh, come on. You must want to do something, Francis. Say the first thing that comes into your mind.

FRANCIS:

Alright. I want to read every book in the Monument Public Library.

NICOLE:

Good. How about writing books? Didn't you win Sister Mathilde's medal for composition?

FRANCIS:

(laughing awkwardly)

Oh...I could never write a book.

NICOLE:

I think you could.

FRANCIS:

(changing the subject)

How about you, Nicole? What do you want to do?

NICOLE:

Oh, lots of things. Such a big world out there. I'd like to help more in the war. Maybe become a nurse, if the war lasts long enough.

FRANCIS:

Didn't you spend time with the nuns at the convent?

NICOLE:

Yeah. I've been knitting socks and scarves for the armed forces.

FRANCIS:

(sensing a smell)

Why do you smell like cooked cabbage?

NICOLE looks at him suspiciously.

NICOLE:

It's the convent's perfume, Francis!

FRANCIS:

(apologetically)

Oh, of course. Sorry. It just smells weird.

NICOLE:

The smell's not that bad, Francis,  
but it's better than Evening in  
Paris.

FRANCIS and NICOLE pass the Wreck Center, leading him to sing "Dancing In The Dark" in an off-key manner, hoping to make her laugh, but she doesn't.

NICOLE:

(beat)

That was a sad party, wasn't it?

FRANCIS:

What party?

NICOLE:

The party we had. December 7, 1941.  
The day the Japs attacked Pearl  
Harbor. A place we had never even  
heard of. Suddenly the whole thing  
felt inappropriate. How could we  
celebrate a table tennis tournament  
and a musical show when our country  
had been attacked and our world  
changed so drastically in the space  
of a few moments? After that, the  
whole party broke up, and everybody  
went home, worrying that the bombers  
could fly over Frenchtown at any  
moment.

FRANCIS:

Of course. How could I forget? It was  
the day we realised the world was not  
a safe place anymore.

CUT TO:

INT. LAURIER'S DRUG STORE - DAY.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

After a while, Laurier's Drug Store became the gathering spot for the people of Frenchtown who bought the Monument Times or the Wickburg Telegram and discussed the progress of the war, shaking their heads at the swiftness with which the boys of Frenchtown became fighting men.

ALBERT LAURIER:

(PRE-LAP)

It's amazing how a kid graduates from high school, gets six weeks of basic training with guns and grenades, then goes overseas on a troop-ship and five months later - five months later! - he's fighting the Japs or the Germans.

MUSIC CUE: "Rosie the Riveter" by The Four Vagabonds

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

The small red radio on the shelf near the soda fountain blared the news of the day between wartime songs like "Rosie the Riveter", which celebrated the working women in the war factories, or "The White Cliffs of Dover", which the fliers saw returning to England after bombing raids over Europe.

C/U ON TWO LADIES reading page five of the Monument Times.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Every day, page five of the Times carried stories and pictures of our fighting forces, often announcing medals awarded for valour on the battlefields.

On one Tuesday afternoon....

NICOLE:

Did any of you hear about Larry  
LaSalle?

All of the customers in the drug store turn towards her, and a deep silence falls.

NICOLE:

(CONT.)

He saved the lives of an entire platoon, and captured an enemy machine-gun nest. It was on the radio!

INT. PLYMOUTH THEATRE - DAY.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

The following Saturday afternoon at the Plymouth, we were stunned to suddenly see Larry LaSalle featured in the Movietone News. He was unshaven, face gaunt and drawn, eyes sunk deep into their sockets. But it was our Larry LaSalle all right. Cheers filled the air, feet stomped the floor, almost drowning out the voice of the broadcaster.

MOVIETONE NEWSCASTER:

(on cinema screen, almost drowned out by noise)

A New England Marine is one of the great heroes of Pacific action, receiving the Silver Star....

SOUND FADES. CLOSE UP ON FRANCIS, staring up at the screen.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

That night and the following day, the people of Frenchtown jammed the Plymouth to see the town's first big war hero on the silver screen.

CUT TO:

INT. ENGLAND HOSPITAL (1945) - DAY.

FRANCIS lays back in a hospital bed, his face HEAVILY SCARRED.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

I haven't always worn the scarf and the bandage. In the hospital in England, in its grounds and in the surrounding countryside, I enjoyed the sting of air on my flesh, once the bandages were removed. I had barely glimpsed myself in mirrors, windows or glass doors. Until the day I went on a three day pass in London.

EXT. BAKER STREET, LONDON - DAY.

FRANCIS walks through the bright sunshine of a spring day.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

I was disappointed because London had always been linked in my mind with foggy days and evenings, and either Jack the Ripper or Sherlock Holmes stalking through the shadows. I headed for Baker Street, hoping to find 221B, even though I knew that address only existed in the stories of Conan Doyle.

As FRANCIS walks along the street, he notices people turning away from him, or giving him wide walking space. A SMALL BOY holding his MOTHER'S hand suddenly cries out upon seeing FRANCIS deformed, and pushes his face into his mother's skirt. He wonders what has scared him until he sees him peeking at him with one eye, before bursting into tears.

EXT. PUB - LATER.

FRANCIS hides against the side of a building and makes his way towards a plate-glass window.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

When I went to the pub, I saw what the boy had seen - my face. No face at all, actually, the nostrils like the snout of an animal, the peeling cheeks, the toothless gums, my jaw and mouth jammed together as if by invisible clamps. I tried to draw up the collar of my Eisenhower jacket to



cover at least the lower part of my face but the collar was too narrow, and didn't cover anything at all, and I hurried along the sidewalk, head down, avoiding eye contact, wishing to be invisible.

INT. DOUBLE-DECKER BUS - LATER.

FRANCIS sits on his own, hiding his face in his hands.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

When I got on the double decker bus, I wondered why didn't anyone warn me? Then I realised that the doctors and nurses had probably become so accustomed to the wounded and the maimed that the abnormal had become normal to them. Enrico made me the gift of the white scarf which he said he had won from an air force fly-boy in a poker game.

END FLASHBACK.

CUT TO:

EXT. FRENCHTOWN STREET - DAY.

FRANCIS is back in Frenchtown, his face now covered by the scarf and bandage.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Now in Frenchtown, my face is healing. My dentures have given shape to the lower part of my face and my jaw is firmer but my nostrils are still caves and the flesh of my cheeks refuses to heal completely, remaining raw and red.

INT. ROOM - DAY.

In the tenement, FRANCIS looks at himself in the mirror.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

When I study myself in the mirror, I don't see *me* anymore but a stranger slowly taking shape.

