

WITH THOMAS WOLFE WHISPERING IN MY HEAD

by

Doug Presley

dpresley52@gmail.com

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FADE IN:

EXT. OUTSIDE THE SPRING HOUSE - DAY

As the credits begin to roll, we get a tight close up of the back of a horse, from withers to hip, angled from the front left shoulder. A saddle blanket is tossed over the horse's back and we can see the hands and forearms of the cowboy in the process of saddling the horse. As the blanket settles, the speckled sunshine that filters through the sparse canopy of shade provided by the few trees highlight specks of dust, gnats and small bugs against the darker background.

Next, we see the saddle placed atop the blanket and then a stirrup tossed over the seat as the saddle is cinched. Again, we see the hands and forearms of the cowboy as they move in and out of camera view.

Next, we get a wider view. The cowboy, PETE SIMPSON, has moved around to the front of the horse and is putting on the bridle. Pete is an average size man with a grey streaked, neatly trimmed beard. He is dressed in the usual garb of a working cowboy; boots, jeans, a long sleeved button up shirt and a crumpled, worn cowboy hat. The hat has a dark, wide sweat stain around the crown.

The horse, named DOLLAR, alerts, raising its head with a jerk.

The camera view is now from behind Pete and over his shoulder. In the distance, we can see the dark outline of low hills. Thunderheads are building over the hills.

PETE

You tryin' to tell me they're headed this way?

(Pause)

Then I reckon we picked the right time to head home, didn't we? But I'm bettin' Maggie and Kate ain't gonna like it if it rains.

The camera switches to an elevated position and we can see more of the area around the Spring House. The house is whitewashed adobe and wood, with a broad, covered porch across the front. The rear of the house is built into the side of a small hill. There is a small stable and a smaller shed off to the side of the house.

A sparse grove of live oak trees cluster around the buildings, and along Goodwater Creek, a narrow and shallow stream that flows past the Spring House on its way to the Canadian River. On the bank of the stream directly opposite the house, a spring bubbles up out of the ground, adding a bit more water to the flow of the creek.

We catch Pete as he lifts himself into the saddle and slowly rides around the Spring House and it's small out buildings. He looks the buildings over closely as he goes, making a

mental note of what he sees. He takes it as his responsibility to make sure this place is kept up, so he looks it over every chance he gets. When he is satisfied with what he sees he wheels Dollar around and follows the trail along the creek.

EXT. MAIN HOUSE AT BEND IN THE RIVER RANCH - DAY

The camera is behind a redheaded woman, looking over her shoulder as she looks toward the Canadian River. The river is a hundred yards or so from the house. She is holding her hand flat above her eyes to shield them from the sun. Off camera we can hear people talking and the noises of some unseen activity.

KATE
(O.S.)

Stop worrying. He won't be able to see anything 'til he gets right up to the house.

Camera view changes to a point in front of MAGGIE RUSSELL, about 40yo, the redhead we saw looking out over the river. We can see her turn as KATE WALLACE approaches. Kate is a brunette, also about 40yo. They are at a corner of the wide, covered porch that goes completely around the main house. Maggie is leaning against the open railing.

MAGGIE

I know, I just want this to be a surprise.

KATE
(Smiling)

Don't worry, it will be.

Then, as she turns to walk away she looks back over her shoulder.

KATE

At least until he catches a whiff of the barbeque.

Maggie frowns a little and goes back to stringing lights along the porch railing.

EXT. CANADIAN RIVER/GOODWATER CREEK - DAY

The camera is elevated slightly and holds on Pete as he comes into view from the small ravine near the spot Goodwater Creek flows into the Canadian River. The camera pans slowly, holding on Pete as he rides between the camera and the river.

He pauses for a second when the ranch comes into view. He can see the ranch house sitting on top of a hill. There are a few trees near the house, but not enough to hide the people milling around the yard near the house.

PETE
 (softly, to himself as
 much as to Dollar)
 Yeah, Bud, They're up to something.

EXT. BEND IN THE RIVER RANCH - STABLES - DAY

Wide camera shot of Pete nearing the stable. The ranch is spread out with several buildings and corrals. The main house is on a hill, the highest point in the immediate area. There is not a lot of work around the ranch since it's Sunday. There is a young cowboy, BLAS AVALOS, standing near the stable door. He is about 20.

Pete dismounts as Blas walks over and takes Dollar's reins.

BLAS
 Hey Pete, How was the fishin'
 today?

Pete is a bit stiff and is favoring his right leg. He stamps it lightly a few times, as if trying to get the circulation back into it.

PETE
 Thanks, Blas. The fishin' wasn't
 too bad, not too bad at all.

BLAS
 Well how come I don't see any fish?

PETE
 'Cause I threw 'em all back

BLAS
 (Puzzled)
 Why fish if you ain't gonna keep
 'em?

PETE
 (Smiling)
 Oh, sometimes the point is just in
 the fishin'. Don't always matter
 whether you catch anything or not

BLAS
 Not sure I understand that.

PETE
 You will one of these days. There's
 an old sayin, 'The gods don't take
 away from a man's life the time he
 spends fishin''

BLAS
 (Shrugs)
 If you say so.
 (MORE)

BLAS (cont'd)

(Pause)

Oh, by the way, Boss left word that you was to git up to the big house just as soon as you got back. I'll take care of Dollar for you.

The camera returns to a full shot of the front of the stables and we can see another building further off to the side of the stables. This building is the bunkhouse. Pete turns and walks toward the bunkhouse.

PETE

Gracias, amigo. I'll wash a little of this dust off and get on up there. I can see they're up to something.

INT. BEND IN THE RIVER RANCH - BUNKHOUSE - DAY

Pete's room is sparsely decorated and dim due to the curtains being closed. He has showered and is putting on fresh clothes before he goes up to the main house. He is sitting on the side of the bed, pulling on his boots. He is wearing jeans but his chest is bare and we can make out a number of irregular scars that almost make a line from the top of his right shoulder, down along the edge of his chest and then down his right side before disappearing into the waistband of his jeans,

Pete stands up, facing a mirror. The camera shows his reflection in the mirror from his right as he buttons the front of his shirt and then buttons the sleeves. As he is doing this we are drawn to another scar on the right side of his face, that is partially hidden by his beard.

After buttoning the shirt he puts on his best hat and heads toward the door.

EXT. BEND IN THE RIVER RANCH - OUTSIDE THE BUNKHOUSE - DAY

The camera follows Pete as he walks up the hill toward the main house, which dominates the top of the hill in front of us. To the left we can see a number of cars and trucks parked at the base of the hill. No doubt people who were invited to Pete's 'surprise' party. The steps leading up the hill are made of old railroad ties dug into the ground, and come in handy during the rainy season when the ground is slick with mud. There is a handrail on both sides of the steps.

As Pete nears the top of the hill he begins to see the extent of the crowd waiting on him.

There is a porch and railing that wraps around the entire house. The porch is crowded as is the yard around the barbeque pit. We can hear the sound of a small band, the fiddle player is working on a lively tune above the din of people talking.

When Pete sees the crowd he stops for a moment. His first thought is to turn around and go back down the hill.

EXT. BEND OF THE RIVER RANCH. MAIN RANCH HOUSE - DAY

From Pete's POV, Maggie makes her way through the crowd and stands at the railing. Momentarily Kate is standing beside her. Both of them are waving at Pete. Maggie notices Pete hesitating and walks quickly to him, taking him by the arm. Kate is just behind her and takes Pete's other arm.

By this time BOSS WALLACE has made his way to top of the porch steps, with JOHN WALLACE right behind him. Boss is the patriarch of the Wallace family, big and solid, looking much younger than his 72 years, and John is his only son, late 40s and as solidly built as his father.

BOSS

Hey folks, here comes the guest of honor!

The little band breaks into an enthusiastic version of 'Happy Birthday'. It was no doubt an enthusiasm meant to cover up the fact they were more than a little off key and out of synch.

JOHN

Come on, Pete. You don't wanna run out on your own party.

People start crowding around the top of the steps as Pete, Maggie and Kate walk slowly toward the steps.

PETE

(softly to Maggie)

Now I can see why you didn't want to go with me today.

MAGGIE

(Smiling)

I couldn't. I wanted this to be a surprise. If I'd gone with you I'd been bustin' to get back here and you would have guessed somethin' was up. Besides, Kate needed my help.

As they walk up the porch steps, Boss makes an exaggerated sweep with his arms toward the crowd of people.

BOSS

(Trying to sound gruff)

Dammit, now move! Moses parted the waters easier than he could make a path through you people.

Boss leads Pete through the crowd. As he walks along people reach out to shake his hand or pat him on the back. All of them are congratulating him. There is a din of voices as

Boss leads him to a stool.

BOSS

(To Pete)

Get up here boy. It's your turn in the boiler. Get up there and give these folks a good look at you.

Pete is trying not to stumble over the stool as Boss more or less pulls him along. Finally, Boss puts up both hands and the crowd slowly gets quiet.

BOSS

(Loud so everyone can hear)

Folks, you know what this man right here means to me. He just as well be one of my own, and in some ways he is. Now, I ain't one to waste a lot of time with speeches, so I think John should do this one.

Everyone laughs. They all know that Boss likes talking more than almost everything else.

Johnm stands in front of Pete, nervously shuffling from foot to foot.

JOHN

(Humbly)

Folks, I don't have to tell you what this man means to me either. To me, they just don't come any better. He's so much more than just my friend. He's part of this family, a big part. I didn't know 30 years ago what I was getting myself into when I grabbed him off a street corner in Amarillo, and I'm not completely sure if Dad has forgiven me to this day.

(everyone chuckles)

But there's no way this family. or Bend in the River, would be the same without him.

Close shot of Maggie holding Pete's hand and smiling up at him.

JOHN

And since he is family, and since he's such a part of this place, today, on his 50th birthday, we want to give him a part of it.

John takes an envelope from Boss and hands it to Pete.

JOHN

(Continuing)

Pete, Dad, Kate, the kids and me want to give you this deed to a piece of Bend in the River. It's the quarter section that contains the Spring House and that fishing hole you like so much.

A close up on Pete as he stands in shock, not believing his ears.

PETE

(Stammering)

Wait a minute. John! Boss! You can't do this. That's part of the original ranch. It's been in your family for over a hundred years.

BOSS

Oh, hell, don't tell me what we can and can't do. We just did it.

PETE

But what about Alex and Elizabeth? One day this will be theirs. They should have a say in it too.

John smacks Pete on the back.

JOHN

(laughin)

Who's idea do you think this was? They knew they couldn't be here for the party, so they suggested it. Beside, who knows if they'll come back here after college or not.

Pete is dumbfounded as people pat him on the back and give him their best wishes. For a time he looks like he's nearly in tears. Maggie moves in beside him and hugs his arm.

EXT. BEND IN THE RIVER RANCH - MAIN HOUSE PORCH - NIGHT

Pete sits in the porch swing, swinging slowly back and forth. Most of the people are gone, but there are a few still out in the yard, cleaning up the leftover mess from the party.

Boss walks through the screen door out onto the porch.

BOSS

(laughing)

We did you up right tonight didn't we boy?

PETE

(smiling)

Yes sir. I have to admit you did.
Still not so sure I deserve it
though.

BOSS

(laughs louder)

We didn't do you any favors. Hell,
you're goin' to be the one payin'
the taxes on it and keepin' it up.
Givin' it to you was the easy part.

John walks up on the porch and stops at the screen door.

JOHN

(loudly so everyone can
hear him)

Anybody want a nightcap?

KATE

(walking up the steps
from the yard)

I'll take one.

(Turning toward the yard)

Hey everybody, just leave that
stuff 'til mornin'. There's no
reason to bother with the rest of
it tonight. It ain't gonna hurt
what's left if it rains.

Kate walks over and leans against the porch railing.

KATE

Quite a turn out. We really
surprised you, didn't we?

PETE

(smiling softly)

Yeah, you did.

Maggie walks up the steps and moves over to sit beside Pete.
The other people who had been helping with the clean up say
their good-byes as they walk down the hill toward their
vehicles.

MAGGIE

We wanted it to be special sweetie,
you only turn fifty once

PETE

(teasingly)

Well yeah, you're right, but you
only get one shot at all of 'em
don't you?

MAGGIE

(slaps him playfully on
the arm)

You know what I mean.

PETE

(smiles)

Yeah, I know, and I gotta admit
that this one is a little
different. Feels like it anyway.

John walks back out on the porch and hands Kate her drink,
then he leans against the railing with her.

KATE

I think the big ones always do make
you feel different.

PETE

(shrugs)

I guess, But this one's got me
thinkin' about things I ain't
thought about in years.

BOSS

Human nature to run things over in
your mind as you get older. You get
to a spot and you start wonderin'
'bout things. Not that it does you
any good. You can't change
anything.

PETE

Maybe, but it got me thinkin' about
takin' a little trip. That is Boss,
if you don't mind.

BOSS

Why should I mind? Unless you're
talkin' about bein' gone for six
months or somethin' like that.

PETE

(chuckling)

No, nothin' like that. Just a few
days, maybe or a week or two at the
most.

JOHN

Where you goin'? Mexico?
California?

PETE

No, I've been thinkin' 'bout goin'
back home

Maggie reacts immediately

MAGGIE

Home? I thought this was home.

PETE

Well, yeah, this is home now, but I was talkin' 'bout Tennessee. I ain't been back in thirty years. Thought maybe it was time I did.

BOSS

Sure you can go. Take one of the pickups if you want to. That way you can come and go as you please. You won't have to waste your time waitin' on buses or planes or whatever. There's nothin' worse than waitin' when you want to get some place.

KATE

You know, in all this time you've never told us very much about your gowing up. Who all's back there? Any relatives?

PETE

(Getting a bit reserved)

Not many, if any. My Uncle Jimmy's the only kin I know of that might be left, and heck, he could be gone by now.

(Pause)

I'd just like to look the place over. No doubt there is an old friend or two still around, and I'd like to pay my respects to my Mom and Dad and grandparents.

Maggie moves a little closer to him. Pete had never talked much to anyone about his life before coming to the ranch, and this seemed to be a good time to get him to open up about it.

MAGGIE

What were they all like?

Pete takes a deep breath. These people had become like family to him over the years. Maybe it is time to talk about it. After all, it had been driving him crazy over the past several months.

PETE

(looking down at the floor)

I don't remember all that much about my folks, I was four when they passed. Just spotty little

(MORE)

PETE (cont'd)

memories are about all there is. I remember Mama always smelled so pretty all the time. As I grew up and would think about her, I'd close my eyes and smell her just like she was right there with me. There are times I can still smell that sweet scent.

(pause)

The only thing I can remember about my Dad was he always whistled. Whether he was workin' or just sittin' on the porch, he whistled. Most of the times it was one of the hymns Grandma was always singin' and at other times it was just a whistle, didn't seem like there was any real tune to it at all.

Pete gets up from the swing and walks slowly toward the steps going to the yard. He leans against a post and stares out into the darkness.

PETE

Pretty much everything else I remember is from the pictures that Grandma had. Grandma loved pictures. She had 'em everywhere. Pictures and knick-knacks. She was just an ol' mountain woman, and in her whole life I doubt she was ever more'n fifty miles away from the spot she was born. She was my Dad's mom. Uncle Jimmy's too. When my folks died in the car wreck I went to live with her. Grandpa had passed by then so it was just me, her and Uncle Jimmy. She raised me and when she started getting' older I felt like it was my turn to take care of her, and I was gonna do it too, 'til I had to go to Vietnam.

(pause)

You know, in the end I didn't do her right, not like I wanted to. I didn't even say good-bye to her the way I should have. She was the whole world to me and I wasn't there when she needed me most.

KATE

It's not like you had a choice

PETE

(his eyes tearing up)

I know. But I felt like I was all she had. Uncle Jimmy lived there,

(MORE)

PETE (cont'd)

but he wasn't around much. He was always drinkin' and runnin' around, worryin' the life out of her. I was afraid of goin' to Vietnam and maybe dyin', but I was more afraid of leavin' her alone. I didn't think Uncle Jimmy would look after her. Not like he should.

(After a sigh)

So, I got Preacher Rainwater from the church to go with me to the draft board to try and get 'em to let me stay and take care of her, but they wouldn't listen. They said Uncle Jimmy was her nearest blood kin and should be able to watch after her.

JOHN

So you were drafted?

PETE

Yep, sure was. It was even on television. They pulled my number out of that big jar and I knew I was gone. I didn't have a choice. If I didn't go they would have come and got me and she'd have still ended up by herself.

JOHN

I was lucky I guess. When my turn came around they didn't pull my number.

PETE

Good for you then, bud. Me, you nor anybody else had any good reason for being over there. Funny thing is I don't remember that much about it. I didn't shoot anybody. I didn't even shoot at anybody. When I got there the unit I was assigned to had just come in off patrol, so we had a little time 'til we went out again, and then I was wounded in the first fight we were in. That's about as far as my Vietnam experience went. All that time and effort put into worryin' about it, and it was over in no time.

MAGGIE

Really?

Maggie looks a little embarrassed, but that is all she could think of to say. She was paying so much attention to what he was saying, and it was her reaction more than it was her

speaking.

Pete stares off into the dark night, his mind drifting back to a time that was so long ago. A time he's tried to equally hard to forget and remember.

SLOW FADE OUT

EXT. OPEN HIGHWAY IN TENNESSEE - DAY

SLOW FADE IN

PETE FLASHES BACK TO THAT TIME.

Camera angle is high above the countryside, looking down at a winding two lane highway. Eventually the camera latches onto a Trailways bus, making its way along the road.

The next camera angle is slightly elevated to about tree top level and holds on the front of the bus as it moves toward the camera. We can see the driver, and in the front seat opposite him is a young man in an Army uniform. It's Pete.

Now the camera is inside the bus, looking over Pete's shoulder at the road ahead.

PETE (VO)

I couldn't believe that in the time I had been gone that things could change that much. Nothing was new, it just looked so much different. Nothing looked as sharp as I remembered, it seemed dull and grey, the road looked impossibly narrow, and distances seems so much shorter.

As we look out the front of the bus, the road goes down a small hill and we can see a river in front of us. There are homes and businesses on both sides of the river, but the far side is more heavily populated. There is a bridge spanning the river, it's blue steel beams dominate the view.

PETE (VO)

That old bridge was the real sign I was home. It was a landmark, but a lot like an old friend welcomin' me home, too.

EXT. DOWNTOWN LOUDON - OUTSIDE THE DRUG STORE - DAY

The camera is on the sidewalk outside a drug store. We can see the bus turn a corner up the street and come toward us. It finally pulls to a stop at the curb, the airbrakes mark the stop and the door swings open.

Inside the bus, the driver speaks into a microphone.

BUS DRIVER

Loudon, folks, this is Loudon.
We'll be here 'bout ten or fifteen
minutes

Pete steps off the bus behind the driver and stretches.

MR. ROBINSON

(Coming out of the drug
store)

Hey Frank, how's things goin'?

BUS DRIVER

Oh, not too bad so far. Anything
goin' out today?

MR. ROBINSON

(Handing the driver a
small box)

Just this one goin' to Chatt'nooga.

Pete stands patiently waiting for the bus driver to get his
duffel bag from under the bus.

CASEY (O.S.)

Well, I'll be damned. I thought we
got rid of your ass.

Pete turns around and sees CASEY GOODMAN sitting in a black
sedan that is idling in the middle of the street. Casey is
leaning part way out the open window. He is the same age as
Pete, but has a larger build. His black hair is long and
shaggy.

CASEY

You look sharp there, hero. Come
home to give us one last look at
you?

PETE

I'm on leave, Casey. I'm gonna be
here about a month and then I'll be
gone again. So don't worry about
it, okay?

CASEY

Oh, believe me, General, I ain't
worried 'bout you or anything to do
with you. It makes no difference to
me whether you're here or not.

PETE

I didn't come home to argue with
you Casey. Like I said, I'm just
passin' through this time. When I
do come back to stay though I'll
make sure you're the first to know.

CASEY

(Laughing)

Skip it, hero. We'll just have to learn to do without you for a while longer. I'm sure Loudon can learn to do without you easy enough.

Casey revs the motor of the car and goes speeding away. Pete watches after him for a moment and turns back toward the bus as the bus driver hands him the duffel bag.

BUS DRIVER

(Smiling)

Here's your bag, son. Enjoy your time home.

PETE

(Taking the bag)

Thank you, sir, I'm sure gonna try.

The camera pans on Pete as he turns and walks across the street to the Taxi Stand. It's a spot that has a couple of reserved parking spaces for taxis and a telephone connected to a pole that has a small wooden cover over it. Behind the pole, and against the wall of the bank building, is a wooden bench for the drivers to sit while waiting for a call.

MR. KEY, the taxi driver gets up from the bench when he sees Pete coming. He is an older man with thinning grey hair who has been driving a taxi in Loudon for a lot of years.

MR. KEY

Well look who's comin' in their bright shiny uniform!

Pete smiles and shakes the older man's hand.

MR. KEY

(laughing as he shakes Pete's hand vigorously)

Heck, boy, I swear I didn't even know you was gone. Your granny's gonna be tickled to see you that's for sure.

Mr. Key opens the trunk of the car and Pete puts his duffel bag inside.

Pete then gets into the front seat.

INT. INSIDE THE TAXI - LOUDON - DAY

Pete is silent as the taxi moves along. Mr. Key tries to start a conversation, but when he realizes Pete is lost in thought he becomes silent too.

Pete stares out the window at the countryside.

PETE (VO)

There was a time Casey and me were good friends. As kids we were inseparable, but that all changed in high school. That's when we met Debbie.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE SIMPSON FARM - DAY

Mr. Key slows the taxi to pull into the driveway that leads to the farm house. Pete reaches over and places a hand on the man's arm.

PETE

Don't drive up to the house, Mr. Key. I want to walk up.

MR. KEY

(Laughing again)

Gonna surprise her, huh boy? I wish you'd let me drive you on up there so's I can see it.

PETE

I want to stretch my legs a little. I've been sittin' all day.

MR. KEY

(Stopping the car at the end of the driveway)

Not a problem, son.

Mr. Key gets out of the car and walks around to the rear and opens the trunk. Pete pulls out his wallet to pay.

MR. KEY

(Smiling)

Keep it. I'm proud to do it.

PETE

(Shaking the old man's hand again)

Thank you

Pete takes the duffel bag and starts walking up the dirt road leading to the house.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE SIMPSON FARM HOUSE - DAY

The camera is now on the end of a long shady front porch, tracking on Pete as he walks slowly up the dirt road. Pete is initially in sunlight but then walks under the dark shade provided by the big trees that surround most of the farm house.

The screen door slowly opens and an elderly woman walks out onto the porch. She never takes her eyes off Pete. She is a short, plump woman wearing a worn cotton dress and apron. The dress goes down well past her knees. Her grey hair is

pulled back in a tight bun. She is Pete's GRANDMA.

As Pete gets closer the woman begins to smile. As he nears the steps she is already starting to bring her arms up to hug him.

GRANDMA

Just look at you, Don't you look pretty.

Pete takes her in his arms and hugs her tightly.

PETE

Grandma, soldiers ain't supposed to be pretty.

GRANDMA

Well the one I'm lookin' at is.

(She breaks the hug and
pats his belly)

Now, come on in here'n eat. Looks like they ain't been feedin' you a'tall.

INT. SIMPSON FARM HOUSE - DAY

Pete and his grandmother enter the living room from the outside. It's a neat and clean room and although sparsely furnished, and there are a lot of pictures on the wall. PETE paused to look around and refamiliarize himself with things.

GRANDMA

Your room is ready. Just like you left it.

PETE

Good. I want to get changed into some regular clothes. I ain't been able to wear anything but a uniform since I left.

GRANDMA

(Turning toward the
kitchen)

Well just hurry, I've saved some dinner for you.

INT. SIMPSON FARM HOUSE - DAY

It's a bit later and Pete enters the kitchen and sits down at the table. He is dressed in blue jeans and a t-shirt. There is a full plate of food in front of him.

GRANDMA

Oh, that girl called here this mornin' for you

PETE

(Smiling)

Her name is Debbie, Grandma, She'd like it if you called her that.

GRANDMA

She's your friend, not mine. What difference does it make what I call her?

PETE

Well, it would be nice for one thing. And besides, it might matter if I ask her to marry me someday. Then what would you do?

Pete watches to see her reaction and he doesn't have long to wait. His grandmother turns around with a surprised look on her face.

GRANDMA

You ain't already asked her have you? I thought you and her split up.

PETE

(With a teasing look)

We did, But I could still ask her.

(Looks down at his plate)

I'm starved, and this smells so good.

EXT. SIMPSON FARM HOUSE PORCH - DAY

Pete walks out onto the porch and lets the screen door close slowly behind him. His grandmother is sitting on the porch swing, fanning herself with a newspaper.

Pete acts frustrated.

PETE

Nobody's at home.

GRANDMA

Did you call that girl?

PETE

(A little irritated)

Debbie, Grandma, Debbie. Her name is Debbie. And no, I didn't call her. I guess I'll bump into her later.

Both of them are quiet for a moment. Pete is sorry for the tone he used and his grandmother quietly continues to fan herself. She is always quiet when she's upset.

PETE
 (Suddenly)
 I'm gonna mow the yard

GRANDMA
 You just got home. There's plenty
 of time for that later

PETE
 (Still frustrated)
 It needs it, look at it, Uncle
 Jimmy's let it grow up too high
 already

GRANDMA
 Then at least wait 'til after the
 sun goes down. It's too hot to do
 that now.

PETE
 (Stepping down off the
 porch)
 I have to do something. Keep the
 tea cold. If it gets too hot I'll
 just do part of it.

EXT. SIMPSON FARM HOUSE YARD - DAY

The yard is actually to the side of the house. The house faced what used to be the Simpson barn and silo, but his grandmother had sold that part of the farm. The dirt road up to the house used to service both the house and the barn.

As Pete walks along he begins to feel better. He has taken off his shirt and the sun feels good on back and shoulders. Dust and grass clippings fly up around him as he works and from time to time he uses the shirt to wipe away the sweat and clippings.

As he mows Pete doesn't notice a car pull up to the side of the road. DEBBIE WARD gets out of the car and walks around to the side nearest Pete. She is an attractive blonde in Bermuda shorts and matching top. She leans back against the car and waits until he is close to her.

DEBBIE
 (Over the sound of the
 mower)
 Hi. I heard you was back.

PETE
 (Turning the mower off)
 Word gets around, huh?

DEBBIE
 Your grandma told me this morning
 when I called. You didn't say much
 in your last letter, so I called
 and asked her.

PETE

I'm sorry. I thought I did tell you since I had a welcomin' committee.

DEBBIE

Who?

PETE

Casey Goodman. So you might say it was an unwelcomin' committee.

DEBBIE

Didn't exactly make you feel at home, huh?

PETE

You could say that. He seemed to be more than a little put out by me bein' back.

DEBBIE

He gets that way sometimes.

PETE

You wouldn't be givin' him cause to feel that way would you?

DEBBIE

(A bit irritated)

Oh please. I've seen him a couple of times down at the cabin, and then we more or less had dinner together one night when he invited himself to my table down at the café, but that's it. The truth is Casey don't need much cause to get mad when it comes to you.

PETE

(Half smiling)

Yeah, I know. I stole you from him, did you know that?

(Pause)

Well, it beats you bein' alone I guess.

DEBBIE

(Looking down at the ground)

Well you ain't interested no more. You made that plain enough.

PETE

(A bit loud)

And I tried to tell you why!

(Lowering his voice)

It's not that I don't want you. I do. But 'til this is all over I

(MORE)

PETE (cont'd)
just think the fewer the worries,
the better it'll be for all of us.

DEBBIE
(Getting emotional)
Sometimes you're so dumb! It makes
it easier for you but not for me. I
hate this whole damn mess. I wish
you didn't have to go.

PETE
(Shrugs)
Me too, but I ain't got no choice.
There ain't no way out of it.

DEBBIE
(Close to tears)
Casey should be goin', not you.

They stand for a few moments in silence, neither knowing
what else to say.

PETE
(Finally breaking the
silence)
Well, I guess I'd better get this
yard done. It ain't gettin' no
cooler.

Debbie walks around the car and slowly opens the door.

DEBBIE
Will I see you again before you
leave?

PETE
(Starting the mower)
You know you will.

EXT. SWIMMING AREA AT THE RIVER - DAY

The camera pans down a rutted dirt road to a dilapidated old
cabin. Some parts of it are crumbling while others are
propped up by wooden poles. Directly in front of the cabin
is a small grassy patch that serves as a yard before the
bank slopes down into the river.

There are several kids/teens splashing in the water. Pete is
sitting on the edge of the cabin porch with two others,
BILLY and WAYNE. The three boys are sipping beer.

Close up on the three teens.

WAYNE
It's a bitch, man. I wish you
didn't have to go.

BILLY

(Full of bravado)

You know what? Sometimes I wish I could go. I'd go in a heartbeat if they'd let me.

PETE

Hey, feel free to take my place.

WAYNE

Hell, man, run off to Canada or something.

PETE

Now why would I go to Canada? I don't know anybody up there. Besides, they'd probably just send me back down here. Then what?

The teens stop talking and sip their beer while they watch the swimmers.

CASEY (O.S.)

Hey dipshits, don't you know you guys ain't supposed to have beer? Especially down here.

The camera moves off to one corner of the porch so we see all four teens. Casey is in bathing trunks and carrying a towel.

BILLY

Screw you, Goodman

WAYNE

And that goes double for me.

CASEY

Both of you can bite me, Anyway, if you get caught they could close this place down and then we all lose. Tell 'em General.

PETE

Nobody's botherin' you Casey

Casey walks a few steps closer and talks directly to Pete.

CASEY

Well if they are, they won't be much longer, will they General?

BILLY

Goodman, was you born this big of an asshole or do you just work hard at it?

Casey steps over and smacks Billy on the top of the head. Billy jumps up and lunges at Casey, but the bigger teen

sidesteps and Billy stumbles to the ground. As Billy gets up on one knee, Casey uses his fist to punch Billy in the back of the head, sending him sprawling in the dirt.

Pete has moved behind Casey and grabs him by the shoulder, keeping him from throwing another punch.

PETE

Leave him alone.

Casey jerks his arm out of Pete's grasp and throws a punch at Pete. Pete blocks the swing with his left forearm and throws a right jab. Casey pulls back to avoid the punch, but he is off balance, and his feet slip on the wet, stubby grass, causing him to fall backward, tumbling down the sloping riverbank and into the water.

Casey comes up thrashing and spitting water. All the other kids gather around and laugh at the sight of Casey in the water. He stands there for a moment looking around at the laughing kids and back at Pete, who is still poised and ready to keep fighting.

Wayne steps between them.

WAYNE

Stay there and cool off a minute
Casey.

Casey glares at him and wades out of the water and up the bank. There is a mixture of rage and embarrassment on his face.

CASEY

(Glaring at Pete)

It ain't worth it anyway, General.
I'm gonna let Vietnam take care of
you for me.

Casey storms off up the dirt road. Wayne and Pete watch him walk away.

WAYNE

Hey man, don't worry about him.
He's just pissed. He'll cool off.

EXT. A HILL OVERLOOKING THE RIVER - EVENING

Pete is sitting in a clearing on a hill overlooking the river. It is late in the day just before sunset. The next day he will be leaving.

He reacts to rustling in the bushes on one side of the clearing. It is Debbie.

DEBBIE

So there you are. I was beginning
to wonder if I was going to find
you.

PETE

I'm just sittin' here thinkin'.

DEBBIE

I'll leave you alone if you want.

PETE

No, no. Stay. Please.

Debbie walks over and sits beside him.

DEBBIE

Okay.

The two of them are quiet for a moment, watching the river below them.

PETE

This has always been one of my favorite spots.

(Pointing to a low limb
in a tree)

When I was a kid there was a swing on that limb.

(Pointing to a limb
further up in the tree)

And I bet you can still see the marks right up there where we tried to build a tree house.

(Chuckles)

All we ever got built was the floor, and it was just a few boards. It was so crooked that everything rolled off of it and ended up down here on the ground. The bunch of us would just hang out up here, or go down to the river and fish. Just us guys. No grown-ups or girls allowed.

DEBBIE

(Smiling)

So am I breakin' the rules by being here?

PETE

(Smiling back)

From the looks of it, nobody comes around here much anyway. We can probably let that rule slide.

They are silent again, as if each of them want to talk but can't think of what to say.

DEBBIE

(Almost a whisper)

Pete, I can be afraid for you if you need me to.

PETE

Oh, believe me, I don't have a problem with that. I'm scared as hell.

DEBBIE

You don't show it.

PETE

Well I am. I feel like my stomach is twisted into a million knots. Sometimes my head tells my legs I should run, but my legs are so scared they don't know how to work.

Debbie leans over and puts an arm around his shoulders.

DEBBIE

I'm sorry that you have to go through this.

PETE

I do love you, you know.

DEBBIE

(A little irritated)

Then why are you closing me out? Why are you pushin' me away?

PETE

I've tried to tell you. There's just so much goin' on and I'm so mixed up I don't even know what I'm doing. If I come back, and all this war stuff is behind me, then we can be together again.

DEBBIE

Then you are asking me to wait on you.

PETE

I'm asking you to wait on everything, not just me. If I come back, then everything will be fine. And if I don't, well, then you can go on.

DEBBIE

(Louder)

I don't even want to think about you not coming back, Pete Simpson. You'd better come back here to me!

Pete leans forward and takes her into his arms and kisses her. A close up shows tears on her cheek.

PETE

(after breaking the kiss)
I know things have been rough the
past year, but it's gonna be even
harder bein' half a world away from
you.

Debbie kisses him again. There is a determination in her
now. They lay back on the grass.

EXT. SIMPSON FARM HOUSE PORCH - MORNING

It's early the next morning and Pete, his grandmother and
his UNCLE JIMMY are standing together on the front porch.
Uncle Jimmy is a little behind Grandma. All three are sad.

GRANDMA

I don't think I'm gonna be able to
sleep a single, solitary night
you're gone

PETE

(Hugging her)
Oh, Grandma. You'll be fine. I'll
be back before you know it. You
just wait and see.

Pete tries not to show his own tears as he kisses her on the
forehead.

PETE

I'll write you every chance I get.
I promise.

GRANDMA

(sobbing)
You'd better.

Pete finally looks at his uncle.

PETE

You look after her. And keep
yourself straight. I'm countin' on
you.

Uncle Jimmy nods but doesn't say anything.

Pete walks down off the porch and hurries to Mr. Key's taxi.
He doesn't want to look back because he is afraid he will
start crying, and he doesn't want Grandma to see him cry.

EXT. ARMY TRAINING - FT ORD - DAY

A collage of shots of Pete in training. Marching in
formation with other soldiers, training on the firing range,
crawling through brush and sand, moving rapidly through a
forest, going from tree to tree.