He turns away from the mirror and sits down on the bed.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

The truth is that I don't care whether I heal or not. Because I know that it doesn't matter. What matters is hiding my face from others, not only to save them the shock of seeing a face in disrepair but so that they won't identify little Francis Cassavant later on after I have carried out my mission. Now each day when I wake up I know that this might be the day when Larry LaSalle will show up and I start to close doors. Not real doors but doors to the future.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER.

FRANCIS is in the kitchen, staring down at a burning piece of paper as we CROSSFADE between him and the burning paper.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

I take out the address and telephone number of Dr. Abrams in Kansas City and burn it in the kitchen sink. Next is the list of veteran's hospitals that Enrico handed to me when I left England. He told me he'd be in one of them until he found the proper method of disposal. I knew what he meant by disposal because I had already planned my own method after my mission was completed. I watch the flames eating up the list of hospitals. *Goodbye, Enrico.*

The smoke fills the air as FRANCIS breathes deeply.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

The smell of ashes fills the air, a damp incense burning for Larry LaSalle's homecoming. His second homecoming. Closing my eyes, I think of Nicole and how his first

homecoming during the war changed our  
lives forever.

BEGIN FLASHBACK.

EXT. MONUMENT DEPOT (1943) - DAY.

Caption: 3rd July, 1943.

A large CROWD gathers at the Monument Depot including JOEY  
LEBLANC, LOUIS ARABELLE, MARIE LACROIX and FRANCIS as they  
wait for LARRY's arrival.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Lieutenant Lawrence LaSalle, US  
Marine Corps, holder of the Silver  
Star for acts of heroism in the  
steaming jungles of Guadalcanal in  
the South Pacific, hero of newsreels  
and radio broadcasts, was coming home  
on furlough. He was scheduled to  
arrive on the 3:10pm train from  
Boston on 3rd July, 1943.

FRANCIS looks towards Monument Park, waiting for NICOLE to  
join him.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Nicole had joined the Monument Red  
Cross as a volunteer. She was  
preparing food kits for servicemen  
that day and said she would join us  
in time for Larry LaSalle's arrival.

FRANCIS places a foot on the rail, hoping to feel the slight  
tremble of a TRAIN. The heat of the rail burns through the  
sole of his shoe, he turns around to see NICOLE come into view  
through the haze of heat. She's wearing a dark blue skirt and  
a white blouse. She waves to FRANCIS as she hurries towards  
the depot. At the same time, the chug of an engine, the blast  
of a horn and a hiss of steam announces the arrival of the  
train. LARRY LASALLE exits the train and stands on the  
platform, resplendent in the green uniform with the  
lieutenant's bars on his shoulders and the ribbons and medals  
on his chest. He shows off his old movie-star smile, his skin  
tanned and glowing, small wrinkles around his eyes as he  
squints down at the CROWD, who cheer as he steps down from the  
platform, and walks towards FRANCIS' group, that touch of Fred

Astaire in his walk but something different about him. His slenderness is knife-like now, lethal, his features sharper, nose and cheekbones.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

I remembered how hard it had been to think of him as a fighting marine when he announced his enlistment, but seeing his lean hard body now I could picture him storming a hillside on Guadalcanal, rifle in hand, bayonet fixed, grenades dangling from his belt, pumping bullets into the enemy. Then he was among us and we surrounded him, crowding him, embracing him, getting as close to him as possible.

JOEY:

This guy is a hero! A fuckin' war hero! My hero from the war!

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Joey was clowning of course, but he was saying what we all thought. Larry was our war hero, yes, but he had been a hero to us long before he went to war.

LARRY:

(holding off the CROWD)

The better to see you.

LARRY looks towards FRANCIS, who makes a gesture towards him, as if serving the white ball over the net and he swivels his arm, as if returning the ball. His eyes move towards NICOLE, and FRANCIS sees the rush of affection on his face. NICOLE bows, tilting her head like a ballet dancer. LARRY tilts his head in return, his eyes full of her. A blush turns her cheeks crimson. A big black car arrives, and MAYOR HAROLD BURNHAM exits the vehicle, followed by CITY OFFICIALS.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Mayor Harold Burnham arrived in a big black car, followed by city

officials, most of whom had walked the short distance from City Hall. Car horns blew and more cheers rose in the afternoon heat as the mayor vigorously shook Larry LaSalle's hand, embraced him fiercely and presented him with a silver key to the city.

MAYOR HAROLD BURNHAM:

(to LARRY)

You are our celebration, Your presence in this great city of ours, Lieutenant Lawrence LaSalle, is cause enough for jubilation.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Other officials made speeches and the words sailed over our heads meaninglessly, while Larry LaSalle stood modestly before the crowd, eyes lowered. Finally, a stillness fell and he turned to the gathering.

LARRY:

Thank you. I'd like to take this opportunity to praise the men and women who are serving in all parts of the globe. They're the people who are defending freedom and have given their lives, willingly and courageously.

He pauses, looking down at FRANCIS and the rest of the KIDS from the Wreck Center.

LARRY:

(CONT.)

Anyway, I'm glad to be home, even if it's only for a little while. And most of all I want to be with the Wreck Center gang.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

Once again, he had made us feel special, singling us out from the

townspeople who gathered there.  
Nicole squeezed my hand and my eyes  
grew moist.

LARRY:

(CONT.)

We have to keep the world safe for  
these young people -- they are our  
future. Thank you.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

The celebration went on during the  
afternoon and evening, culminating in  
a Welcome Home dance that night at  
City Hall.

INT. CITY HALL - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS.

The hall is brightly lit and an orchestra is playing classical  
music, as the floor is filled by the guests.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

The hall was a bright spot in the  
dark wartime city, street lights dim,  
air raid wardens patrolling the peak  
of Moosock Hill on the look-out for  
enemy planes, although an air attack  
on Monument was a remote possibility.  
But better be vigilant than sorry,  
said an editorial in the Monument  
Times. German U-boats had been  
sighted in the waters off the  
Massachusetts shores and rumours  
claimed that Nazis prowled the  
streets of New England in disguise.  
But City Hall blazed with lights  
behind the blackout curtains and the  
big orchestra played the tunes of the  
day, while the dancers twirled on the  
floor.

TILT UP to FRANCIS, JOEY, LOUIS, MARIE and NICOLE sitting in a  
special section of the balcony.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

We were a merry group, Larry LaSalle's guests at the dance. We watched from above as he moved among the city officials and their wives, shaking hands, enduring slaps on the back, and the embraces of beautiful women.

FRANCIS looks towards NICOLE as she gazes towards the ladies in their fancy gowns, glittery sequins catching the light from a crystal ball revolving on the ceiling.