EXT. PACIFIC COAST NEAR FT. ORD - DAY

Pete is sitting atop a group large rock along the coastline. Waves crash around him and sea birds seem to hover in the ocean breeze, crying loudly.

Pete looks solemn. His mind is hundreds of miles away, thinking about his grandmother and the others back home. Especially Debbie.

PETE (VO)

Each and every day, almost all day,
I thought of Grandma. I wrote her
as much as I could and sometimes I
called, but I still worried so much
about her. I thought of Debbie too,
of course. I couldn't help it.

EXT. AIRPORT TARMAC - VIETNAM - DAY

PETE (VO)

The first thing I noticed about
Vietnam was how hot it was. It can
get hot and humid in Tennessee but
this was worse than anything I had
felt before.

Pete and several other soldiers exit an airplane and walk down a gangway to the tarmac. There is a lot of activity around them. Other planes are taxing or taking off while helicopters are flying in and out of the airspace overhead. Other soldiers service the planes or performing some other detail, and some are standing around watching the new guys arrive. A stack of boxes that are obviously caskets draw the most attention from the new soldiers.

PETE (VO)

The second thing I noticed was the
boxes. Nobody had to tell us what
was in 'em.

Pete follows the slow moving gaggle of new arrivals as they walk into the terminal building.

INT. AIRPORT TERMINAL - VIETNAM - DAY

As Pete shuffles through the door a soldier stops him. Pete hands him a copy of his orders and the soldier points to an NCO standing against a far wall. Pete walks over and gives a nod to the NCO, but the NCO doesn't acknowledge him.

After a few more soldiers join Pete, the NCO finally speaks.

WAGNER

Follow me.

EXT. OUTSIDE TERMINAL - VIETNAM - DAY

The NCO stops just outside the building.

WAGNER

Gather around me here for a second.
 (Waits to make sure
 everyone is listening)
 I'm Sergeant Jack Wagner, First
 Platoon of Bravo Company. I'm going
 to take you to headquarters and get
 you squared away. Don't get too
 used to any of the luxuries you see
 around here. We're only here for a
 little while longer and then we're
 goin' back to the bush. Now, follow
 me.

Wagner leads them through a cluster of tents and bunkers.
 There are soldiers scattered around watching the new
 arrivals. After a short period of time WAGNER stops.

WAGNER

Simpson!

PETE

(Moving through the other
 soldiers)

Yes, sir.

WAGNER

Save the sir stuff for the CO. It's
 Sarge or Jack or Wagner or
 whatever, but don't call me sir.
 (Pauses)

You're in my platoon. You stand
 tight right here 'til I show these
 boys where they go and I'll be back
 to show you around.

Pete stands there as the sun gets hotter and hotter. He is
 aware of other soldiers watching him. They are talking
 almost loud enough for him to hear, and they laugh even
 louder, but he knows they are talking about him.

Finally Wager comes back and waves his arm.

WAGNER

Come on. Let's go.

INT. TENT - VIETNAM - DAY

Pete follows Wagner into a tent. It is dark and cooler
 inside and it takes a few seconds for Pete's eyes to adjust.
 There are three men lounging in the other end of the tent.

HOUSEY (O.S.)

Hey look at the FNG!

WAGNER

At ease, Housey.

(MORE)

WAGNER (cont'd)

(To Pete)

Simpson, this is going to be home while we're not in the bush, but like I said, don't get too used to it. We're in and outta the bush a lot. Grab an empty cot, the CO will want to talk to you later.

(Turns toward the other 3 soldiers)

This is Woodall, Housey and Nunez. They're not a bad bunch as long as you sleep with one eye open. Guys, this is Simpson.

The soldier closest to Pete steps forward and offers Pete his hand.

WOODALL

(Smiling)

Don't listen to him, we do our dirty work when you're awake. I'm Max, Max Woodall.

The tall thin soldier who yelled when he walked into the tent looks him over cautiously.

HOUSEY

I'm Housey, Mario Housey, but everybody just calls me Housey.

The third soldier steps forward.

NUNEZ

I'm Roberto Nunez, but they call me Bob. Where are you from?

PETE

Tennessee.

HOUSEY

Damn! Another damn hillbilly.

PETE

(Ignoring the remark)

Where are you guys from?

WOODALL

Little Rock, Arkansas.

NUNEZ

Lubbock, Texas

WAGNER

Covington, Kentucky.

HOUSEY

(smiling)

See? Nothin' but fuckin'
hillbillies.

(Pauses)

I'm from Riverside, California

WAGNER

(Slapping Pete on the
back)

Don't mind him, his bark is way
worse than his bite. Grab you a
beer. I'll be back later to take
you to see the CO.

Housey hands Pete a beer.

HOUSEY

Here man, have a cold one on me.
First thing you gotta learn is how
to stay cool, and this helps. Just
get thru your time here, that's the
name of the game. We all just wanna
get through with this shit and get
back to the world.

WOODALL

Yeah, and we'll be going back to
the bush soon enough.

EXT. AIRFIELD TARMAC - VIETNAM - MORNING

The platoon is getting onto helicopters. Pete looks very nervous but he tries hard not to let the others see how nervous he is.

The helicopters take off with a rush of wind and noise. The doors of the helicopter are open and it adds to Pete's nervousness.

Housey sees how nervous Pete is.

HOUSEY

(Above the noise of the
helicopter)

Don't sweat this stuff, man. We're
goin' to a cold LZ, but just the
same, when we hit the ground stick
with me. Clear the chopper fast. If
any shootin' does start these
things draw a lot of fire.

Pete nods to show he understands and tries looking at the scenery to help calm his nerves. It is amazing how such lush and beauty could be a place where men were dying.

EXT. LANDING ZONE - VIETNAM - DAY

As the helicopters land in the LZ, Wagner jumps off and hurries to a cluster of other soldiers gathered near the center of the compound. Pete follows Housey and the others into an open bunker.

Wagner comes to the bunker.

WAGNER

Okay, listen up. Looks like we're going to be here for a little while. There's VC activity between here and our patrol area.

NUNEZ

So what are we gonna do here?

WAGNER

Rest up while we can. There's a couple of gunships comin' in to see about clearin' a way for us, so it shouldn't be long. Just hang tight and keep your eyes and ears open.

Housey moves over to Pete and starts checking his gear.

HOUSEY

Stay close to me. If I make a move I want you in my shadow. The rules are simple; keep your eyes and ears open, your weapon clean and ready, and your ass outta trouble. And above all, don't get dead. Scared?

Pete nods, almost too nervous to talk.

PETE

(Stuttering)

Yes-s-s. Some.

HOUSEY

(Smacks Pete's shoulder)

Get used to it Bro. I get so nervous my mouth dries up. I ain't spit since I got here.

EXT. LANDING ZONE - VIETNAM - DAY

Pete and the others are standing outside the bunker looking at the jungle. In the distance is the thumping of the gunships attacking the pockets of enemy soldiers.

WAGNER

Heads up guys. If the gunships flush anybody out they might come this way.

NUNEZ

(Pointing)

Here comes another chopper.

Pete and the others watch it as it moves slowly toward the LZ. When it is only a few feet off the ground it disintegrates into a fireball. Pieces of burning metal rain down on the LZ.

WAGNER

(Screaming)

ROCKETS!!! INCOMING!!! INCOMING!!!

Suddenly the entire LZ is bombarded by mortars and rockets. Pete scurries back to the bunker and jumps in. Everywhere he looks is pandemonium. He no sooner gets into the bunker than there is a tremendous explosion near him. He is picked up and dropped to the ground outside the bunker.

Pete lays there, dazed and confused.

FROM PETE'S POV

His vision is blurred and dim. His hearing is muted. Everything seems like a dream. He can see the shadow of soldiers rushing past him and he can feel the ground shake with each new explosion.

Now there's a figure over him. Almost face to face with him. He realizes it's Housey and he's yelling, but Pete can barely hear what he's saying.

HOUSEY

(Screaming)

MEDIC!!! MEDIC!!!

(To Pete)

Lay still man, don't move. Don't even try to move. Help is comin'! Help is comin'! Hang in there, man! Remember the rules. No dyin'. No dyin'!

Pete feels himself receding. Things are getting darker and darker. He can barely see Housey now. He tries to hang on, but can't. The darkness is pulling him in, he no longer hears Housey or the sounds around him. Then, everything is dark.

PETE (VO)

I remember grabbin' for Housey and holdin' on as hard as I could. I didn't know if I was dyin' or what. I knew I was hit but I didn't hurt. I didn't feel anything.

INT. HOSPITAL - VIETNAM - DAY

PETE'S POV

Everything is slowly getting lighter. We can see images but nothing too clearly,

PETE (VO)

I have no idea how long I was out.
It was almost like I went from
lookin' at Housey to lookin' at a
ceiling.

Eventually things come into focus and he sees he is inside a long room with lights and fans along the ceiling. Most of the lights are out, but all the fans were turning slowly. He can only move his head from side to side and that doesn't allow him to see very much more. From what little he can see, there are other beds in the room. He doesn't know how many beds, but the ones he can see are occupied. His mind is foggy and he tries to sit up but can't.

NURSE (O.S.)

Well, look who's awake.

The face of a nurse moves into his line of sight. This is NURSE DAVIS.

NURSE DAVIS

Welcome back. We were wondering
when you were going to wake up. Can
you hear me and understand me?

PETE

(Groggy)

Where, where am I?

NURSE DAVIS

(Smiling)

You're in a hospital, so don't
worry. We'll have you better in no
time.

The camera is now near the bed. We can see Pete has bandages around his head. His right arm is in a sling and his right leg is elevated and heavily bandaged.

Pete tries to move again and is straining to sit up.

NURSE DAVIS

(Putting her hands on
Pete's shoulders)

Hey there! You watch yourself. If
you loosen any of these bandages,
I'm going to tie you down to this
bed permanently. Just wait right
there and I'll let the doctor know
you are awake.

After the nurse walks away, Pete tries once again to sit up. He grabs the ring over his bed with the only arm that isn't bandaged and pulls. It is a struggle to lift himself at all, and after struggling with it for several minutes he falls

back on the bed, breathing heavy and nearly exhausted.

NURSE DAVIS (O.S.)

Did you try to get up again? Now don't you make me get after you.

(Wiping Pete's face with a cloth)

If you pop any of those stitches open soldier we may never get you out of here.

She looks down at him and smiles. When she moves aside, Pete can see a man dressed in a white coat standing by his bed, flipping through pages on a clipboard. It's the DOCTOR.

DOCTOR

Hello, Private Simpson, I'm Major King. Good to see you are alert. How do you feel?

PETE

Not bad. Okay I guess. Sorta funny.

DOCTOR

You're still pretty groggy from the medication, and will be for some time. Can you feel any discomfort of any kind?

PETE

No sir. Nothin' I can feel right now. Just sorta funny. Dizzy a little.

DOCTOR

(Continuing to flip through the papers on the clipboard)

You're a very lucky young man. You've lost a lot of blood from wounds to your right side, hip and leg. You have a fractured hip and your arm and three ribs were broken. They put pins in your right thigh, and removed a piece of your large intestine.

PETE

How long was I out?

DOCTOR

(Starting to examine Pete's bandages.)

All told, several weeks. More than enough time to give us some concern. What time you weren't unconscious you were sedated. It took a while for you to stabilize

(MORE)

DOCTOR (cont'd)

enough to patch things up properly. If you were another half hour away from the field hospital we wouldn't be talking now. Some medic did a damn fine job on you. Now that you're alert, we will give you another once over to see how things are healing. If everything looks good enough, we'll start you on physical therapy. The good news there is most of the therapy will be in the states.

(Turning to the nurse)

You can untie the arm and lower his leg. And elevate the head of the bed. Let's let him sit up for a while.

NURSE DAVIS

Yes, doctor

DOCTOR

(To Pete)

Private Simpson, you let us know right away if there's any pain or discomfort.

PETE

Yes, sir.

The Doctor walks away.

NURSE DAVIS

I'll be back in a little bit unless you need something now.

PETE

Do you know what happened to my unit?

NURSE DAVIS

That was a while ago. I'm not sure. As I remember there were several casualties, half a dozen or so, I think, and three times that many were wounded.

PETE

Do you remember any of their names?

NURSE DAVIS

No, I'm sorry but I don't.

PETE

Thank you, ma'am.

INT. HOSPITAL - VIETNAM - DAY

Even though the nurse was only gone a few minutes, PETE is dozing when she comes back. He is startled when she lays a stack of papers on the table by his bed.

NURSE DAVIS

Here's your mail. If you need help opening any of it just let me know. And there's also somebody here to see you.

PETE

Who would be coming here to see me?

NURSE DAVIS

(Busying herself with untying his arm and lowering his leg)

One of the chaplains. They come by and visit with every patient. Looks like it's your turn.

(She then starts turning the crank at the base of the bed)

I don't know how much you're going to like what you're about to see, but here goes.

Pete's upper body lifts as she cranks the bed up. He can see the entire room now. There are about 20 beds. Some of the soldiers, like him, are sitting up looking about the room or reading, while others are still lying down. Some look like they could spring up out of bed right now, while others are bandaged from head to toe.

NURSE DAVIS

(Turning to leave)

There you go. Now you and some of these other guys can get acquainted.

PETE

Thank you, ma'am.

FATHER JOE (O.S.)

Well, I see Private Simpson decided to wake up.

Pete turns to see the tall, grey haired man standing near his bed.

FATHER JOE

Hi. I'm Father Joseph McCown, one of the Chaplains around here. It's good to finally see you are awake Private Simpson. You had us worried there for a while.

PETE

Thank you, sir.

FATHER JOE

(With a wave of his hand)

I'm not a sir. That sounds too stuffy. Father Joe is good enough with me.

PETE

(Smiling)

Okay, Father Joe it is then. I'm Pete, Is there something I can do for you Father? I mean, I'm not Catholic.

FATHER JOE

Oh, that doesn't really matter. Just between me and you I don't think God really cares so much about where we choose to go to church, as long as we go and try our best.

PETE

There sure are a lot of them.

FATHER JOE

Yes there are. Which one do you practice, Pete?

PETE

Southern Baptist I reckon. That's all I know to be.

FATHER JOE

(Chuckling)

Baptists have been around almost as long as we have. Have you ever been to a Catholic church?

PETE

(Laughing)

Once in basic training I went to the wrong service by mistake. It never occurred to me that there was gonna be anybody there but Baptists since back home it's mostly Baptists and a few Methodists. But it was a Catholic service. I saw right away it was different, nothing like what I'm used to back home, but it really wasn't all that bad.

FATHER JOE

Good. I'm glad it was a good experience.

Father Joe moves over and sits on the side of Pete's bed, his mood noticeably more solemn.

FATHER JOE

(Slowly)

Listen, Pete, Like you, I have my duties here, and some of them are not very pleasant. I'm afraid it has fallen on my shoulders to give you some very distressing news.

PETE

(Apprehensive)

What is it?

FATHER JOE

Well Pete, there is no easy way to say this, so I'm just going to say it. I'm afraid your grandmother has passed away.

Pete has a shocked look on his face. He searches the priest's face, looking for some sign that maybe he had heard wrong, but the sadness in the man's eyes echo his words.

PETE

(Almost crying)

When? How?

FATHER JOE

That's the saddest part Pete. It was some time ago, while you were still unconscious. The Red Cross alerted the hospital but there was nothing that could be done.

Pete lowers his eyes, not trying to hide the tears running down his face.

FATHER JOE

I am so sorry, I really am. Is there anything I can do, anyone I can contact for you?

PETE

(Sniffing)

No. I'm the only one she had that she could depend on, and I wasn't there.

FATHER JOE

It's hardly your fault, Pete.

PETE

She was always there for me. After my folks died, she took me in and raised me. She didn't deserve to die alone like that.

FATHER JOE

If it's any consolation, she died peacefully in her sleep,

PETE

I guess that's something.

FATHER JOE

And God is looking after her now. She'll have no more suffering.

PETE

I don't mean any disrespect Father, but right now that's not much comfort. She looked so scared when I left. It's almost like she knew we wouldn't see each other again.

(Pause)

If you don't mind Father, I think I'd like to be alone.

FATHER JOE

(Patting Pete on the shoulder)

Certainly, Pete, certainly.

(Stands to leave)

And please remember, if you need to talk about it, or need anything, anything at all, just let me know. Ask one of the nurses to come and get me, and I'll be right here.

PETE

Thanks

INT. HOSPITAL - VIETNAM - MORNING

Pete wakes up and rubs his eyes. Since finding out about his grandmother the night before, he could barely sleep. He looks sad and distant.

He picks up the stack of mail from the table beside the bed and starts to look through it. One of the letters is from his grandmother and he tosses it aside. He is not ready to read anything from her just yet. The only other letter is from Debbie. He rips the envelope open and scans through it quickly. There is nothing solid in it, nothing to get him out of the doldrums.

The other pieces of mail are small home town newspapers. He picks up one and starts thumbing through it. The camera is over his shoulder focusing on the paper as he scans through it.

Suddenly, Pete stops and stares at the headline of the story in front of him: 'GOODMAN AND WARD WED'.

Below the headline is a picture of Debbie and Casey smiling with the story: 'Mr. Casey Goodman and Miss Deborah Ward

were married Saturday in a private ceremony at the home of the bride's parents'.

Pete lets the paper crumple on his lap as he stares at the ceiling.

PETE
(Muttering)
Well, so much for waitin' 'til I
get back home.

NURSE DAVIS (O.S.)
Someone you know?

Pete realizes he was crying again but didn't care. He didn't try to hide it.

PETE
(Softly)
Just someone I thought I knew.

NURSE DAVIS
You've had a rough few months,
Private Simpson

PETE
(His eyes still teary)
I'll get over it.

NURSE DAVIS
I'm afraid I can't give you
anything for what you're feeling
now.

Pete doesn't respond. He's afraid he will break down and cry hard.

The nurse looks at him for a few moments, searching for some way to help him, then moves toward the bed.

NURSE DAVIS
(Softly)
I know I'm not your grandmother, or
whoever the girl in the picture is,
but I can try to help.

The nurse reaches out and takes Pete's shoulders in her hands. She pulls him to her and wrapped her arms around him, her hand softly patting his back. She sits there, holding him, for several minutes. She rocks gently back and forth as he cries harder, and she tries her best to take some of the hurt away. When the sobbing has almost stopped, she eases him back on the pillow.

PETE
Ma'am?

NURSE DAVIS
Yes?

PETE

Thank you. Can I ask your name?

NURSE DAVIS

Lieutenant Davis. Ann Davis.

PETE

(Trying to smile)

Thank you, Lieutenant Ann Davis.

NURSE

(Smiling as she turns to
leave)

Glad I could help

INT. HOSPITAL - VIETNAM - AFTERNOON

It's several days later and Pete is sitting up in bed, flipping through a magazine. He looks bored.

The doctor comes into view, leafing through the papers on his clipboard.

DOCTOR

Well, Private Simpson, it looks like we have done just about all we can do for you here. Tomorrow we are going to be transferring you to another hospital to begin physical therapy.

PETE

Where Sir?

DOCTOR

San Francisco. You're going back to the states, son.

PETE

How long will I be there?

DOCTOR

A few weeks, a month or two, it's hard to say. It depends on how you respond to the treatment.

(Pause)

I can tell you that you will most likely always have a limp and that at the end of your rehabilitation you will be medically discharged. It's more than a bit ironic that the Army puts young men in the position to get injuries like yours, that will no doubt bother them for the rest of their lives, and then turns them loose to deal with it more or less on their own.

Pete doesn't say anything. He sits there staring off into space, looking as some unseen image that seems to be holding him in its grasp.

DOCTOR

(As he turns to leave)
Anyway, good luck Private Simpson.

PETE

Thank you, Sir

As the doctor leaves, Father Joe walks up.

FATHER JOE

Well, Pete. I hear you're leaving us.

PETE

(Smiling)

Yes, Father, I guess I am.

FATHER JOE

You know, the name Peter means a lot in our church. The apostle Peter was our founder.

PETE

I didn't know that.

FATHER JOE

It's true. And like you, he had his share of rough times too. I guess what I'm trying to say is things will get better

PETE

I know you mean well Father, and I do appreciate it, but I'm still not sure which way to turn right now.

FATHER JOE

Going home is a positive first step isn't it?

PETE

Home to what? To who?

FATHER JOE

(Putting his hand on Pete's shoulder)

It will work out. Don't forget you have a guardian angel watching over you now. She will help you work your way through this.

PETE

I'll try my best, Father.

FATHER JOE

Good. Keep in touch and let me know how things work out for you.

INT. HOSPITAL - SAN FRANCISCO - DAY

PETE (VO)

It helped that I was so busy tryin' to get myself workin' again that I didn't spend too much time thinking of Grandma. When I did I couldn't help cryin'. I couldn't believe I was never goin' to see her again. I thought of Debbie too, and couldn't keep myself from feelin' more and more bitter.

With the VO is a collage of clips showing Pete undergoing physical therapy. At first, he moves slowly, methodically, with a cane. The next clip is of him working with a therapist on a slow moving treadmill. With each passing clip he is getting stronger, more confident. Then a clip of him walking fast without any support, not even his cane, and finally he is jogging slowly. He has a pronounced limp, especially when he runs, but he is much stronger than when he started.

INT. HOSPITAL - SAN FRANCISCO - DAY

Pete has finished running and is leaning over with his hands on his knees, catching his breath. A hospital orderly walks up to him.

ORDERLY

(Handing Pete a folder)

Private Simpson, this is your out processing packet. Take it to every part of hospital you've worked with while you've been here. It will take you a couple of days to get it complete. Your final out processing appointment will be Thursday at 0900 hours. That's in the packet too.

PETE

(Looking at the packet,
and speaking to himself)

Hmmm, only 3 days. And I was worried it would last forever.

INT. HOSPITAL - SAN FRANCISCO - DAY

Pete enters a small narrow room. There is a wide double door frame, with no doors, in the center of one wall and just outside it is a CLERK sitting at a desk. The wall opposite the desk is lined with chairs. There is also a closed door at the far end of the room. Pete walks over to the desk and hands the Clerk his processing folder.

CLERK

(Taking Pete's packet)

Please have a seat. Someone will call your name when it's your turn.

Pete takes a seat. There are two other soldiers waiting to be called.

After several minutes Pete is the only one waiting. Presently he hears his name called.

CORPORAL (O.S.)

Private Simpson!

Pete stands up and walks through the double door frame. This room has a number of desks down each side of the room. A soldier is behind each desk and there is a straight backed chair beside each desk that faces the wall.

There is a CORPORAL standing up looking toward Pete. He waves for Pete to come to his desk.

CORPORAL

Right over here, Private Simpson.

(As Pete approaches he points to the chair beside his desk)

Have a seat.

The corporal is thumbing through Pete's folder.

CORPORAL

Looks like tomorrow is going to be your big day. You're going to be a civilian again.

Pete nods as the corporal continues to thumb through the papers. After another minute, he puts a small stack of papers down in front of Pete.

CORPORAL

These are your discharge papers. As you can see it's a medical discharge based on your condition. Be sure to file a copy with the local veteran's office ASAP after you get to your home of record. The Army has decided you should receive thirty five percent disability. That's not much, but it's something. As soon as you register at your home of record they will re-evaluate the percentage and you will start receiving the monthly checks.

Pete nods and glances over the papers before he begins signing them. As he is signing the papers, the corporal tosses a small box down on the table in front of him.

CORPORAL

This is yours too.

PETE

(Picking up the box)

What is it?

CORPORAL

(Still shuffling papers)

That's your Purple Heart. You were still out when they wanted to give it to you the first time.

Pete opens the box and looks at the shiny medal. He strokes the pad of his thumb across it, feeling its cool surface, then he puts the top back on the box and puts the box in his pocket.

CORPORAL

(Laying down another stack of papers)

This is your travel voucher. Go back out into the entry way and through the door to your right. Take this to the first window inside that door and they will give you your travel pay and any back pay you have coming to you. Then, take that money to the next window you see and they will get an airline ticket for you.

PETE

What if I want to take the bus or something?

CORPORAL

No problem. The shuttle that leaves here at 0600 tomorrow morning goes by Greyhound on the way to the airport. I would also advise you that while you're traveling to wear something other than your uniform.

PETE

Why?

The corporal stops shuffling papers and looks intently at Pete.

CORPORAL

Because not everybody outside these gates loves the Army or the fact we're in 'Nam. The Army feels there's no need in you drawing any unnecessary attention to yourself.

PETE

Can't I wear what I want?

CORPORAL

Look. All the Army's trying to do is save you some grief, man. There are people out there who will do anything, up to and including kicking your ass, if they see you in that uniform.

PETE

I'll think about it.

The corporal glares at Pete for several seconds, and then after sizing up the stubbornness in him, throws up his hands.

CORPORAL

(Slamming his hands down
on the top of the desk)

Okay fine, Private Simpson. You do that.

(After handing Pete a
large envelope)

These are yours. I'm done with you.
You're free to go.

EXT. HOSPITAL - SAN FRANCISCO - MORNING

Pete is standing outside the hospital waiting for the shuttle. It is a cold, foggy morning. He is wearing his Army dress uniform.

A green Army station wagon comes down the street and stops at the curb in front of the hospital. A small man gets out of the vehicle and opens the rear door. He gives Pete a smile as he walks up the steps and into the hospital.

After a few minutes, he comes back out and puts his hand out to Pete.

VIC

Mornin' to you. I'm Victor, you can call me Vic. They tell me inside you're my only rider this morning.

PETE

(Shaking Vic's hand)

I'm Pete.

VIC

(Smiling)

Well, come on Pete. We'll get you loaded up here and on your way.

Pete starts to bend over to get his duffel back but Vic stops him

VIC

You let me worry about that.

Pete limps along behind him to the station wagon, and stands to one side while Vic puts the bag in the back and closes the door.

VIC

You can ride up front with me if you want.

The two men get in the station wagon and Vic slowly pulls away from the curb.

INT. SHUTTLE - SAN FRANCISCO - MORNING

VIC

I'll have you to the airport in no time.

PETE

I don't want to go to the airport. The bus station will be fine.

VIC

Aren't you in a hurry to get home?

PETE

Not really. There are some things I need to think over before I get there.

(Pause)

Besides, it'll be good to let things slow down for a while.

VIC

Okay. You're the boss. The bus station it is then.

The two men drive along in silence for a while, Vic paying attention to the traffic and Pete staring out at the fog.

VIC

(Breaking the silence)

So Pete, you strike me as being a smart enough guy, so I guess I can assume you're a little bit on the stubborn side.

PETE

Meanin' what?

VIC

Well, I know they gave you the same no uniform speech they give everybody else. So since you're wearing your uniform I can only guess that you're just stubborn enough to do what you want.

PETE

(Smiling)

It just didn't make any sense to me, that's all.

VIC

You know they do that for a reason, right?

PETE

I know the reason they gave me. But it's my uniform, and as much as I hated havin' to go through what I went through, I still think I earned the right to wear whatever I want to.

VIC

I agree.

(Pause)

It's a shame that it's come to this. My generation was treated a lot better. I did my time. Twenty years in fact, forty-four to sixty four. When we came home, we were heroes. The country was a lot different then. Now, people just want us out of there and they want us out now. They want to yell at the people who put us there, but they can't because the ones responsible aren't close enough. So, they take it out on you guys, the ones they can see. I'm not making excuses for them, you understand. Just telling you the way it is.

Vic doesn't say anymore and they ride along in silence. As he turns the corner near the bus station he can see the sidewalks are crowded with people already, several of which are young panhandlers.

VIC

Pete, do me a favor. Walk right in, get your ticket, and find a nice quiet place in a corner to sit until your bus leaves.

PETE

(Eyeing the crowd as Vic pulls up to the curb)

I'll be fine.

There was more people on the sidewalk than he had seen in one place in a long time, and it made him nervous. Being in the hospital was almost like being isolated, especially from things that might be unpredictable.

VIC
 (Seeing Pete hesitate.)
 You want me to help you?

EXT. OUTSIDE THE BUS STATION - SAN FRANCISCO - MORNING

Pete gets out and waits for his bag. After months of being in a quiet hospital, the noise of the city puts his nerves on edge. He looks up and down the street, trying to take it all in. The street noise is almost deafening and the sidewalk was almost as loud with people hurrying this way and that. He feels something bump his leg and realizes Vic is standing there holding his duffel bag.

PETE
 (Reaching for the bag)
 No. I'll take that, I want to do this myself.

VIC
 Are you sure?

PETE
 Yeah. I've got to do this myself.

VIC
 (Putting down the duffel bag)
 You're the boss.
 (Offering his hand to PETE)
 It's been a pleasure, Pete. Welcome home and have a safe trip.

PETE
 Thanks Vic, I will.
 (Noting the apprehension on Vic's face)
 You go on and get back. I'll be fine.

Pete stands on the sidewalk and watches as Vic gets back in the station wagon and pulls away from the curb. After a brief wave, he bends down to pick up the duffel bag.

TEENAGE GIRL (O.S.)
 Hey, got any change?

Pete looks back when he hears the voice. For a moment his mind is playing tricks and he thinks he is seeing Debbie. He temporarily forgets the duffel bag and stares at the young girl in front of him, his eyes wide and his mouth open in disbelief.

TEENAGE GIRL
 Well, do ya?

FIRST TEENAGE BOY (O.S.)
 Hey man, give her some change.

Pete can't say anything. He continues to stare at the girl and then realizes it's not Debbie he is looking at, and that only confuses him more. He is tongue-tied.

FIRST TEENAGE BOY

I said give her the money, man.

Pete turns slightly. A scruffy teenage boy is yelling at him. His hair is almost as long as the girl's hair and there are the thin, wispy beginnings of a beard on his face.

FIRST TEENAGE BOY

Is something wrong with your hearing. soldier boy?

Pete is trying to say something, anything, but can't. The words just wouldn't come, and the young boy keeps interrupting.

SECOND TEENAGE BOY (O.S.)

Hey, what's with the baby killer?

Another boy comes up on the other side of the young girl. Now all three of them are talking loudly, their voices combine with the already noisy street. One of the boys steps toward Pete and spits at him. Pete begins to fumble in his pockets but he can't remember where he put his money. Then, other young people begin to join the three already yelling at him, and the crowd grows larger,

VIC (O.S.)

Pete, get back in the wagon

Vic tosses several bills at the crowd and picks up Pete's duffel bag.

VIC

(To Pete)

Hurry up! Get back in the wagon and let's get out of here.

Vic had left the front door open and Pete ducks inside as several of the kids scuffle for the money. For the time being they had lost interest in Pete, and Vic quickly jumps back behind the wheel and pulls away from the curb

INT. SHUTTLE - SAN FRANCISCO - MORNING

Pete is still flustered and is trying to calm down.

PETE

I'm sorry. Too many things happened at once I guess. I got confused.

VIC

Don't worry about it. I don't think they would have hurt you. They're not bad kids, not really. They're

(MORE)

VIC (cont'd)
just a little confused, and can you
blame them when they have to live
on the street like that?

PETE
Well, thanks for comin' back for me

VIC
I could see you were going to have
some trouble so I circled the
block. The problem now is how are
we going to get you home? We can't
go back there so it's got to be a
plane.

PETE
(Quickly)
No, no plane.

VIC
Train?

PETE
Maybe.
(pause)
Wait! A truck!

VIC
Truck?

PETE
(Getting excited)
Yeah! Big trucks, eighteen
wheelers. Billy's dad drove one
back home. Me and Billy went all
over the place with him. Those guys
will give me a lift. I know they
will. Is there a truck terminal
near here?

VIC
(Shrugs)
Beats me, Pete. I'm sure there is,
but I've never noticed one.

PETE
There has to be. This is a port.
Boats bring the stuff in and trucks
haul it out.

VIC
Might be one in Oakland

PETE
(Hopefully)
Mind goin' to see?

VIC
 (Smiling)
 No sir. I'll get you a ride out of
 here if it's the last thing I do.

EXT. TRUCK TERMINAL - OAKLAND - AFTERNOON

Vic rolls the station wagon to a stop next to the truck terminal. It had taken them awhile, but they finally found a terminal in the foothills east of Oakland

VIC
 I'm not leaving until you find out
 if you can get a ride.

PETE
 Thanks, Vic. I'll be right back. If
 this don't work out we can go to
 the airport.

VIC
 (Smiling)
 It's a deal

EXT. TRUCK TERMINAL - OAKLAND - AFTERNOON

The parking lot surrounding the building is full of trucks. Some are idling and some are being refueled while mechanics work on some others. Pete thinks there are so many trucks that some of them had to be going east.

One part of the terminal building is a garage and the other part is a convenience store. Pete steps inside the store.

INT. TRUCK TERMINAL - OAKLAND - AFTERNOON

The inside of the store is stocked with almost everything a truck driver could want. There are shelves holding books, maps, tools, snacks, even clothing. A WOMAN is standing behind the counter, watching Pete as he walks in.

WOMAN
 (Smiling)
 We don't get many soldier boys in
 here.

Pete smiles and walks to the counter.

PETE
 Ma'am. I was wonderin' if I could
 ask a question.

WOMAN
 Sure, honey.
 (She notices the scars on
 Pete's face)
 You've been through some kind of
 hell, haven't you

PETE

(Uneasy)

Yes ma'am, I guess I have. What I was wonderin' is if maybe you know of a driver who might let me ride along with him.

WOMAN

Where to?

PETE

Well, I eventually want to get to Tennessee but I'll take anything that'll get me goin' in that direction.

WOMAN

Well, there are trucks leaving here all the time headed south. You could probably hitch a ride down to Bakersfield or Barstow. There's bound to be trucks through there headed east.

PETE

Great. I'll get my stuff.

EXT. TRUCK TERMINAL - OAKLAND - AFTERNOON

When Pete goes back outside, Vic is leaning against the station wagon watching the trucks move around the terminal.

VIC

Find anything?

PETE

Yeah. The lady inside said they leave outta here all the time.

Vic takes Pete's duffel bag out of the back of the station wagon.

VIC

Good.

(Offers his hand to Pete
one more time)

Well, this is it then I guess.

PETE

(Shaking Vic's hand
vigorously)

I don't know how to say thank you enough.

VIC

Don't worry about it, brother. Glad I could help. We vets have to stick together.

Pete stands in the shadow of the building and watches Vic pull away from the terminal and head back toward the bay. He then turns and carries the duffel bag inside the store.

INT. TRUCK TERMINAL - OAKLAND - AFTERNOON

As Pete re-enters the building the woman behind the counter smiles at him again.

WOMAN

Sweetie, it's up to you, but I don't think I'd wear that pretty uniform in one of these dirty old trucks. You'll get grease and dirt all over it.