NICOLE:

(pointing to a woman in a simple white gown)  
Isn't that beautiful?

FRANCIS:

(whispering in her ear)  
I'll buy you one like that someday.

NICOLE squeezes FRANCIS' hand, leans towards him, and kisses his cheek. LARRY LASALLE looks up and motions towards the front of the hall.

LARRY:

Hey, guys! I got a surprise for you!

NICOLE and FRANCIS look down at LARRY.

EXT. CITY HALL - SAME.

LARRY leads NICOLE and FRANCIS outside and down the City Hall steps.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

Larry lined us up and we began a wild snake dance through Monument Square, among the statues of generals and the Civil War cannon and by the water fountain. Larry headed the line, Nicole was next with her hands on his hips and mine on hers. We laughed and yelled and stopped at the fountain to drink and splash our faces, then crossed the intersection of Main and West and began to march down Mechanic Street, breaking ranks occasionally to pause and laugh, as if we were all drunk without having taken a sip of liquor.

NICOLE:

(whispering)

Stay close to me.

FRANCIS:

I'll never leave you.

The gang continue their parade in the shadowed streets, before LARRY finally leads them along Third Street until they stand in front of the Wreck Center. He bows to him, produces a key from his pocket, unlocks the door and swings it open.

LARRY:

*Voilà!*

INT. WRECK CENTER - SAME.

The gang enters the Wreck Center as LARRY switches on the lights.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

Once he ushered us inside, he told us he had arranged for Henry Roussier, the old retired janitor, to sweep and clean up the center for a special night.

A ping-pong table has been set up, with paddles and white balls on it.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

We saw the ping-pong table, paddles and white balls on it. A table with cans of soda pop and candy bars, not chocolate bars because of wartime restrictions, but candy all the same.

LARRY places a record on the phonograph.

MUSIC CUE: "Never In A Million Years" by Bing Crosby

LARRY:

OK, let's play ping-pong!

FRANCIS:

I thought it was called "table tennis", not "ping-pong".

LARRY:

Alright, Francis. No need to remind me!

CUT TO:



LARRY and FRANCIS playing ping-pong, without keeping score, hitting the ball back and forth, trying for, and sometimes making, impossible shots, LARRY rolls up the sleeves of his shirt, removing the medals and ribbons, while NICOLE changes the records.

END MUSIC CUE

INT./EXT. WRECK CENTER - LATER.

JOEY LEBLANC and LOUIS ARABELLE leave the Wreck Center.

JOEY:

Goodnight, Larry!

LARRY:

Goodnight, Joey! Goodnight, Louis!

LOUIS:

Goodnight!

NICOLE:

(walking over to FRANCIS and  
LARRY)

My favourite champion and my  
favourite dancer.

LARRY:

Can you find "Dancing In The Dark"  
for me?

LARRY places an arm around FRANCIS's shoulder.

LARRY:

(CONT.)

Time to go home, Francis. You look  
tired, it's been a long day.

FRANCIS:

It's OK, I don't mind staying.

LARRY:

(CONT.)

Nicole and I are going to have one  
last dance. Just me and her alone.  
It's important, Francis.

FREEZE FRAME ON LARRY AND FRANCIS

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

At that moment, I wondered if he had  
a big announcement for her. That he  
had found a way to make her a star.  
Entertaining the troops, perhaps.  
Nothing was impossible with Larry

LaSalle. His face was flushed and his eyes shone with excitement.

LARRY:

So, you'd better go, OK?

NICOLE places the record on the turntable and turns towards them, an expectant look on her face, glancing at LARRY.

FRANCIS:

(to NICOLE)

I've got to go. You and Larry stay.  
One last dance.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

The words sounded false as I said them and I realised they were Larry's words, not mine.

NICOLE:

Come on, Francis, stay and watch.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

I was puzzled by the expression on her face. Was she asking me to stay?  
Did she want to be alone with Larry?

LARRY places his arm around NICOLE, drawing him to her gently.

LARRY:

He's tired. He wants to go.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

We always did what Larry LaSalle told us to do. Always carried out his slightest wish. And now I seemed actually to be tired, as Larry suggested, the events of the day and all the excitement catching up with me. I saw Larry raising his eyebrows at me, the way he looked at me when I made a stupid move at table tennis.

FRANCIS:

I'd better go.

FRANCIS turns to leave, but then NICOLE walks toward her.

NICOLE:

Don't go, Francis. Please.

LARRY nods for him to leave.

FRANCIS:

No, I'd better leave. I think he  
wants to tell you something.

FRANCIS walks away.

MUSIC CUE: "Dancing In The Dark" by Bing Crosby

INT. HALLWAY - SAME - CONTINUOUS.

LARRY sweeps NICOLE into his arms, and reaches out and flicks the switch, plunging the hall into darkness. FRANCIS makes his way to the front door but he suddenly draws back, and stations himself in the small foyer, in a slant of moonlight, as the music fills the place, miserable in his aloneness, wanting to be dancing with her. In the shadows of the hallway, he stands in agony and waits for the song to end. Suddenly, he hears the scratching of the needle on the record, and a sound like a moan and a rustle of clothing. How long has he been standing there listening? As he hears the small sounds, then a sudden gasp and the needle scratching as the record goes round and round, he struggles to breathe, his body is rigid, his lungs burning, and at the moment of panic, heart thudding, his breath returns, and he listens, and hears nothing now. What were they doing? FRANCIS knows what they were doing - the thought streaks through his mind so fast that it can hardly be acknowledged. Then, a whimpering, like a small animal caught and trapped, moaning distinct now. The scratching of the needle has stopped. Footsteps approach, coming close, closer and suddenly NICOLE stumbles into the hallway, her face caught in the slash of moonlight. She looks at FRANCIS, who looks at her. Her hair is dishevelled, mouth flung open, lips swollen. Cheeks moist with tears. Her white blouse is torn and one hand is clutching the front of her blouse to hold it together. FRANCIS draws out of the darkness towards her and she raises a hand to stop him, gasping now, her breath like a moan escaping her body. Suddenly, her eyes flash black with anger as she looks at him. More than anger. But what? What?

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

I couldn't cover my eyes. I had to  
look at her. And I recognized in her  
eyes now what I could not deny:  
betrayal. My betrayal of her in her  
eyes.

NICOLE stares at FRANCIS for another long moment, mouth still agape, then shakes her head in disbelief and flees towards the door, fumbling with the doorknob. She pulls the door open, steps through, and slams the door behind her while he stands there helplessly. Numbed, he steps out of the moonlight's rays, wanting to hide in the dark. Suddenly, a voice calls out.