PETE

None of my other clothes fit right. I've been laid up a while.

WOMAN

(Pointing toward the back of the store)

I have racks of clothes over there. It's just jeans and work pants. That's all a trucker will wear. There are shirts over there too.

PETE

Thank you.

Pete walks to the back of the store. He looks through the racks until he finds a shirt and a pair of jeans that look like they will fit him okay. He also chooses a belt and a pair of cowboy boots.

He then goes to the men's room and changes, putting his uniform into the duffel bag as neatly as he can.

WOMAN

(As Pete reappears)

You look like a whole new man, right down to the boots.

PETE

Yeah, I figured that would be easier than bending over and fooling with laces.

WOMAN

Smart man.

(Pauses)

Oh, I got you a ride!

PETE

(Excited)

Really? Do you know where he's goin'?

WOMAN

Barstow. It's right on sixty-six
and a lot of trucks come through
there going east.

Pete takes out his wallet to pay for the clothes

PETE

I sure do appreciate your help.

WOMAN

Glad to do it. Oh, wait a minute.
(She reaches for a cowboy
hat and hands it to
Pete)

You're going to need something to
keep the sun off that scar.

(As Pete tries it on)

That's on me. You just take care of
yourself. Oh, here comes Woodrow,
he's the ride I was telling you
about.

Pete turns to see an older man walking toward the counter.

WOMAN

Woodrow, this is the soldier I was
telling you about.

WOODROW

(Looking Pete up and
down)

Don't look like one to me, except
that is one helluva reminder you
got there on your jaw. Mortar?

PETE

(Shyly)

Yeah, I guess so. To tell you the
truth I was too busy duckin' for
cover to figure out what it was.

WOODROW

(Chuckling)

Yeah, I guess you would be. Well,
come on, I have to get this load to
Barstow.

PETE

(To the woman)

Thanks again.

WOMAN

Don't worry about it, hon.

(Louder)

Now Woodrow, you stop in next time
you're up this way and let me know
how he makes out.

WOODROW

(As he's walking out the door)

We'll do it.

INT. TRUCK CAB - CALIFORNIA - AFTERNOON

The two men don't talk much. The exhaust pipe that extends up the rear side of the cab, is loud and occasionally slaps the side of the cab on Pete's side.

After a time the truck moves out of the coastal hills and into a long valley. The air is hot and Pete rolls down his window, trying his best to disregard the noise.

Pete watches the scenery go by. There is one cultivated field after another that is broken up by an occasional town. He never saw so much farm land or the constant activity in the fields.

After an hour or more, WOODROW yells out above the noise of the truck.

WOODROW

(Loud)

I'm gonna stop down here in Bakersfield to fill up and give the truck a chance to cool off a little before we start up the grade. Get yourself a cold drink and find a shady spot.

EXT. BAKERSFIELD CALIFORNIA - LATER

Pete is sitting on a chair behind a gas station, under the shade of several trees. He sips on a soft drink and watches the traffic on the highway he and Woodrow had been on earlier.

INT. TRUCK CAB - CALIFORNIA - LATER

The two men are back in the truck as it climbs up a fairly steep grade. Pete leans out the window and tries to look behind the truck as the long valley disappears behind them.

An hour later the road bobs and twists through small rolling hills. This part of the ride is still hot and looks more and more like a desert instead of the cultivated fields in the valley they were in earlier.

PETE (VO)

The desert was givin' me second thoughts about tryin' to hitch a ride. I didn't want to get stuck in a place like this.

EXT. TRUCK TERMINAL - BARSTOW - NIGHT

The truck pulls into a well lit truck terminal. They had dropped off their load only moments before. Woodrow parks the truck and both men get out and stretch.

WOODROW

It's too late to start back north.
I've got a friend a few blocks from
here that I visit when I'm in town.
You feel free to sleep here in the
cab if you want to, but I'm taking
off bright and early in the
morning.

INT. TRUCK CAB - BARSTOW - NIGHT

The noise of the trucks makes it hard for Pete to go sleep. For a time he sits there looking through the windshield at the stars. After what seems like hours, he falls asleep.

EXT. TRUCK TERMINAL - BARSTOW - MORNING

It's barely daylight and Pete stands beside the terminal, waving to Woodrow as he pulls the truck back out on the highway.

Then, there is a collage of Pete hanging around the terminal. Occasionally he approaches a driver but is always turned away. Nobody is going east. The more he tries to get a ride, the more depressed he becomes.

It is almost noon and Pete is hungry and hot and decides to go into the terminal for something to eat and chance to cool off.

INT. TERMINAL CAFE - BARSTOW - LATER

Pete walks into the diner and sits on a stool at the counter. The COOK who runs the diner hands Pete a menu.

COOK

Hell, boy, I thought you left this
mornin' with Woodrow.

PETE

No, Sir. I'm headin' east as soon
as I can get a ride.

COOK

East? What's east?

PETE

(Looking over the
menu)

Home.

COOK

So you're tryin' to hitch a ride
from one of these truckers?

PETE

That's what I'm hopin'.

COOK

You don't look like you're in any
shape to be hitchin' anywhere.
Where did you get cut up so bad?

Pete doesn't answer.

COOK

(Persisting)

Car wreck?

PETE

(Giving in to the
questions)

No, sir. I was wounded in the Army.

COOK

From the looks of it, you're lucky
to be alive.

PETE

I guess I am. Now I'm just tryin'
to get back home.

COOK

You should have taken a plane. You
would have been there by now.

PETE

I know. Believe me, that thought
has crossed my mind a lot today.

COOK

(Seeing the sadness in
Pete's eyes)

Well hell, boy, if you want a ride
you have to know how to ask for
one.

The cook turns around, facing the other men in the cafe.

COOK

Who in here's a vet?

Several men raise their hands.

COOK

(Indicating Pete)

This boy here's a vet too. Look at
him. He did his duty and got all
banged up doin' it. Now he's just
trying to go home back east. Any of
you boys goin' in that direction
want to give him a lift?

A trucker sitting at one of the tables raises his hand.
This is ED.

ED

As soon as I'm finished eatin' I've
got a load going to Amarillo

COOK

(Turns to the smiling
Pete)

There you go. I'll get you a
hamburger, and if you don't get a
chance to finish it before he's
ready you can take it along with
you.

INT. TRUCK CAB - ARIZONA - AFTERNOON

The truck is a lot different than Woodrow's had been. This one is almost brand new. The cab is higher, roomier and best of all, air conditioned. There is also a sleeping compartment behind the seats.

Ee proves to be no more of a talker than Woodrow had been. He listens to his CB radio and sometimes talks to other truckers, but mostly he is silent, so Pete spends his time watching the countryside zip by.

PETE (VO)

Western Arizona looked worse than California. Once we got past the Colorado River there was hardly anything to look at but hard baked dirt and rocks. We drove over dozens of small bridges but I didn't see any water, just dry creek beds.

After a time they start to climb up into the Arizona high country.

PETE (VO)

Then, before I knew it, everything changed. It wasn't desert anymore and there were lots of pine trees. Everything seemed to totally change inside of 20 miles.

They ride on through the pines where it is cool and shady and the air smells so sweet and clean.

But then they started their decent on the east side of the mountains.

PETE (VO)

Then, just as I got used to the everything bein' so nice, we started back downhill again and
(MORE)

PETE (VO) (cont'd)
 inside of 5 miles we were right
 back in the ugly desert again.

ED
 (Breaking up Pete's day
 dreaming)

There's a rest area up here a bit.
 I'm gonna pull in there for a few
 hours sleep. I'm gonna crawl back
 there into the sleeper, but you're
 welcome to sleep here in the cab if
 you want to. I've got a sleeping
 bag and extra blankets you can use
 if you need 'em.

EXT. ARIZONA REST AREA - EVENING

The rest area is crowded with other trucks and cars. Some of the trucks are idling with their marker lights turned on. Ed finds a place to park and the two men get out to stretch their legs. After walking around for a few minutes, Ed climbs into the sleeping compartment and tosses Pete a blanket.

PETE
 It sure is a nice night, so if it's
 all the same to you I'm gonna go
 lay out on one these tables. Don't
 run off in the mornin' without me.

Ed doesn't say anything and closes the door. Pete spreads the blanket out on the table, lays down on one part of it and pulls the rest of the blanket over him.

Sleep is slow in coming.

EXT. ARIZONA REST AREA - MORNING

ED
 (Slapping the top of the
 table)

Time to rise and shine. Gonna stop
 up here in Gallup to gas up and
 grab a bite to eat. We should be in
 Amarillo shortly past noon.

Pete is snapped out of a deep sleep and crawls slowly into the truck.

INT. TRUCK CAB - NEW MEXICO - MORNING

Pete dozes for the first hour or so after they eat. The scenery is getting a bit better. There is more plant life and the green brush and trees were starting to mingle with the brown ones. He notices the 'Welcome to Texas' sign.

ED

Listen, I'm gonna have to drop you off before I drop this load. They've got their own loaders at this place and they don't like nobody being in the truck but the driver.

PETE

Okay. I understand.

ED

I'm gonna drop you on the corner where there's other trucks comin' and goin'. If you get another ride, that's good, but if you don't I'll pick you up on my way out and take you over to the truck stop. You'll be able to get somethin' there.

PETE

(Nods and shakes Ed's hand)

Okay, and if for some reason I don't see you again, I appreciate all you've done for me.

ED

(Smiles)

Glad I could help.

EXT. STREET CORNER - AMARILLO - DAY

Ed pulls over to the curb at the first intersection he comes to off the interstate. Pete tosses his duffel bag out onto the sidewalk and hops down behind it.

PETE

You're welcome at my place anytime.

Ed waves and Pete closes the door and steps back as Ed pulls away from the curb. Pete watches him go.

JOHN (O.S.)

Hey cowboy, you interested in pickin' up a little bit of work?

Pete turns and sees a young cowboy partially out of his truck. He has the truck door open, his left arm hooked over the top of the door and his right hand still on the steering wheel. The truck is loaded down with what looks like fence posts. The load is so heavy the truck bed is almost resting on the rear axle.

PETE

Well, I don't know. I was just passin' through. What kind of work?

JOHN

I'm takin' these posts out to my ranch and I'm gonna need help unloadin' 'em. The ranch is about an hour north of here. I can get you right back to this same spot tomorrow, next day at the latest.

Pete picks up the duffel back and carries it to the truck. He puts it on the seat between him and the cowboy. The young cowboy closes his door and offers his hand to Pete.

JOHN

My name's John, John Wallace.

PETE

(Shaking John's hand)

Pete Simpson. Good to meet you.

EXT. BEND IN THE RIVER RANCH - MAIN HOUSE PORCH - EVENING

THE FLASHBACK ENDS.

JOHN

(Laughing)

I remember. I had you figured for a regular cow hand 'til I got you out here and found out you didn't know one end of a horse from the other.

Everyone sitting around the porch laughs.

JOHN

Dad had the boys out on a round up, and I had gone to town to get some stuff. When I went by Watts' Hardware the posts had come in early, so I had them load them on the truck and swung over by the truck terminals to see if anybody over that way would help me. That's when I run into you.

PETE

(Chuckling)

I felt sorry for the truck. The bed was ridin' on the axle, and it looked like it was gonna break down any minute.

MAGGIE

I thought you were still hurt.

KATE

He was. It scared me to death when I looked out there and the two of them was unloadin' that truck. He was so thin and pale. He didn't

(MORE)

KATE (cont'd)

look much bigger than one of them
fence posts.

PETE

Well, they said I was to get plenty
of exercise, I just had to start
slow. I figured a fence post didn't
weigh all that much.

MAGGIE

You're lucky you didn't open
something back up.

JOHN

We did alright. We unloaded the
truck and put up most of the fence
posts for the new corral by the
time Dad and the others got back.

BOSS

(Laughing)

Yeah, I came back and asked John
who in the hell that scarecrow was
workin' on the corral. He had to be
the saddest lookin' excuse for a
cowboy I ever saw.

KATE

It worried me, just watchin' him. I
thought he was gonna end up gettin'
hurt again. For the first week he
was here I made him sleep in the
guest room. I'd never forgive
myself if somethin' happened at the
bunkhouse and nobody would have
been there to help him.

PETE

(Holding up a hand)

Now wait a minute. I wasn't all
that bad. It's not like I was an
invalid.

JOHN

You sure looked like one. Dad and
Kate both kept tellin' me we
couldn't let you leave here until
you were stronger. The thing is I
didn't know it was gonna take
thirty years.

Maggie gets up and walks over to where Pete is standing and
puts her arm around his waist.

MAGGIE

(Smiling up at him)

I'm glad you stayed.

Boss gets up and walks toward the door. As he walks past Pete he slaps him on the back.

BOSS

I've made a lot of mistakes in my time, but hirin' this man ain't one of 'em.

(Pause)

I'm gonna go to bed. Now if you still want to go, get one of the pickups and go. We can do without you for a while.

PETE

Thanks, Boss.

Kate and John walk toward the door too.

KATE

We're goin' to bed too. Maggie, use the guest room. It's too late for you to be drivin' home.

MAGGIE

I will, thanks.

KATE

(Stopping long enough to give Pete a kiss on the cheek.)

You can do what you want with birthday boy here, but if it was me I'd send him down to the bunkhouse where he belongs.

Pete and Maggie laugh.

JOHN

G'night you two.

PETE

G'night John

After everyone else goes inside Pete and Maggie stand arm in arm looking out at the dark.

MAGGIE

They love you a lot.

PETE

They're all good people. I don't know where I'd be without them.

MAGGIE

(Softly)

You'd better come back.

PETE

(Taken by surprise)

Hey now, I ain't plannin' anything. There are no secrets. Couple of days there and I'm comin' right back here.

MAGGIE

You never told me about her.

PETE

Debbie? Nothin' to tell really. Not anymore.

MAGGIE

But you obviously loved her. Why didn't you try to get in touch with her again?

PETE

(Sighs)

I did, once. It was three or four years after I got here. Me and John and some of the boys was down at Lefty's one Saturday drinkin' beer and swappin' lies. When we came back to the ranch John went on up to the house and I got to feelin' pretty lonesome, so I got Casey's number from the operator and called. Debbie answered and she was laughin' at somethin', almost like she was playin'. She said hello a couple of times, but I didn't say anything. I felt like I was intrudin' on something, so I just hung up.

MAGGIE

You let that stop you? You know as well as I do there could have been a hundred reasons why she was laughin'.

JOHN

I know that, but she sounded happy. I didn't think I had the right to stir things up again, even if I could. Anyway, that was the last time I tried.

MAGGIE

Look, go back and look her up. Say hi. Just don't get any ideas about not coming back here.

PETE
 (Pulling her into his
 arms)
 Never had any ideas like that to
 begin with.

EXT. INTERSTATE - MORNING

An overhead shot shows a pick up truck turning onto an onramp to the interstate.

Music starts.

The next shot from the front of the truck shows Pete driving the pickup truck. The shot holds on Pete as the truck passes under the camera.

Then, there is a shot from behind the pickup truck that holds on a 'Welcome to Oklahoma' sign.

Followed by a view from just above the interstate showing the pickup truck driving in the rain. Again, the camera holds on the truck as it passes under it.

Next, the camera holds on a sign that says "Welcome to Arkansas" as Pete drives past it, munching on a hamburger as he drives.

The next shot is from behind the pickup truck as it drives down the interstate and the camera lifts to show a large bridge crossing the Mississippi River with a city on the other side. He has reached Memphis.

EXT. HOTEL - MEMPHIS - EVENING

A view of the pickup truck turning into a motel parking lot. Pete gets out slowly and stretches and then stamps his right foot a couple of times before he goes into the motel.

INT. MOTEL - MEMPHIS - EVENING

Pete is reclined on the bed talking to Maggie on the phone. Shots switch between Pete and Maggie as they talk.

PETE
 Just letting you know I'm in
 Tennessee. Barely. I'm just east of
 downtown Memphis.

MAGGIE
 Are you excited? You sound tired.

PETE
 (Chuckles)
 I'll admit to be a little of both.

MAGGIE
 How much farther do you have to go?

PETE

Six to seven hours. I'll get up early and be there by noon I hope. Not really sure what I'm going to do when I get there. Go out to the graveyard most likely.

MAGGIE

Keep an open mind. There will be some things that will be different, but I'll bet you're gonna see a lot that are the same too.

PETE

Yeah, I guess. Well, I'm gonna take a shower and hit the sack. I'll call you again tomorrow.

MAGGIE

Okay. Have fun. Love you.

PETE

I love you too. Sweet dreams.

Pete hangs up the phone.

EXT. INTERSTATE - MORNING

Another shot of Pete entering the interstate.

Next shot is of the pickup truck traveling the interstate through Nashville. It has started to rain again.

Next is an interstate sign showing the ramp to Interstate 75. Pete takes the ramp going south.

The next shot is Pete exiting the interstate at a sign reading "Loudon".

INT. PICK UP TRUCK - AFTERNOON

Pete has pulled to the side of the road. He looks around, trying to get his bearings. The road he is on is a newer road, one he doesn't remember.

He decides he is going the right direction and pulls back out on highway.

A mile or so down the road, he turns off the new road onto a smaller two-lane road.

The truck follows the twisting, turning road. When he starts recognizing more and more, he speeds up, anxious to get there.

The camera is at road level, focused on a small rise in the road. After a beat we can see the truck coming over the rise at a good rate of speed.

Suddenly, Pete slams on the brakes and the truck skids to a stop as dust boils up around it.