LARRY:

Is anybody there?

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

I stood hushed, pressed to the wall, heard my own breathing so harsh that I was afraid he could hear it. His footsteps grew louder as he approached. He passed through the flash of moonlight, a ghostly silhouette, and I closed my eyes, not wanting to see him. Then, no footsteps. Had he seen me? My eyes flew open. He was at the door, a shadow now, turning the knob, whistling a tune - "Dancing In The Dark" - whistling softly as he stepped through the doorway, closing the door gently behind him, and went off into the night. I stood there thinking of what I had seen in Nicole's eyes. It's amazing that the heart makes no noise when it cracks.

EXT. SIXTH STREET - DAY.

FRANCIS stands across the street and looks up at the second floor of NICOLE's house.

EXT. SIXTH STREET - DAY.

FRANCIS stands across the street and looks up at the second floor of NICOLE's house.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

For three days, I haunted Sixth Street at all hours, standing across the street, venturing sometimes into the yard, hoping that I might catch a

glimpse of her coming or going or at a window. Despite the heatwave, the piazza on Nicole's second floor tenement remained vacant. The windows were open to allow cooler air to enter the tenement but no one came or went.

A man in a CHECKERED shirt exits the tenement.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Nicole's father left the tenement to go to the shop just before seven o'clock in the morning and returned shortly after five in the afternoon and I avoided him, kept away from the street during those times.

A SMALL BOY rides his BICYCLE and looks at FRANCIS as he waits.

BIKER BOY:

Why are you here all the time?

FRANCIS:

(shrugging)

I'm waiting.

BIKER BOY:

For who?

FRANCIS doesn't reply. The BOY scratches his chin.

BIKER BOY:

Are you the bogeyman?

FREEZE FRAME ON BIKER BOY AND FRANCIS

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

I wanted to say yes. A kind of bogeyman who does terrible things like letting his girl get hurt and attacked, purposely avoiding even in my mind that terrible word: what had actually happened to her.

The BIKER BOY pedals back into his yard, silent as he gazes at FRANCIS over his shoulder.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

The boy waited a moment for my reply then pedalled back into his yard, silent as he gazed at me over his shoulder. He went into the house and did not come out again.

INT. LAURIER'S DRUG STORE - DAY.

A small CROWD is gathered inside the drug store.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

In Laurier's Drug Store, rumours were rampant about Larry LaSalle's sudden departure from Frenchtown so soon after his arrival. Someone said his furlough had been cancelled, that his outfit had been recalled to duty for a big push in Europe against the Nazis. There was talk of a Western Union messenger bicycling down Mechanic Street in the middle of the night, bringing a telegram to the tenement Larry LaSalle rented on Spruce Street.

ALBERT LAURIER:

That wasn't a messenger. That was Crazy Joe Touraine trying to cool off from the heat of the day.

CUT TO:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT.

FRANCIS stares up solemnly at the ceiling.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

I could not sleep at night. I lay on the bed and stared up at the ceiling, glad for the heat that was so relentless, as if it was part of the hell that I had earned.

EXT. SIXTH STREET - DAY.

FRANCIS stands outside NICOLE's house.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Finally, on the fourth day, I saw her emerging from the hallway onto the piazza on the second floor.

NICOLE does not move away as FRANCIS comes into the yard.

FRANCIS:

Nicole.

NICOLE turns towards FRANCIS, and draws back a step, then pauses, as if waiting for him to approach.

FRANCIS:

(voice breaking)

Nicole....

Her eyes meet his. She doesn't say anything for a long moment, before plucking the courage to speak.

NICOLE:

(in a harsh voice)

You were there the whole time.

FRANCIS finds himself unable to reply, unable to find words to utter in his defence. He HAS no defence.

NICOLE:

You didn't do anything.

The accusation in her voice is worse than the harshness.

FRANCIS:

I know.

NICOLE:

You knew what he was doing, didn't you?

FRANCIS' head is so heavy, pounding with blood, that he can barely nod in agreement. NICOLE leans against the banister, crying.

NICOLE:

Why didn't you do something? Tell him to stop. Run for help. Anything?

FRANCIS:

I'm sorry.

NICOLE shakes her head, turning away.

FRANCIS:

(hesitating)

Are you...Are you all right?

NICOLE:

(angrily)

No, I'm not alright! I hurt. I hurt all over.

FRANCIS:

(sorrowly)

What can I do?

NICOLE:

(sighing)

Poor Francis.

She flings her hand in the air, a gesture of dismissal.

NICOLE:

(CONT.)

Go away, Francis. Go the fuck away!

NICOLE pulls away from the banister, and steps into the hallway.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

I waited for her to appear again. I waited through long empty minutes. Somewhere a door slammed. Later, a dog barked, a car roared by. Finally, I went away.

INT. ST. JUDE'S CHURCH - NIGHT.

FRANCIS enters FATHER BALTHAZAR's confessional.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

Later that week, I went to church after supper and slipped into Father Balthazar's confessional, waiting there until Mr. Boudreau, the janitor, closed the doors for the night.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. ST. JUDE'S CHURCH - SAME.

FRANCIS climbs up to the tallest steeple and emerges into the open air on the roof.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

I started climbing in the darkness, up the steep steps that workers climbed to repair portions of the steeple. The heat intensified and the stairs narrowed as I ascended, my heart beating heavily, my breath coming in gasps, the sound like cloth



ripping. Pausing to gather strength and wait for my heart and lungs to calm down a bit, I looked for the stone door that could be swivelled aside to allow access to the outer surface of the steeple.

His fingers find it. Grunting and gasping, he manages to move it aside on its rusty hinges. He looks down at the street below.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

I looked out at Frenchtown below me, the dark shapes of the three-deckers, the shadowed streets, the stars closer than I'd ever seen them, as if I could reach out and pluck one of them from the sky.

FRANCIS closes his eyes as he breathes in the cold air.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Despite the calmness of the summer night, a gust of wind caught me by surprise, cooling the perspiration on my face and forehead. I rested there, bathing in the sudden coolness. Then peered out again, craning my neck to look down at the cement sidewalk below.

TILT DOWN towards the CEMENT SIDEWALK, as FRANCIS continues to stare down and begins to mumble.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

I began to mumble a prayer in French, the old *Notre Père*, the way the nuns had taught us, then stopped, horrified at what I was doing. Saying a prayer before committing the worst sin of all: despair. I thought of St. Jude's Cemetery and the pitiful graves set apart from the rest, the ones who had taken their own lives and could not be buried in

consecrated ground. I thought of my mother and father - how could I disgrace their name this way?

FRANCIS moves away from the steeple and breathes heavily.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

I couldn't die that way. Soldiers were dying with honour on battlefields all over the world. Noble deaths. How could I die by leaping off a steeple?

EXT. BUS STATION - DAY.

A yellow bus pulls up at the bus station, and FRANCIS enters.

INT. BUS - SAME.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

The next afternoon, I boarded the bus to Fort Delta, in my pocket the birth certificate I had altered to change my age, and I became a soldier in the United States Army.

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. THIRD STREET - DAY.

FRANCIS, fully bandaged, stands outside in the street.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

I always thought I would spot Larry LaSalle on Third Street, would see him striding along like Fred Astaire, bestowing that movie-star smile on people that he met. I would shadow him through the streets and follow him home, note his address, and then return later with the gun in my pocket, ready to do my job.

EXT. BOARDING HOUSE - LATER.

FRANCIS enters the boarding house, just as MRS. BELANDER is talking to a neighbour in French.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Instead, I learn of his return from, of all people, Mrs. Belander, as I

come back from another round of searching the Frenchtown streets. I overheard her talking to a neighbour while they stood on the back porch.

MRS. BELANDER is folding clothes she has drawn off the clothes-line that links her house with the three-decker next door. The neighbour is MRS. AGNEAUX, a big woman with flushed cheeks and bulging eyes. They are talking in French as FRANCIS lingers nearby, listening like a spy.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

What they don't realise is that I understand most of what they are saying as they talk of the weather and then of old Mr. Tardier who likes to pinch women on the *derrière* when they pass. I am stunned when I hear the name of Larry LaSalle on the lips of Mrs. Agneaux.

MRS. BELANDER and MRS. AGNEAUX continue to speak in French.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

The French language spoken by the Canadians passes quickly on their tongues, almost like music, sometimes so quickly that the words are lost as they cascade in the air. I draw closer to catch every syllable and miss some of them but hear enough to make my heart begin to race and my flesh to grow warm. I am concentrating so hard that a headache begins, a throbbing pain above my eyes.

MRS. AGNEAUX:

(to MRS. BELANDER, in French, subtitled)

Did you know that Larry LaSalle is back in Frenchtown?

MRS. BELANDER:

(also in French, subtitled)

Which corner?

MRS. AGNEAUX:

(in French, subtitled)

The green house, cheap paint, bought discount, fading already...

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

But I don't hear the rest of her description. I have heard enough. Larry LaSalle has returned to Frenchtown, and I know where to find him.

EXT. NINTH AND SPRUCE - LATER.

FRANCIS walks through the morning streets with the gun in his pocket.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

The gun is like a tumour on my thigh as I walk the morning streets against the wind that never dies down. April sunlight stings my eyes but the wind dissipates its heat, blustering against store windows and icking debris into the gutters.

FRANCIS pauses and looks up at the three-decker and the windows of the second floor.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

When I turn up at Larry's house, I wonder what must be going through his mind. Does he suspect my presence here on the street? Does he have a premonition that he has only a few minutes left to live?

He walks up the steps leading to the second floor, which are worn from use and age.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

I am calm. My heartbeat is normal. What's one more death after the others in the villages and fields of France? The innocent faces of the two young Germans appear in my mind. But

Larry LaSalle is not innocent. When I walk the steps leading to the second floor, I think of all the people who have climbed the steps, who worked in the shops and came home heavy with weariness at the end of the day.

He stands in front of LARRY LASALLE's tenement, and loudly knocks on the DOOR. No response. He waits. He raps on the door again, hand clenched in a fist this time.

LARRY:

(calling out)

Come on in, the door's not locked.

FRANCIS is suddenly hesitant, uncertain - his voice giving reality to what must happen.

INT. LARRY LASALLE'S HOUSE - SAME.

He steps into the tenement and into the fragrance of pea soup simmering on the black stove, steam rising from a big green pot. LARRY is sitting in a rocking chair by the black coal stove, and narrows his eyes, squinting to see who has come into his tenement. He is pale, eyes sunk into the sockets, and seems fragile, as if caught in an old photograph that has faded and yellowed with age. His eyes blink rapidly as if taking quick pictures of him.

FRANCIS:

Francis. Francis Cassavant.

LARRY:

Ah, Francis. Come in, come in.

He slowly rises from his chair, steadying the rocker as he lifts himself up. As he holds out his hands in greeting, FRANCIS goes forward to meet him. They shake HANDS. At the last minute, when it seems they might embrace, as old friends and comrades, teacher and pupil, he pulls away. His white hands clutch the air before he clasps them together and settles back into the chair.

LARRY:

(gesturing to the chair next to the window)

Sit, sit. Take off your jacket, your Red Sox cap and your scarf.

FRANCIS does not move or take anything off.

FRANCIS:

I'm not staying long.

LARRY seems concerned.

LARRY:

You sure? You don't have to be afraid to show your face, Francis. That face, what's left of it, is a symbol of how brave you were, the Silver Star you earned--

FRANCIS:

You earned a Silver Star, too.

LARRY shrugs, sagging in the chair, sighing, as if tired suddenly.

LARRY:

(smiling)

It's good of you to visit. Makes me remember the old days at the Wreck Center. Those were good days, weren't they? That table tennis championship. What a great day for you, Francis.

A deep sadness engulfs FRANCIS, as if winter has invaded his bones.

FRANCIS:

You made it possible. You let me win.

LARRY:

You miss the point, Francis. You deserved to win. It was more than a game. More than a score. You played like a champion and deserved the trophy.

(beat)

But those days are gone now. And the war is over. Everything's different. Not only the war but everything.

Lifting his hands, he studies them. Then looks down at his body. He rubs his thighs.

LARRY:

(CONT.)

No wounds that you can see, Francis. But I'm worn out. They called it jungle fever at first but I don't think they really know what it is.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, thinking)

Maybe your sins catching up with you.

LARRY:

(CONT.)

And you, Francis. Will you be OK?

Will you heal? Be like new again?

FRANCIS:

Yes.

Silence falls in the room and LARRY shifts his body in the chair. FRANCIS touches the gun in his pocket.

LARRY:

(focusing his eyes on FRANCIS)

How did you get into the army so young?

FRANCIS:

I forged my papers. They were taking anybody with a heartbeat those days.

LARRY:

(shaking his head)

Just a kid. Then you became a fuckin' hero.

FRANCIS:

I'm not a hero.

LARRY:

Of course you are. I heard about you, read the stories in the newspapers--

FRANCIS:

(snapping)

You know why I went to war?

LARRY:

Why does anybody go to war, Francis?