We can see Pete through the windshield and he is staring, open mouthed at something in front of him.

Next, the camera is behind the pickup truck as Pete slowly opens the door and gets out, still focusing on the sight in front of him. The camera moves up enough to show a large lake. About 50 yards out in the lake is a silo sticking up out of the water.

OLD MAN (O.S.)

You look lost.

Pete is startled and looks to his right. An OLD MAN is walking up from the lake shore, carrying his fishing gear.

PETE

(Still puzzled)

Well, I'm not sure anymore, maybe I am. I thought this road went on through. Looks like I was wrong.

OLD MAN

Must be a helluva long time since you used it then. That water's been there more'n twenty years now.

Pete continues to stare out at the water, not knowing what to else to say.

OLD MAN

You headed someplace in particular?

PETE

(Flustered)

Well, yeah. Yeah, I was. There used to be a little graveyard over there on that hill.

OLD MAN

Still is, but you ain't gonna get to it goin' that way

PETE

How then?

OLD MAN

Back the way you came in. Turn left on the new road. Go down about 5 miles and you'll see a little store on your left. You can't miss it. Turn on the road beside that store. Then you can turn back this way when you reach them hills.

PETE

Thank you.

OLD MAN

Who do you know buried up there?
Family?

PETE

(Cautiously)
Just some people I used to know.

EXT. GRAVE YARD - AFTERNOON

Pete turns off the paved road onto a dirt road that goes up a hill at a fairly steep angle.

At the top of the hill, he turns off the motor and steps out of the truck. The sky is dark and storm clouds are moving in.

He looks around the grave yard. When he gets his bearings, he walks over to a set of head stones.

The wind is picking up leaves and debris and blowing them around the ground. The trees above him are beginning to whip in the wind.

He looks down at the first headstone and it is his grandfather, next to him is his grandmother and then to the right of her are his Mom and Dad.

He takes his hat off and brings his hand up to his face as he sobs. His shoulders are shaking as he cries hard.

Suddenly the air is split by a very loud crack of thunder as the lightning flashes across the sky and the clouds open up with heavy rain.

He stands there for a moment, consumed with sorrow, but then decides he had better leave. He isn't used to being around trees during a storm such as this.

He runs over to the truck and climbs in.

He starts the truck, turns it around and eases back down the hill. It is raining so hard now that the water is rushing along the dirt road, filling the gullies on each side of it and spilling over onto the road.

Part way down the hill the truck slides slightly to the right. When Pete tries to correct it, the truck slides to the left. Within seconds he has lost almost all control of the truck as it half rolls, half slides, down the slick, muddy road.

When the truck hits the bottom of the hill, he tries to jerk it onto the blacktop but cannot. The truck goes across the road and down an embankment, stopping several feet off the road.

Pete collects himself and puts the truck in reverse and tries to back up to the road, but the truck tires spin in

the water and mud.

Suddenly, the cab of the truck is filled with light.

EXT. BELOW THE GRAVE YARD - AFTERNOON

It is still raining hard and combines with the thick clouds to make the day almost as dark as midnight. When the light shines on the cab of the truck, Pete opens the door and looks back up the hill.

DEPUTY (O.S.)

You alright down there?

Pete steps out of the truck and sees a figure approaching him through the rain. As the man gets closer, Pete recognizes the DEPUTY Sheriff's uniform.

PETE

(Still a little dazed)

I missed the road. I was comin' down out of the graveyard and went into a skid. Ended up over here.

DEPUTY

Are you hurt, sir?

PETE

No. Nothin' more than my pride anyway.

DEPUTY

Think you can pull it out?

PETE

I tried once. Let me try it again.

Pete gets back in the truck and starts it up. Again, his tires spin in the mud and the truck does not move.

DEPUTY

You're not gonna get anywhere that way. I've got a winch. Let me pull you out.

The Deputy walks back up the hill and releases the cable on the winch. He pulls the cable back down the hill and hooks it underneath the rear end of the truck.

DEPUTY

When I flash my lights you try backin' up. When I flash them again, stop. We don't want to hurt anything or anybody if we can help it.

The Deputy gets in his car and flashes his lights. Pete tries to back up. At first the tires slip again but then catch hold and the truck backs up the hill. The deputy

flashes his lights again and Pete stops.

The deputy gets out of his car, unhooks the cable from the truck and reels it back into the winch. He then turns to Pete.

DEPUTY

I'm sorry, sir, but I called this stop in so I'm gonna have to write up a report. Can I see your driver's license and registration please?

Pete fishes around in the glove box for the registration and then hands it to the deputy along with his license.

DEPUTY

This will only take a minute. I'll be right back.

Pete sits back in the truck to wait on the deputy who comes back almost immediately.

DEPUTY

Sir, there's a little problem here. This registration has expired and it ain't registered to you. It's registered to Isaac Wallace in Texas.

PETE

Yeah, that's Boss. He owns the ranch where I work. He knows I have his truck.

DEPUTY

I'm sure he does, sir, but I'm gonna have to check it. Just sit tight, and I'll be right back.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - LOUDON - AFTERNOON

Casey walks down a hallway to the lobby. He is busy looking down at a stack of papers he is carrying. When he gets to the lobby he puts the papers down on a counter.

Behind the counter, a woman is talking into a headset and typing into a console as she speaks. She is BETTY JO, she works the deks and radio for the Sheriff's Office.

CASEY

(Without looking up)

Betty Jo, I need the logbooks from last week.

BETTY JO

(Holds up a finger to
Casey, indicating he
should wait)

Hold on just one second.

(Then into her
microphone)

Say again, four. Roger four, wants
and warrants for Peter Simpson. Is
that right?

CASEY

(Looks up as if he
misheard)

What was that?

BETTY JO

It's a traffic stop. Expired
registration.

CASEY

(Snappy)

The name, what was that name again?

BETTY JO

(Reading from the screen
in front of her)

Peter Simpson, He's outta Texas,
driving a truck that don't belong
to him and has an expired
registration. I'm checking with
Texas now.

CASEY

Get a description from four.

BETTY JO

Sheriff, it's just a traffic stop.

CASEY

Just do it, Betty Jo.

BETTY JO

(Into the headset)

Four, give me a description on the
driver.

(Turns to Casey and
repeats the description
as she receives it)

White male. Fifty years of age. Six
feet. Brown and brown.

CASEY

(Hurriedly)

Bring him in. And while you're at
it, run his name and numbers and
see what else you can find out
about him.

BETTY JO

But Sheriff, it's just a traffic stop.

CASEY

I don't give a damn. Call it what you want to, but get him in here. The vehicle could be stolen. If nothing else, we can bring him in on that.

BETTY JO

Okay.

(Into the headset)

Four. Detain the driver and bring him in for questioning. Sheriff's orders.

(Pause)

Roger four. Sheriff's orders.

EXT. BELOW THE GRAVE YARD - AFTERNOON

Pete sees the deputy returning and rolls down the window.

DEPUTY

I'm sorry, sir, but the Sheriff has ordered me to bring you back to the jail.

PETE

(Bewildered)

What for? I ain't done nothin'.

DEPUTY

I'm sure it's just routine, sir. Now, if you'll just step out of the truck, please.

Pete sighs and gets out of the truck.

DEPUTY

Sorry, sir, but I have to handcuff you. It's regulation.

Pete reluctantly turns around and the deputy handcuffs his hands behind him.

PETE

What about the truck?

DEPUTY

It'll be towed to the jail.

The deputy leads Pete to the car and opens the back door. As Pete gets in, his hat falls to the ground. The deputy leans down and picks up the hat and puts it on Pete's lap.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - LOUDON - DAY

The deputy leads Pete into the jail's lobby.

BETTY JO

The Sheriff wants to see him in his office.

The deputy leads him down the hall and knocks on a door. Beside the door is a sign, "Sheriff Goodman".

Pete sees the name on the sign and smiles. It looks like Casey has done well for himself.

CASEY

(From inside)

Come in.

The deputy opens the door. Even though Casey is looking down at the papers on his desk, Pete recognizes him right away.

PETE

(Muttering)

Damn.

CASEY

(Without looking up)

Take the cuffs off of him Curt, and then there won't be no reason for you to hang around. I can handle this one by myself.

The deputy does as he is told and then walks out the door. When the door closes, Casey looks up at Pete for the first time. Casey looks angry.

CASEY

(Sarcastically)

Well, look here. You leave a war hero and come back lookin' like John Wayne. What in the hell are you up to?

PETE

(Feeling uncomfortable)

I ain't up to nothin'. Just decided it was time to pay a visit. I got a little home sick to see the old place I guess.

CASEY

Home sick my ass. After thirty years?

PETE

Well, yeah. That's a long time I admit, but it's true. I wanted to see how the place looked, see if

(MORE)

PETE (cont'd)

Uncle Jimmy was still around,
things like that. A middle age
thing I reckon.

CASEY

What were you doin' out there when
they found you?

PETE

I was up at the graveyard, payin'
my respects to my folks.

CASEY

See anything surprisin'?

PETE

Surprisin'? Surprisin' how?

CASEY

Never mind. Just a question.

PETE

(Fumbling with his hat)

Look Casey, whatever it is that
bothers you about my bein' here,
don't worry, I'll be in and out in
a week at the most.

CASEY

(Changing the subject)

Where you been all these years,
cowboy?

PETE

I settled down in Texas. I'm the
foreman on a ranch out there. Been
there since I got outta the Army.

CASEY

The Army give you that scar?

PETE

Yeah, I wasn't even there a month
before I got hurt. Took 'em a while
to put me back together, but they
did a good job.

(Slaps his right thigh)

Sometimes this gives me a little
trouble, but I can manage.

CASEY

(More to himself than to
Pete)

Startin' to make sense now.

PETE

What's that?

CASEY
(Ignoring Pete's
question)

Listen Tex, you'd make my life a whole lot easier all the way 'round if you'd just turn around and go back to whatever rock it was you've been hidin' under. You bein' here is just gonna cause problems.

PETE
Look, Casey, like I said, I just got an urge to see home, that's all. I don't see how my bein' here could cause trouble for anybody. I'll go back to Texas after I look around a few days.

Casey spins his chair around and stares at the wall. He doesn't speak for a few moments, but it seems to be a long time to Pete.

CASEY
I married Debbie.

PETE
I know.

Casey spins back and around and looks quizzically at Pete.

PETE
(In answer to Casey's
look)
I read about it in the Loudon paper while I was in the hospital. The same time they told me about Grandma.

CASEY
Oh.
(Pause)
Look, I can hold you seventy two hours on this registration business and nobody would say a word. Now, I know you didn't drive all this way to spend time in my jail, so we can just settle it all if you'll jump in that truck and head back the way you came.

PETE
(Obviously irritated)
Dammit Casey! I didn't come all this way just to turn right around and go back. I don't know why you don't want me here, but you do what you feel like you gotta do, and I'm gonna do what I came here to do. I
(MORE)

PETE (cont'd)
ain't botherin' you or anybody
else.

CASEY
You got no idea how wrong you are.
Come with me, there's somethin' I
wanna show you.

Casey grabs his hat and raincoat and starts toward the door.

PETE
What is it?

CASEY
Just come on and see for yourself.

EXT. LOUDON - EVENING

It's after sunset and still raining so the night is even darker. Casey pulls out onto the highway and turns south while Pete looks around.

As they ride along, Pete is reminded of the bus ride home a long time ago.

When they top the hill that overlooks the river, Pete notices the old narrow bridge has been replaced by a newer, wider bridge, but this one has no steel structure over it.

PETE
When did they tear down the old
bridge?

CASEY
A couple of years ago, and it was
about time too. It felt like it was
going to fall apart every time I
drove across it.

After crossing the bridge, Casey turns down the street in front of the court house and parks in front of the walkway leading to the front steps.

Casey gets out of the car and walks down the walkway and stops in front of a monument with a small ornamental fence around it. Pete follows along behind him.

A statue of a soldier tops the monument. The rain is creating small wisps of steam on the floodlights that illuminate the soldier.

Casey points to a plaque recessed into the stone base of the monument.

Pete steps closer and looks at the plaque.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF THE BRAVE SONS OF LOUDON COUNTY WHO GAVE
THEIR LIVES DURING THE VIETNAM WAR

GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN THAN THIS, THAT A MAN LAY DOWN HIS
LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS

GARY HENDERSON
PAUL RALSTON
WILLARD MCKEY
CRAIG SCOTT
PETER SIMPSON

Pete is in shock, and feels his knees start to buckle and he stumbles backward as he tries to keep from falling. His foot slips off the edge of the walk and he loses his footing completely, landing with a thud on the wet grass. He sits there, his eyes wide in disbelief, staring at his name on the statue.

As the rain soaks into Pete's clothes, Casey lets the impact of what he is looking at sink in more and more.

When he thinks he has made his point, Casey bends down and helps Pete to his feet. Casey half carries, half guides him back toward the car.

When they get to the car, Pete jerks his arm out of Casey's grip. Casey grabs for him again but stops when Pete holds up his hand.

PETE

Leave me alone, Casey. I need a
minute.

Pete walks to the corner and stands in the rain as he stares up into the dark night sky.

INT. CASEY'S OFFICE - EVENING

After they walk back into his office, Casey gets a towel from the closet and hands it to Pete.

CASEY

Better get yourself dried off.

Pete dries his face and hair as much as he can.

PETE

(A bit dazed)

Everybody really think I'm dead?

CASEY

Sure do. The Army sent home a fancy box and everything. 'Course nobody opened it. According to the Army, there was just bits and pieces in there anyway, or at least nothing we would recognize.

(Pause)

They had a great big funeral with guns and flags and a honor guard. The whole bit. Lots of people

(MORE)

CASEY (cont'd)
showed up. You would have been
proud.

Pete sits down in a chair.

CASEY
They planted you out there in that
graveyard right next to your Mama
and Daddy. I'm surprised you missed
it.

PETE
A thunderstorm came up, so I had to
leave.

(Pause)
What happened to Uncle Jimmy?

CASEY
Nothing. Nothing bad anyway. He's
doin' great. He's a member of the
city council. Has been for years.
He's got a successful business.
Pillar of the community I think is
what they call it.

PETE
(Smiling for the first
time)
That's great. Here I was worried
about him for nothin' I guess. How
'bout everybody else? Billy? Wayne?

CASEY
Billy's dead. Just a couple of
years after we graduated. He got
him an old car, and you know Billy,
he had to do everything fast and
hard. Always trying to prove
something. Anyway, one Saturday
night he wrapped it around a tree
not far from your old house.

PETE
Damn.

CASEY
Wayne, on the other hand, is doing
well for himself. He's a
contractor. His company built most
of the houses over on the lake, and
from the looks of it he's going to
keep right on buildin'. It won't be
long before you really won't
recognize that area.

(Pause)
We run into each other every now
and again. We're as friendly as we

(MORE)

CASEY (cont'd)
 can be considerin' we don't move in
 the same circles. You might say he
 ain't hurtin' for money.

PETE
 Speakin' of that lake, what is all
 that? It's not easy comin' back
 home and findin' your old house
 under water.

CASEY
 The TVA built a dam on the little
 river about twenty five years ago
 and it backed up water all through
 that area. Everybody got paid for
 any land they lost. Like everything
 else, some folks lost out in the
 long run and some of them, your
 Uncle Jimmy for one, got a fresh
 start with the money. Anyway, no
 sooner did the water level off when
 developers bought up all the land
 around the lake and started sellin'
 retirement homes, mostly to folks
 from up north. There's been a rough
 spot or two, but overall it ain't
 been too bad. It kept Loudon from
 dryin' up, that's for sure.

PETE
 How's Debbie?

Casey scowls, not liking the question.

PETE
 Casey, come on. I'm just askin' how
 she's doin'. It ain't like I'm here
 to take her back to Texas with me.

CASEY
 (Still frowning)
 She's fine. We've been together a
 long time, and I've done everything
 I can to make her happy. There's
 not been one time, not one, that I
 didn't put what she wanted in front
 of what I wanted.

(Pause)
 That's all I'm gonna say 'bout
 that.

PETE
 She could have done a lot worse.
 I'm sure she appreciates you.

PETE
 (Shrugs)
 Sometimes I wonder.

Both men grow silent. The only noise is the sound of the rain falling outside.

CASEY

You know, none of 'em are gonna be prepared to see you, not after all these years of thinkin' you're dead.

PETE

Yeah, I know. Helluva thing. I've been thinkin' 'bout this trip for a long time, and nobody was more excited to be anyplace than I was to see these hills again. Now, it's just a big mess.

CASEY

(Facetiously)

I thought you cowboy types just rode off into the sunset. Which is exactly what I think you should do. Pack it up and head back to Texas.

Pete is silent. Deep in thought. Casey stays quiet, letting everything sink in.

PETE

(Finally)

Who said anybody's gonna recognize me.

CASEY

What in the hell are you talkin' 'bout?

PETE

Well, I just don't see how it would hurt if I looked around for a few days. It's not like I'm going to walk up and knock on somebody's door.

CASEY

(Louder)

Pete, dammit, you are still as stubborn as a mule. You'll never change. Don't you see this ain't just about you?

PETE

(Equally loud)

I didn't come all this way just to turn right around and go back.

CASEY

(Threatening)

You're gonna force me to lock you up!

PETE

No I ain't, and you ain't goin' to. If you did you'd have to write it down somewhere that I was here. Then where would you be? You'd be lettin' people know I was here, and that's the very thing you don't want to happen.

CASEY

(Slamming his fist on the desk)

Damn you, Pete!

PETE

I'm gonna find the truck and then find me a place to stay the night. I'm wet and I'm tired. It's been a long day, and it's not been a particularly good one at that. In the mornin' I'm gonna look around Loudon. I'm at least goin' back to the graveyard and finish payin' my respects. Then maybe the next day, or the day after that, I'll be satisfied with what I've seen and head back to Texas.

Casey slumps back in his chair, staring at Pete. He is trying to find a clean way out of this.

CASEY

(Leaning forward and pointing his finger at Pete)

Forty eight hours. I'm givin' you forty eight hours. If you're still here Saturday mornin' you're gonna have to deal with me. I mean it. If I hear of you so much as sayin' hello to anybody, or if I find you within a mile of my house, I'm gonna break you in half. You understand me?

PETE

I understand a threat when I hear one. And I'll let you know when I'm ready to leave. Right now, I don't plan to knock on many doors besides maybe Uncle Jimmy's. In light of what I've seen tonight I'm not even sure I'm gonna do that. I'll have to think more about it.

CASEY

(Picks up the phone and speaks into it)

Send Curt back in here

After a few seconds, there is a knock at the door.

CASEY

Come in.

The deputy walks in.

DEPUTY

You wanted somethin', Sheriff?

CASEY

I want to know when his truck gets here.

DEPUTY

They're droppin' it in the lot now.

CASEY

Good.

(Turning to Pete)

Get it and get out of here. I'm gonna be keepin' an eye on you. Step outta line once and I'll be all over you.

Pete takes another look at Casey, almost as if he is going to say something but changes his mind, takes the keys offered by the deputy and walks out the door.

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - LOUDON - EVENING

Betty Jo stands up and watches Pete walk out the front door of the jail. The deputy comes out of the hall and stops just inside the lobby, watching after Pete too. The deputy is not aware that Casey is behind him and is startled when Casey starts talking.

CASEY

Follow him. Don't worry about whether he sees you or not. I want him to see you. I want him to know we're watching him.

The deputy nods and walks toward the door. Casey turns to Betty Jo.

CASEY

Betty Jo, Tell the city boys to be lookin' for him too. No need to give 'em a name, just tell 'em to be lookin' for that truck.

DEPUTY

(Stopping at the door)

Anything else, Sheriff?

CASEY

(Softly)

Yes. I would appreciate it if both of you didn't mention this to anybody. Not right now anyway. This is personal.

DEPUTY

You got it, Sheriff.

BETTY JO

I won't tell a soul.

INT. GOODMAN HOME - LOUDON - EVENING

Casey walks into the kitchen of his home. Debbie is sitting at the kitchen table reading the newspaper.

CASEY

(Hanging up his jacket)

I think you should stick close to the house the next few days.

DEBBIE

Why? What's wrong?

CASEY

(Lying)

A couple of guys broke out of Brushy Mountain Prison today. They might be heading this way.

DEBBIE

That's happened before. What's so different about this time?

CASEY

(Snappy)

Just stay close to home!

Debbie stares at Casey as he hurries out the back door to the deck. She wonders what has made him so upset.

EXT. BEND IN THE RIVER RANCH - MAIN HOUSE PORCH - EVENING

Boss walks out onto the porch and sits in his favorite rocking chair. It is almost dark. After a couple of minutes Kate walks out on the porch too, her attention is focus on something off screen.

EXT. BEND IN THE RIVER RANCH - EVENING

From the POV of Boss and Kate we can see the headlights of a car making its way to the ranch from the main road. As the car gets closer we can see it's a sheriff's patrol car. SHERIFF FRANKS gets out of the car.

EXT. BEND IN THE RIVER RANCH - MAIN HOUSE PORCH - EVENING

BOSS

(As the Sheriff gets out
of the car)

Bob, what in Sam Hill are you doin'
out here this time of day?

Sheriff Franks walks over to the porch steps.

SHERIFF FRANKS

I was on my way home and thought
I'd stop in for a minute.

KATE

Would you like something cold to
drink, Sheriff?

SHERIFF FRANKS

(Wiping his neck with a
kerchief)

Ice water would be good if you got
it.

BOSS

This a business call or a social
call?

SHERIFF FRANKS

A little of both.

Kate comes back out on the porch and hands the Sheriff a
glass of ice water. The Sheriff takes the glass and drinks
most of it at once.

SHERIFF FRANKS

Much obliged.

BOSS

(After giving the man a
chance to drink)

Well, what part of it's business?

SHERIFF FRANKS

We got a call today on Pete.

KATE

What is it?

BOSS

(Almost at the same time
as Kate)

Yeah, what kind of call?

SHERIFF FRANKS

Some county people from Tennessee
was callin' here checkin' on him.
Seems they got him in a traffic
stop.

At this point John has walked out on the porch as well.

BOSS

They called all the way out here
for just a traffic stop?

SHERIFF FRANKS

They said the registration on the
truck he was driving had expired.

JOHN

Damn. I didn't bother to look at
which truck he took. One of them
was overdue.

BOSS

Well, just tell 'em we're good for
the fine or whatever it is, and
that'll be the end of it.

SHERIFF FRANKS

I'm not so sure, Boss. There was
somethin' in there about puttin'
him in jail.

KATE

Jail!

BOSS

What in the hell would they put him
in jail for?

SHERIFF FRANKS

Laws are different all over so I
can't really say. I just thought
I'd better let you know.

BOSS

Thanks Bob, we appreciate you.

JOHN

Did they say where in Tennessee?

SHERIFF FRANKS

Loudon County I think is what they
said.

BOSS

Is that where he was goin'?

KATE

Yes it is.

BOSS

Well why in the devil would his own
people do that to him?

JOHN

Nobody did anything to him, Dad. It
sounds like they were just doin'
their job.

BOSS

Job hell. You don't throw somebody in jail for a traffic ticket.

SHERIFF FRANKS

I can't say for sure that's what they did. They probably just wanted to make sure he didn't steal it. If they thought he had, they could certainly put him in jail 'til they got it cleared up.

Boss gets out of the rocking chair as Kate goes into the house.

BOSS

Well, whatever the cause, nobody throws one of my men in jail without a damned good reason. Get me an airplane ticket. I want the earliest one I can get.

JOHN

Now, Dad, the chances are that it's all over and Pete ain't in jail. There's no need for you to go flyin' back there over something that's probably nothing to worry about.

BOSS

Well, if nothin' is wrong, I'll just hitch a ride back here with him. Besides, I could use a day or two off myself, and I ain't seen that part of the country, so get me a ticket.

Kate comes back out on the porch.

KATE

I called Maggie and told her. She wants to go with you.

BOSS

(Laughing)

There then, it's settled. Looks like she's as big a fool as I am, don't it?

SHERIFF FRANKS

Well, I'd better git. If I hear anything else I'll let y'all know.

BOSS

You do that Bob. Thanks for watchin' out for one of ours.

KATE
(and John)
Thanks, Sheriff.

SHERIFF FRANKS
I'm happy to do it. Y'all take
care.

EXT. LOUDON MOTEL - MORNING

Pete walks out of his room to the truck. Before he gets in he looks around. The motel is on a hill overlooking the interstate exit for Loudon. It was the only place he knew to get a room. As he looks out across the roadway he sees a small cafe and it reminds him of how hungry he is.

INT. LOUDON CAFE - MORNING

Pete enters the cafe. It is about half full. He stands near the cash register, not knowing if he should wait on someone to seat him. A waitress hurries past him with an order. This is MARY ANN.

MARY ANN
Sit wherever you can find room. The
menus are on the tables.

Pete keeps his hat on and his head down as he walks across the room, not looking directly at anyone. He sits down in the last booth by a window and puts his hat on the table in front of him. He glances back at the room to see if anyone had noticed him coming in, but nobody was looking his way. He picks up a menu and starts looking through it.

CHARLIE (O.S.)
Hey mister, are you a real cowboy?

Pete looks down to see two little boys standing beside the booth. They are looking back and forth from him to his hat. The one in front is CHARLIE. He is the bigger and braver of the two, while the smallest smaller one is standing quietly behind his bigger brother. He is DAVID.

PETE
(Smiling)
Well, yeah, I reckon I am.

CHARLIE
You got a horse and everything?

PETE
Yep, I sure do.

CHARLIE
Wow, I wished I had me a horse.

The little one behind him is grinning and shaking his head. Clearly, he wants a horse too.

PETE

Maybe one of these days you'll get one. What's your name?

CHARLIE

I'm Charlie.

(Indicating the smaller one behind him)

And this is David. He's my brother. He's three and don't talk much.

PETE

How old are you, Charlie?

CHARLIE

(Holding up his hand with his fingers spread to emphasize the number)

I'm five. What's your name?

PETE

I'm Pete.

CHARLIE

What's your horse's name? Is he outside?

PETE

(Chuckling)

You mean Ol' Dollar? No. He's back home in Texas, most likely eatin' too many oats.

MARY ANN (O.S.)

You boys get out of here and leave this man alone so's he can eat.

(Pause)

Now git!

The two boys scurry off to the back corner of the cafe where they have several toys spread out on the floor.

PETE

They weren't any bother.

MARY ANN

Old Dollar?

PETE

(Not fully understanding what she said)

Ma'am?

MARY ANN

What kind of a name is Ol' Dollar? Is that anything like Ol' Yeller

Mary Ann chuckles at her own joke.

PETE

No ma'am, that's my horse back home in Texas. Boss named him Dollar when he was foaled. Said he was so skinny we'd be lucky if anybody would give a dollar for him.

MARY ANN

(A little embarrassed)

Wait. You're bein' serious

PETE

Well sure I am. Why wouldn't I be?

MARY ANN

I thought you were just pullin' their leg.

PETE

Heck no. Dollar's a fine horse.

MARY ANN

Then I'm sorry. I wasn't laughin' at you.

PETE

(Smiling)

I didn't think you were.

MARY ANN

What's a cowboy from Texas doin' around here

PETE

Just passin' through mostly. I used to know some folks who lived around here. Thought I'd look the place over a little bit.

FRANKLIN (O.S.)

(Loud)

Will somebody please do somethin' about these damn kids?

Pete looks over in the corner where the two little boys are playing. At one of tables near them sits a large bearded man. There are two other men sitting with him who are trying to keep him quiet. The big man is FRANKLIN.

FRANKLIN

Can't a man eat his breakfast around here in a little peace and quiet? Where the hell is JB?

MARY ANN

You hush, Franklin. They ain't gonna be here much longer. Mama's on her way now to pick 'em up.

FRANKLIN

Why don't you get your ass over here and take care of 'em? You're their damned mama.

MARY ANN

(To Pete)

I'll be right back.

PETE

Bring 'em back over here.

MARY ANN

(Not sure she understands)

What?

PETE

Bring 'em over here by me. They won't bother me. I'd appreciate the company.

She smiles at him and then walks over and gets the two boys. She carries a few toys and sets them on the floor by Pete's booth. The boys follow along behind her, smiling at Pete.

MARY ANN

(To Pete)

Thank you.

(Pause)

Now, what can I get you?

PETE

(Smiling at the two boys)

You two want something?

MARY ANN

They've already ate.

PETE

I hate eatin' by myself.

(Reading from the menu)

I'll have scrambled eggs with bacon and toast. Bring me a cup of coffee too. And bring both of my partners here a doughnut.

Both boys squeal with delight.

CHARLIE

Oh boy!

MARY ANN

(Smiles as she turns toward the kitchen)

You two be good.

PETE

They will. Ain't that right boys?

CHARLIE

Yes sir!

David shakes his head up and down with a big smile on his face.

The boys begin to play again and Pete looks around the room. The big man is still looking at Pete and the boys while talking to the other men at his table. He looks angry.

Mary Ann brings the food and Pete begins to eat. The big man gets up from his table, scowling at Pete. The two men with him walk toward the front of the cafe but the big man walks toward the booth. The two little boys see him coming and move away, their eyes wide with fright.

FRANKLIN

You ain't from around here are you?

PETE

No. Just passin' through.

FRANKLIN

You should learn to mind you own damn business. Nobody around here likes nosey strangers.

CHARLIE

Grandma!

Franklin is blocking Pete's view of the front of the cafe. Both little boys run in that direction. and Pete leans forward a little to see them one last time. When he moves to see them, the big man moves too and blocks his view again.

FRANKLIN

(Almost a growl)

You best leave.

Pete doesn't want to push the issue. He knows that if anything happens he will have to deal with Casey, so he tries to stay calm. Then, he glances out the window at a van heading back toward Loudon with the top of Charlie's head barely visible through the window.

FRANKLIN

You gonna leave, or do I have to help you make up your mind?

MARY ANN

Franklin, you leave him alone, He ain't done nothin' to you.

Pete stands up. If the big man expects Pete to back down, he is mistaken. Pete will only be pushed so far, even if he does have to face Casey.

CASEY (O.S.)

Franklin!

Pete freezes in place and Franklin backs up a step as Casey steps up beside them.

CASEY

What's goin' on here?

FRANKLIN

This guy is meddlin' where he ain't got no business.

MARY ANN (O.S)

He's lyin'. Franklin was yellin' at Charlie and David and this man was just tryin' to help. Nobody else would.

CASEY

Get outta here, Franklin.

FRANKLIN

I ain't done nothin'.
(Then glaring at Pete)
Not yet anyway.

Pete glances back and forth from Casey to Franklin, not really sure how to respond but at this point is okay with letting Casey handle the matter. Then Pete notices an older man leaning against the counter. The old man is staring directly at Pete. It is his Uncle Jimmy. He looks older than he actually is, almost feeble.

FRANKLIN

(Still glaring at Pete)

JB, you're gonna have to have a separate section in here for these outsiders. Keep 'em outta in here where decent folks are tryin' to eat.

The old man against the counter says nothing, and continues to stare at Pete.

CASEY

This is the last time I'm sayin' it Franklin, get outta here.

FRANKLIN

(Turns to Casey)

You know what Casey, you ain't gonna be sheriff around here forever. One of these days I might just have to beat the shit outta you too.

Casey doesn't flinch.

CASEY

Maybe, but it ain't gonna be today.
Leave now or I'm gonna throw you in
jail.

FRANKLIN

What are you gonna do with this
bird?

CASEY

Leave him to me. Now git.

Franklin gives Pete one last scowl, then turns and walks
past Casey and Uncle Jimmy and out the front door. Casey
moves closer to Pete.

CASEY

I warned you.

MARY ANN (O.S.)

Don't start on him, Casey. He
didn't do anything wrong.

CASEY

(Not taking his eyes off
Pete)

You stay out of this, Mary Ann.

(Then low to Pete)

You were supposed to keep away from
people who might know you.

PETE

I thought I was, Casey. I picked
the only spot I know of. It ain't
like there's a sign out in front of
these places that says who's
inside.

CASEY

I still think the best thing for
you to do is to get on back out to
that graveyard and say your
goodbyes so you can get out of
here. And do it soon.

Pete glances again at Uncle Jimmy. He is leaning heavily
against the counter, supporting himself.

PETE

Like I said, Casey, I'll be gone
when I've done what I came here to
do.

CASEY

Don't get any squirrelly ideas.
Take a good hard look at him. Does
he look like he could handle
findin' out who you are? He's
barely able to stand up as it is.

PETE

You're askin' me to leave without talkin' to my only livin' relative?

CASEY

I'm askin' you to consider somebody besides yourself.

PETE

I'm beginnin' to think you're worried more about yourself than you are about him or me.

CASEY

(Whispering)

Get your hat and get out.

Pete hesitates for a moment, unsure of what to do, then puts his hat on and walks toward the door. He can feel Uncle Jimmy's eyes follow him as he walks past the old man. Pete fights the urge to stop and say something.

Uncle Jimmy watches him go then turns to Casey.

UNCLE JIMMY

(In a soft whisper)

Casey, do you know that man? He looked an awful lot like Pete.

CASEY

(Bowing his head)

He's just somebody passin' through. I had a run in with him last night and I thought he was gone. Don't let it bother you none.

(He steadies the old man)

Let's get you back to your office.

(Over his shoulder)

Mary Ann, get him some water.

MARY ANN

(Defiantly)

You had no right to run him off, Casey. He wasn't hurtin' anybody.

CASEY

He's a vagrant. When I'm finished here, I'm gonna make sure he's gone.

Casey watches as Mary Ann grabs her purse and hurries out the door. He watches through the window as she jumps into her car and pulls out on the highway heading back toward Loudon. Casey shakes his head. Things were starting to fall apart quicker than he thought.

CASEY

(Mutters to himself)

Damn you Pete Simpson!

INT. SHERIFF'S OFFICE - LOUDON - DAY

Debbie walks into the Sheriff's office with the two little boys trailing behind her.

DEBBIE

Betty Jo, this is Casey's lunch if he wants it. I'm gonna put it in his office.

BETTY JO

(Without looking up)

Okay, I'll tell him.

Debbie walks down the hallway toward Casey's office with the two little boys at her heels.

As Debbie disappears into the hallway, the front door opens and Boss and Maggie walk in.

BETTY JO

May I help you?

BOSS

I'm Boss Wallace, outta Hutchinson County Texas. I come here to see the sheriff.

BETTY JO

I'm sorry, sir. Sheriff Goodman ain't in right now. Is there something I can do for you?

Boss and Maggie look at each other, both recognizing the name.

BOSS

Maybe you can, I don't really know. I got word that you have one of my men locked up here in your jail, and I've come to get him out.

BETTY JO

When was he jailed?

BOSS

It would have been yesterday.

BETTY JO

I'm sorry, sir, but nobody was jailed yesterday.