FRANCIS:

I went to war because I wanted to die. (Lowers his voice) I was too much of a coward to kill myself. In the war, in a battle, I figured it would be easy to get killed. And I wouldn't disgrace my parents' name. I looked for chances to die and instead killed others, and two of them kids like me.

LARRY:

You saved your patrol. You fell on that grenade--

FRANCIS:

When I fell on that grenade, I wasn't trying to save the GIs. I wasn't trying to save anyone! I saw my chance to end it all, in a second. But a freak accident happened. My face got blown off and I didn't die.

LARRY:

(in shock, whispering)  
Why did you want to die, Francis?

FRANCIS:

(stunned by his question)  
Don't you know?  
(beat)

Nicole. Nicole Renard.

LARRY's mouth drops open and he flinches as if reeling from an unexpected blow.

FRANCIS:

(CONT.)

I stayed behind that night. I heard what you were doing to her. And I saw her afterwards. Those eyes of hers and what was in them.

LARRY shakes his head, reeling from FRANCIS' words.

LARRY:

You wanted to die because of that?

FRANCIS:

(deadpan)  
I still want to die. What you did to her. And I did nothing. I stood there and I let it fuckin' happen.

LARRY:

Oh, Francis, you're too hard on yourself. You didn't do anything you should feel guilty about, that should make you want to die. You couldn't have stopped me anyway, Francis. You were just a child.

FRANCIS' lips are trembling.

FRANCIS:



So was she.

A long sigh escapes LARRY.

LARRY:

Is that why you came here? To tell me this?

FRANCIS:

No.

He takes the gun out of his pocket and aims it at LARRY, with his finger on the trigger.

FRANCIS:

(CONT.)

This is why I came.

FRANCIS' hand is shaking and he is suddenly overwhelmed by the knowledge of what he is about to do.

FRANCIS:

(CONT.)

You could have had anybody. All of those beautiful ladies at the dance that night. Why Nicole?

LARRY:

The sweet young things, Francis. Even their heat is sweet.

FRANCIS shakes his head in dismay.

LARRY:

(CONT.)

Everybody sins, Francis. The terrible thing is that we love our sins. We love the thing that makes us evil. I love the sweet young things.

FRANCIS:

That's not love.

LARRY:

There's all kinds of love, Francis.

FRANCIS:

Then, didn't you know that we loved you? You were our hero, even before you went to war. You made us better than we were.

LARRY sighs, his lips trembling.

LARRY:

(voice trembling)

Does that one sin of mine wipe away  
all the good things?

FRANCIS:

(angrily)

That's a question you should ask  
Nicole!

FRANCIS' eyes measure him closely.

FRANCIS:

(CONT.)

You know something? Until this  
moment, I hadn't even planned where I  
place the fuckin' bullet, whether to  
aim for the spot between your eyes or  
aim for your fuckin' heart. It isn't  
a question of aiming, really, not at  
this distance. Only desire. The  
desire to avenge what you did to  
Nicole and those other girls, now  
that I know about them.

LARRY waves his hand at him, as if dismissing the gun in his  
hand.

LARRY:

Know why I'm sitting in this chair,  
Francis? My legs are gone.

He gestures towards the table and FRANCIS notices the  
aluminium crutch leaning against the table.

LARRY:

I can't dance anymore, Francis. No  
more sweet young things. No more  
anything.

FRANCIS:

Am I supposed to feel bad for you?

LARRY:

Don't look at me like that! If I want  
one thing, it would be to have you  
look at me again the way you did at  
the Wreck Center. When I was the big  
hero you say I was. But it's too  
fuckin' late, isn't it?

FRANCIS is tired of this talk, impatient to do what he came  
here for.

FRANCIS:

(voice cracking)

Say your fuckin' prayers, Larry!

He has decided to aim for the heart, to shatter it like he shattered NICOLE's and FRANCIS'.

LARRY:

(calling out)

Wait!

LARRY reaches towards a small table next to his chair and a cigar box on the table. He opens the box and withdraws a pistol, just like his, a relic of the war. FRANCIS flinches, his finger agitates on the trigger, but he places the gun in his lap, cradling it in his hand.

LARRY:

(CONT.)

You see, Francis. I have my own gun. I take it out and look at it all the time. I place it against my temple once in a while. I wonder how it would feel to pull the trigger and have everything come to an end.

He sighs and shakes his head, then nods towards FRANCIS.

LARRY:

(CONT.)

So lower your gun, Francis, one gun is enough for what has to be done.

He sees the doubt in his eyes and, in a swift movement, removes the magazine from his pistol.

LARRY:

(CONT.)

Empty. You're safe, Francis. You were always safe with me. So put your gun away. Whether you know it or not, you've accomplished your mission here. And you couldn't have killed me anyway, not in cold blood.

They stare at each other for a long moment.

LARRY:

(CONT.)

Please.

FRANCIS lowers his gun, and removes his finger from the trigger. HIS hand is trembling. He puts the gun back in his pocket.

LARRY:

(CONT.)

Go on, Francis. Leave me here. Leave everything here, the war, what happened at the Wreck Center, leave it all behind, with me.

FRANCIS turns to leave and heads to the door. LARRY suddenly stops him.

LARRY:

(CONT.)

Let me tell you one thing before you go, Francis. You would have fallen on that grenade, anyway. All your instincts would have made you sacrifice yourself for your comrades.

FRANCIS' hand is on the doorknob. He takes a deep breath, closes his eyes, and turns the knob as we hear a GUNSHOT. He pauses at the outside door. He walks away, as we CUT TO - LARRY's lifeless body, slumped in his chair, with a bullethole in the side of his head and blood dripping down as we --

CUT TO:

EXT. CONVENT - LATER.

The sound of the doorbell echoes unendingly through the long corridors of the convent. FRANCIS steps back, waiting, looking at the faded red-brick exterior of the building and the black forbidding shutters at the windows.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

On summer evenings, we played our games - Buck, Buck, How Many Fingers Up? And Kick The Can - in the schoolyard until a nun threw open the shutters, clapped her hands and sent us scurrying home in the gathering twilight.

The door opens and an OLD NUN with transparent skin looks suspiciously at FRANCIS.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

I am accustomed by now to the shock my appearance causes people and try

to make my voice gentle and unthreatening.

FRANCIS:

(to the OLD NUN)

Is it possible to speak to Sister Mathilde? I'm one of her former pupils.

She studies him for a long moment with her pale blue eyes, then gestures for him to step inside.

INT. CONVENT - SAME.

She ushers him to a small room to the right of the foyer. The familiar smell of strong soap and cabbage cooking hangs heavy in the air. Nodding towards one of the two straight-backed chairs near the window, she waits until he sits down before turning away. She hasn't spoken a word. Her footsteps fade as FRANCIS settles himself in the chair, wondering if he is on a futile errand.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

I am here because I remember how often Nicole visited the nuns in the convent, strolled the grounds with Sister Mathilde and knitted socks and scarves for servicemen with the sisters. I wonder if Sister Mathilde might know what happened to Nicole or where her family moved to.

The whisper of starched clothing and the clump of heavy shoes announce SISTER MATHILDE's arrival. As she enters the room, she touches the long black rosary beads that dangle from her hip to the hem of her long black skirt. Her skin is as white as the starched wimple framing her face. She regards FRANCIS curiously and I take off the Red Sox cap.

FRANCIS:

(to SISTER MATHILDE)

Francis Cassavant.

SISTER MATHILDE:

(smiling)

Of course, Francis. I hear you served your country well. You have made us all proud.

She sits on the edge of the chair as if being a nun does not allow her to sit comfortably.

SISTER MATHILDE:

(CONT.)

We still pray for our men and women in uniform every day and night. How are your wounds?

FRANCIS:

(beat)

Um...healing.

SISTER MATHILDE:

Oh, good. I will offer up special prayers for you. So, what are you here for?

FRANCIS:

Nicole Renard. I have been wondering where she is and what she's doing. Her family left town while I was away. Do you know where they went, Sister?

SISTER MATHILDE:

(nodding her head)

Nicole, yes. You were friends, *n'est-ce pas?*

FRANCIS nods in return, his interest quickening.

SISTER MATHILDE:

(CONT.)

Ah, Nicole. A good girl. Smart. A secretive girl, too. But, then, we all have secrets, don't we, Francis?

He shrugs, not daring to say anything. A thought strikes him.

FRANCIS:

Has she gone away to become a nun?

SISTER MATHILDE:

She's gone away, yes but not to become a nun. Life is not that simple, Francis, and neither is a calling to God.

FRANCIS smiles through the scarf and bandage.

FRANCIS:

Do you know where she is, Sister?

She picks up the beads of her dangling rosary and begins to draw them through her fingers.

SISTER MATHILDE:

Her family has returned to Albany. I don't think Mr. Renard was happy here in his job at the comb shop and went back to his old one.

FRANCIS:

Was Nicole glad to go back too? Do you think it might be alright if I visit her?

She sighs, her shoulders lifting and falling, the beads clicking together as her fingers move across them.

SISTER MATHILDE:

I don't know, Francis. She didn't seem happy when she came to say goodbye. Was she unhappy because she was leaving Frenchtown? Or was there something else? Did you quarrel like young people do?

Now it's FRANCIS' turn to sigh.

SISTER MATHILDE:

(CONT.)

Maybe it would be good to have a friend from Frenchtown visit her. It's hard for a young person like Nicole to move away from her friends.

FRANCIS:

Do you have her address, Sister?

SISTER MATHILDE:

She wrote me a letter a few weeks ago. She's in her senior year now, at St. Anne's. An academy of the Sisters of the Holy Spirit. I have her address upstairs in my bureau.

EXT. CONVENT - LATER.

A few minutes later, FRANCIS and SISTER MATHILDE are stood at the front door, their fingers touching tentatively as they shake hands.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

I have never touched a nun's flesh before. She lets go of my hand and touches the bandage on my face.

SISTER MATHILDE:

I hope your face heals soon, Francis.

FRANCIS:

Thank you, a doctor I met in the service is going to help me. He's a specialist. I'll be as good as new pretty soon.

SISTER MATHILDE:

Goodbye, Francis.

FRANCIS:

Goodbye, Sister.

FRANCIS leaves the convent, and waves at SISTER MATHILDE, who waves back.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

I wonder if it's a special sin to lie to a nun. A moment later, I leave Sister Mathilde and the convent behind, Nicole Renard's address in my pocket.

INT. ST. ANNE'S ACADEMY - DAY.

FRANCIS is shown into the building by a NUN. Another NUN has entered the room, her hair is cut short and combed straight and flat, with wisps touching her ears. The NUN turns around, it is NICOLE. For one lightning moment, he does not recognise her. Her cheekbones are more prominent and her eyes seem to be bigger. He looks at her as if studying a painting in a museum, searching for that glimpse of mischief in her eyes, but he sees only the question there.

FRANCIS:

Francis. Francis Cassavant.

She's wearing a green cardigan, unbuttoned, a white blouse underneath and a green plaid skirt, the uniform of the school. As she advances towards FRANCIS, her face is inscrutable.

NICOLE:

I couldn't imagine who my visitor was.

(beat)

You've come a long way.



FRANCIS:

So have you.

NICOLE:

(frowning at FRANCIS)

How are you, Francis? Your face--

FRANCIS:

(gesturing to the bandage and scarf)

This is nothing. It's not as bad as it looks. My skin is healing. There's a doctor who took care of me overseas. He's going to fix my face up - they call it cosmetic surgery - when he gets back from the service.

FRANCIS is still lying.

NICOLE:

I heard about your Silver Star. Jumping on that grenade and saving all those lives. Remember Marie LaCroix? She writes to me now and then, and sends me news about Frenchtown.

It's clear FRANCIS does not want to talk about the grenade.

FRANCIS:

How about you, Nicole? How are you doing?

NICOLE:

Fine.

The softness is gone from her face and her voice is sharp and brittle.

NICOLE:

(CONT.)

The girls here are very nice. Nuns are nuns, of course, but at least they don't use rulers for discipline here. So I'm fine.

(beat)

I'm sorry about one thing. What I did to you that day.

FRANCIS:

Did to me?

NICOLE:

I shouldn't have said those things to you that day on the piazza. You weren't to blame for what happened. I realised that later and went to your Uncle Louis' place but found out that you'd enlisted.

NICOLE and FRANCIS fall silent and she returns to the window, looking out as if something very interesting is going on out there. FRANCIS joins her and they watch two GIRLS in white blouses and shorts playing tennis. The ball doesn't have the sharp sound of a ping-pong ball on a table when it lands. Or a gunshot.

FRANCIS:

(talking about LARRY)

He's dead, you know.

NICOLE:

I know.

FRANCIS:

He was--

NICOLE:

Don't say it, Francis. I know what he was. For a while there he made me feel special. Made us all feel special. Made me think I was a ballerina. Now I'm starting to find out what I am, and who I am.

FRANCIS:

Who are you, Nicole?

NICOLE:

I told you - I'm just finding out. How about you, Francis? How are you? What are you going to do now that you're back?

FRANCIS:

Go to high school. College later. The GI Bill pays for college for veterans.

NICOLE:

Are you going to write? I always thought you'd be a writer.

FRANCIS:

(for once, truthfully)

I don't know.

Silence falls between them, broken only by the swish of the tennis rackets and the plopping of the ball outside and the distant laughter of a girl in a corridor somewhere.

NICOLE:

Why did you come here today?

FRANCIS is surprised by the question.

FRANCIS:

I wanted to see you again. To tell you that I'm sorry, too, for what happened. To see if--

NICOLE:

If I was all right? To see if I had survived?

That bitter twist is back in her voice again.

NICOLE:

(CONT.)

Well, I'm alright. Don't I look as if I'm alright?

A bright smile emerges on her lips.

FRANCIS:

I don't think so, Nicole.

NICOLE:

Don't think what?

FRANCIS:

I don't think you're alright.

She looks at him for a long moment, as still as the stopped clock on the wall.

FRANCIS:

(CONT.)

Did you ever tell anyone about it, Nicole? Did you ever talk about it?

His question seems to startle her.

NICOLE:

Who was I going to tell? My mother and father? It would have killed them, ruined them forever. Or maybe my father would have killed him, which would have been worse. The police? He was a big war hero. He didn't beat me up. No visible wounds. So, I didn't tell anybody. All I said

to my parents was that I didn't want to live in Frenchtown any more. My father was ready to come back here, anyway. This is his hometown. And we came. No questions asked. I think they were afraid to ask questions.

She backs away, as if she needs to distance herself from me.

NICOLE:

OK. If I'm not exactly alright, then I'm---(screws up her face, searching for the right word)---adjusting. Getting better at it all the time. When Marie LaCroix started writing to me, that Monument postmark gave me the shivers. I tore up that first letter. But she persisted. Now I read them and even write back.

She sighs, as if suddenly out of breath.

NICOLE:

(CONT.)

It's almost three years, Francis, and sometimes I can think of Frenchtown without the shivers. And then---

Her voice falters and her eyes lower.

FRANCIS:

And then I come walking in.

She shakes her head.

NICOLE:

For a minute there, when you said your name, I almost panicked. And I'm sorry, because you were part of the good times, Francis. Always so shy, I couldn't help teasing you. Those movie matinees. Our long talks walking home.

FRANCIS:

(laughing subtly)

What do you remember most about those matinees?

NICOLE:

I remember those old cowboy serials we went to see. To be honest, I

really didn't like them very much. I pretended to enjoy their fake endings every week. What about you?

FRANCIS:

What about me?

NICOLE:

What do you remember from those days?

FRANCIS:

Oh, I remember being embarrassed that my palm was always wet when we held heads.

NICOLE:

My palm was wet, too.

FRANCIS and NICOLE burst into laughter.

NICOLE:

(CONT.)

You know, Marie LaCroix is thinking of becoming a nun.

FRANCIS:

Well, that's great! That should liven up any convent!

NICOLE:

Well, that's what happens when you join St. Anne's. I am hoping to become a teacher in English.

Silence falls between them, magnifying the sounds of the tennis game outside, the plopping of the ball. Finally, she reaches towards him.

NICOLE:

(CONT.)

Your poor face.

FRANCIS:

(stepping away)

I don't want you to see me this way. When the doctor fixes my face up, I'll send you a picture.

NICOLE:

Promise?

FRANCIS:

Promise.

NICOLE looks at FRANCIS with affection.

FRANCIS:

I've got to go.

She nods, almost eagerly, and glances at her watch.

NICOLE:

The bell's going to ring any minute now. We live by bells around here.

She takes his hand.

NICOLE:

(CONT.)

Still moist. My good Francis. My table tennis champion. My Silver Star hero.

FRANCIS:

(beat)

I don't know what a hero is any more, Nicole.

NICOLE:

Write about it, Francis. Maybe you can find the answer that way.

FRANCIS:

Do you think I can?

NICOLE:

Of course you can.

A trace of impatience is in her voice.

NICOLE:

(CONT.)

Look, I've got to go.

FRANCIS:

Can I come again sometime?

NICOLE:

Oh, Francis.

The words are weighted with sadness, and FRANCIS sees the answer in her eyes. She reaches up and presses her lips against the damp scarf that covers his own lips. He expects a flash of pain but there is only the pressure of her lips, and he closes his eyes, clinging to the moment, wanting it to last forever.

NICOLE:

Have a good life, Francis. Do that for me, please. Have a fantastic life.

The bell rings, freezing them together for a moment, and when he opens his eyes, she is gone, the room vacant, her footsteps echoing down the hallway, until there's only silence left.

EXT. RAILWAY STATION - LATER.

FRANCIS is sitting on a hard bench, he watches the people coming and going in the late-afternoon rush, on their way somewhere, with suitcases and briefcases, a FRECKLE-FACED GIRL struggles under a knapsack on her back, TWO SAILORS sitting on the marble floor play cards. A MASTER SERGEANT marches across the lobby as if leading an invisible platoon, uniform crisp, an array of ribbons on his chest. A YOUNG GUY watches him, unshaven, wearing an old battle jacket, soiled and stained. He follows the sergeant with half-closed eyes, then sags against the wall, smiling dreamily.

FRANCIS:

(v/o)

I remember what I said to Nicole about not knowing who the real heroes are and I think of my old platoon. Sonny Orlandi, Spooks Reilly, Blinky Chambers, Eddie Richards and his diarrhoea. Erwin Eisenberg. Henry Johnson, hit by shrapnel. And those who died, Jack Smith and Billy O'Brien, and all the others. I think of Enrico, minus his legs, his arm. I think of Arthur Rivier, drunk and mournful that night in the alley. Scared kids, not born to fight or kill. Who were not only there but who stayed, did not run away, fought the good war. And never talk about it. And didn't receive a Silver Star. But heroes, anyway. The real heroes.

A TRAIN arrives, and FRANCIS stands up.

FRANCIS:

(v/o, CONT.)

Maybe if I'm going to write as Nicole hopes I will, I should write about them. Maybe I should buy a typewriter and get started. Maybe I should try to find Dr. Abrams' telephone number

in Kansas City. Maybe I should track down Enrico, check out those hospitals he told me about. I should do all those things. I think of Nicole. I think of the gun inside the duffel bag at my feet. I pick up the duffel bag and sling it over my shoulder. The weight is nice and comfortable on my back as I cross the lobby, heading for the exit and the next train to leave the station.

FRANCIS heads towards the exit as we -

FADE OUT:  
CREDITS.  
THE END.