BOSS

Well, you'd better look on your book there or something, 'cause Sheriff Franks of Hutchinson County told me just last night that he got word from somebody here that they had my foreman, Pete.

BETTY JO

Sir, I think you'd better wait for
Sheriff Goodman.

Boss moves closer and tries to look at the book.

BOSS

Can you at least look him up in
your book there? His name is Pete,
Pete Simpson.

DEBBIE (O.S.)

Whose name is Pete Simpson?

Debbie is standing just inside the room, listening to them
talk.

BOSS

(Turns to Debbie)

My foreman, ma'am. I come all the
way from Texas to get him.

DEBBIE

What did you say his name was?

BOSS

It's Pete, ma'am. Pete Simpson. He
was raised up around here.

DEBBIE

(Looking bewildered)

That can't be. That Pete Simpson is
dead.

BOSS

Dead!

Boss and Maggie echo the same shock and surprise.

DEBBIE

(Near tears)

Yes. He was killed in Vietnam. We
buried him a long time ago.

BOSS

Ma'am, I don't know who you buried,
but the Pete Simpson I'm talkin'
about has lived on my ranch in
Texas for the last thirty years.

DEBBIE

But that can't be.

Debbie tries to steady herself. She walks slowly to a chair
and sits down. Her eyes reflect her bewilderment. They well
up with tears that seem to plead with Boss and Maggie to
stop saying these things.

DEBBIE

Are we talkin' about the same Pete Simpson?

Maggie walks quickly over to Debbie and takes a seat beside her. She reaches out and takes Debbie's hands in hers.

MAGGIE

(Softly)

Now, this is only a guess, but are you Debbie?

Debbie's eyes searched Maggie's face for some sign of recognition.

DEBBIE

Yes I am. Who are you?

MAGGIE

My name is Maggie. I'm a friend of Pete. Boss and I are here looking for him.

DEBBIE

(Sobbing)

But how? There has to be some kind of mistake. We buried him. How can he be with you? Why didn't he ever call or write somebody? Anybody? Why didn't he ever come home? Anything besides lettin' us think he was dead.?

MAGGIE

I'm sure he didn't know anything about what happened here, He was very confused for a long time and was deeply torn about where he should be.

DEBBIE

He told you that?

MAGGIE

Yes, he did.

As Debbie and Maggie talk, the two little boys move closer to Boss.

CHARLIE

(Indicating Boss's hat)

My friend has a hat like that.

Boss is trying to concentrate on what the two women are saying and thinks the little boys are a distraction.

BOSS

(Absentmindedly)

Is that so?

CHARLIE

Yeah. He's a real cowboy. Are you
are real cowboy too mister?

BOSS

(Still not wanting to be
bothered)

Yeah, yeah. I'm a cowboy.

CHARLIE

My friend said he was from Texas.
Are you from Texas too, mister?

It takes a moment for what Charlie is saying to register
with the adults, but when it does, all three of them looked
at him.

DEBBIE

What friend, sweetie?

CHARLIE

My friend from this mornin'. He had
a hat and a horse named Ol' Dollar.

MAGGIE

(Excited)

Dollar? Are you sure?

CHARLIE

Yep, I'm sure. And we ate with him
too. Didn't we David?

DAVID

(Nodding his head)

Yep. Doughnuts.

DEBBIE

He was at the restaurant?

CHARLIE

Yes Grandma, when you came and got
us.

Debbie stares at Charlie, her mouth open, her eyes wide.
She had been that close to him and didn't know it. Maggie
sees the shock on her face.

MAGGIE

(Trying to calm Debbie)

Just take it easy and catch your
breath.

DEBBIE

(After a moment)

Betty Jo, where's Casey?

Betty Jo is leaning over the counter, trying to follow the
conversation. It surprises her when Debbie speaks directly
to her.

BETTY JO

I don't really know. He hasn't checked in for over an hour.

DEBBIE

Was there a man here last night?

BETTY JO

(Hesitantly)

They stopped a man last night for expired plates. Casey had Curt bring him in, and then Casey took him back yonder to the office. You could hear 'em yellin' and screamin' way out here. The man left after about an hour. Casey was pretty upset.

BOSS

(Chuckling)

That sounds like Pete.

DEBBIE

Where did he go?

BETTY JO

I don't know. Really I don't. Casey had him followed and he got a call this mornin' that the man was down at JB's restaurant.

DEBBIE

(Suddenly remembering
Mary Ann)

Mary Ann was there!

MAGGIE

Who?

DEBBIE

Mary Ann. My daughter. And probably Pete's uncle Jimmy too.

MAGGIE

(Almost to herself)

Uncle Jimmy? Pete mentioned him.

DEBBIE

Pete might not recognize him. He's a lot different now than when Pete left.

DEBBIE

Betty Jo, do you know where either of them are right now? Has anybody called in?

BETTY JO

Curt called in a little bit ago. He said he saw that fella headin' out toward the lake. That's the last I've heard.

DEBBIE

The grave yard!

(Turning to Boss and Maggie)

Come on, you can ride with me, it will save some time.

(Then to the little ones)

Come on boys.

EXT. DEBBIE'S VAN - DAY

Debbie puts the boys into the car seats in the back of the van. Boss opens the front door and starts to get just as Maggie catches his eye. The look on her face tells him that the two women should ride in front so they can talk. He holds the door open for Maggie with a sheepish grin on his face.

MAGGIE

Thanks, Boss.

Boss slips into one of the middle seats as Debbie finishes with the boys.

BOSS

How far?

DEBBIE

(Getting into the van)

Thirty minutes if we're lucky.

INT. DEBBIE'S VAN - DAY

Debbie is deep in thought as she begins to drive toward the grave yard. She is still nervous and feels the need to talk.

DEBBIE

Listen. I'm not really sure what we are gonna run into when we get there, so I guess I should tell you all of it, since you may be findin' out sooner than later.

MAGGIE

What is it?

DEBBIE

Pete is Mary Ann's father.

MAGGIE

(Shocked)

What? He didn't say anything about that.

DEBBIE

He don't know.

BOSS

Damn. How much cow shit can a man step in all in one day?

MAGGIE

(Sharply)

Boss! There are little kids in the back of this van!

BOSS

(Begins to laugh)

I'm sorry.

MAGGIE

What's so funny?

BOSS

(Still laughing)

Nothin' really. I was just thinkin' 'bout how he came back here to pay his respects and remember a good memory or two, but instead everybody thinks he's dead and now he's a daddy. I'm tellin' you, the man ain't got any luck.

Maggie scowls at Boss.

MAGGIE

(Turning to Debbie)

Go on.

As Debbie starts to talk she starts crying again.

DEBBIE

Granny Simpson didn't last much more than a couple of months after Pete left, and by then I knew I was pregnant. I was gonna tell Pete the first chance I got, but I didn't get the chance. It wasn't but a couple of days after Granny died that we heard Pete was killed. It's hard to really know which happened first.

Maggie reaches over and lightly squeezes Debbie's arm.

DEBBIE

They sent the casket home and said there was no need to open it. They said he was messed up so bad that there wasn't anything in it we would recognize. So, nobody opened it, not at the viewin' and not at the funeral. We had no reason to doubt it, 'cause the Army said it. Who would have thought the Army was wrong about who they put in a casket?

By now Maggie is crying too, and Boss silently looks out the window at the passing scenery so nobody will notice his watery eyes.

DEBBIE

If poor ol' Granny hadn't died first, she would have died anyway when she heard about Pete. As for me, well, I was sort of like the odd man out I guess. I was pregnant and the father of my baby was dead.
(Trying to laugh)
Or at least at the time I thought he was dead.

Debbie cries so hard she has to pull over to the side of the road for a moment. None of the others say anything as she cries.

MAGGIE

(After a moment)

Does Mary Ann know about Pete?

DEBBIE

(Trying to shake away the tears)

No, and believe me, it's for the best. Her and Casey fight and argue all the time as it is. If she knew he wasn't her real Daddy she would have run off a long time ago. She's as stubborn as they come, just like Pete was.

BOSS

Still is.

Maggie glares at Boss again.

DEBBIE

Anyway, they fight constantly. I prayed that she would grow out of it, but she never has.

MAGGIE

That makes it bad for all of you.

DEBBIE

At times it does.

(Shrugs)

Sometimes it seems like the hard part never changes. Especially in the beginning when I was left with nowhere to turn. Casey ended up bein' the only one I could turn to. He was always right there, you know, meanin' well, but almost like a kid, underfoot all the time. I had nowhere else to go, nothing else I could do, and so one day I told him everything. I just blurted it out. It was like once it got started, I couldn't stop it. And do you know what he did?

MAGGIE

No, what?

DEBBIE

He told me not to worry about a thing, that he would fix it, and he proposed. He said he'd take the baby and raise it as his own, and nobody would have to know any different. I was shocked and so scared I couldn't think of anything else to do but to say yes.

(Pause)

A couple of weeks later we were married. It was odd at first, but he's been good to me, and to the kids, especially Mary Ann. But as hard as he tried, Casey was never cut out to be a Daddy. He tried. Lord, there ain't been nobody try harder. It was just something he wasn't good at and Mary Ann, as hard headed as she can be at times, sure didn't make things any easier for him.

INT. PETE'S TRUCK - DAY

Pete knew almost immediately that he was being followed, and it wasn't the law this time. Someone is taking all the turns he does.

He wonders if it might be Franklin, looking to finish what they started earlier.

He drives up the hill to the grave yard as fast as he can. He jerks the truck to a stop and jumps out, waiting for whoever is behind him.

EXT. GRAVE YARD - DAY

Pete is leaning against the rear bumper of the truck, looking at the road as the car that has been following him pulls to a stop and the waitress from the cafe gets out.

MARY ANN

Hi. Hope I'm not interrupting you.

PETE

No, you're not. I was just goin' to pay my respects to some people I knew.

MARY ANN

I'm sorry. Somebody close?

PETE

Close enough.

(Changing the subject)

By the way, I'm Pete.

(Shaking her hand)

Those sure are two fine boys you've got

MARY ANN

(Smiles as she shakes his hand)

Thank you. I'm Mary Ann. Those two can be a handful sometimes.

PETE

(Chuckles)

That just means they're bein' boys. You and their Daddy sure must be proud.

MARY ANN

Well, it's just me. Their Daddy's dead.

PETE

Oh. I'm sorry to hear that.

MARY ANN

No, it's okay. You didn't know. We split up just after I got pregnant with David. I guess he didn't want anything to do with another baby. Not long after he left, he got drunk one night in Florida and drove his car into a lake.

PETE

Makes it tough on you, raisin' the boys by yourself.

MARY ANN

My mom helps, and so does JB.

PETE

That was the name on the
restaurant. He your boss?

MARY ANN

Yes, we call him JB, but his real
name is Jimmy. Jimmy Simpson.

Mary Ann searches Pete's face for any sign that he knew
Uncle Jimmy.

PETE

(Trying to mask any signs
of recognition)
He must be a really nice fella.

MARY ANN

He is. He's always been good to me.

PETE

(Nods)
Pays to have friends.

As they chat Mary Ann keeps looking back through the trees.
There are some breaks in the trees that lets her catch
glimpses of any cars that might be coming.

MARY ANN

(suddenly)
Oh, damn. Here comes Casey. I came
here to tell you he's comin' here
lookin' for you.

Pete glances back in the direction she is looking.

PETE

Where?

MARY ANN

I saw him comin' this way. He'll be
here in a few minutes.

PETE

(Moving toward the truck)
Well, I just as soon not be here
when he gets here. I'd appreciate
it if you moved your car and let me
get by.

MARY ANN

That won't do you any good. He'll
be here before you got to the
bottom of the hill.

(Pause, trying to think
of an alternative)

Tell you what, straight ahead of
you is an old trail down the other
side of the hill. It's not much but

(MORE)

MARY ANN (cont'd)
it's wide enough for the truck. You can follow it down to the lake and catch the paved road at the boat ramp. I'll try to stall him here for a while.

PETE
What about you?

MARY ANN
He ain't after me. Besides, I can handle him. I have been all my life.

Pete looks at her quizzically.

MARY ANN
(Smiling)
He's my Daddy.

Pete looks for signs of Debbie in her face and starts to say something.

MARY ANN
You'd better go, if you're goin'!

Pete gets in the truck and starts it up. Mary Ann watches as the truck disappears beyond the crest of the hill and down into the tree line. Within seconds of Pete leaving, Casey rolls to a stop beside her car.

CASEY
(Getting out of the car)
Okay, where is he?

MARY ANN
Who?

CASEY
You know damn well who.

MARY ANN
He's gone Casey. Left just before you got here.

Casey instinctively looks over his shoulder, back down the hill.

CASEY
I didn't pass him on the road.

MARY ANN
I don't know about that, all I know is he's gone.

Casey walks around the crest of the hill, looking at the tree line in every direction.

CASEY
He's hidin' here somewhere.

MARY ANN
Who is he, Casey?

CASEY
He ain't nobody. Just a damn
drifter who's been hangin' around
here way too long as it is.

MARY ANN
I don't believe you. When I said
you were comin' he knew exactly who
I was talkin' about. Now who is he?
He knows you and JB both, you ain't
foolin' me.

Casey starts to argue with her when Debbie's van pulls up
beside Casey's car. She gets the boys out of their seats and
starts walking toward Csey and Mary Ann as Boss and Maggie
fall in beside her.

DAVID
(Running to Mary Ann)
Mommy!

MARY ANN
(Laughing as she picks up
David)
Hey you little stinker. What are
you doin' out here?

Charlie walks over and hugs his mother's leg, his eyes never
leaving the grown ups..

DEBBIE
Didn't expect to see you two here.

CASEY
(As he eyes Boss and
Maggie)
She's helpin' me find somebody.

DEBBIE
(Sarcastically)
Those convicts you were tellin' me
about?
(To Boss and Maggie
before Casey has time to
respond)
This is my husband Casey, and my
daughter, Mary Ann.
(Pause)
And this is Maggie Russell and Boss
Wallace. They're here lookin' for
Pete.

MARY ANN

(Smiling)

Hi. Now maybe I get to find out who this guy is that everybody is pretendin' they don't know.

DEBBIE

It's not a secret. He used to live here. He went to school with me and Casey.

MARY ANN

(Looking directly at Casey)

Oh, is that all? Everybody is actin' like there's some deep dark secret.

BOSS

And now he lives on my ranch in Texas. He's my foreman.

MARY ANN

(To Maggie)

And what about you? Where do you fit into all this?

MAGGIE

(Suddenly not sure how to answer)

I'm his friend.

BOSS

She's a lot more'n that. If he had any sense at all he'd have married her a long time ago.

DEBBIE

It's not a secret, sweetie, but there is somethin' I think we need to keep to ourselves. At least for now.

MARY ANN

Like what?

DEBBIE

Let me show you somethin'.

As the others follow Debbie toward a cedar tree on the lower side of the cemetery, Casey balks.

CASEY

(Walking toward his car)

I got some things I gotta do.

DEBBIE

Casey.

Casey stops without turning around. Debbie walks a few steps in his direction.

DEBBIE

(Softly)

You don't have to protect me from Pete.

CASEY

(Muttering as he gets in his car)

Fine.

Debbie watches Casey turn the car around in the clearing and go back down the hill. When he is out of sight, she turns back to the others.

DEBBIE

(Walking past the others)

It's right over here.

The others fall in behind her. Eventually she stops in front of a row of headstones. Five of them stand out from the others. They are neat despite the storm from the night before, and each of them are modestly decorated with fresh flowers.

Maggie steps closer to look at the headstone. Her breath catches in her throat when she sees Pete's name.

Boss holds his hat in his hands and bows his head somberly. He is unable to speak around the lump in his throat.

Mary Ann expects her mother to explain what she is supposed to be looking for, but Debbie isn't talking either, she is silently sobbing.

Then it occurs to Mary Ann what she is looking at. The name on the headstone is 'Peter Simpson', and the stranger's name is Pete.

MARY ANN

(Shakily)

Mom, this ain't funny. What is goin' on here? Is this what I think it is?

DEBBIE

(Putting her arm around Mary Ann's shoulder)

Yes. This is Pete, the man you met this morning. He's also JB's nephew. I think it's just a couple of mistakes that add up to a whole lot of confusion.

(Pause)

It looks like the Army was wrong when they said he was killed, and

(MORE)

DEBBIE (cont'd)

for some reason he decided to stay away 'til now. I don't really know all the answers yet myself.

BOSS

(Without taking his eyes off the headstone)

He was banged up over there pretty bad. I think he was meanin' to come back here sooner or later, but one thing led to another and he ended up stayin' on at the ranch.

(Pause)

When he first got there, he looked like he could barely walk. To tell you the truth, we all kinda felt sorry for him. He had to learn everythin'. Why, he couldn't even ride a horse. More than that though, he needed a chance to heal up. I told him I was hirin' him 'cause I needed another hand, but I didn't. I just couldn't see turnin' him loose in the shape he was in.

(Beginning to sound like the old Boss)

But I tell you what, God didn't make many men better'n Pete. He turned out to be tough as nails, just like he was a Wallace through and through. He didn't just learn what he had to know, he learned to do it better'n any other hand I had. If a horse threwed him, or a bull turned on him, he would get right up and do it again. He never backed down from nothin' or nobody.

Maggie stands closer to Boss and grips his arm with both hands. She needs some comfort and Boss's old familiar boasting is like a piece of home to her.

MARY ANN

So, what are we gonna do now?

DEBBIE

We're gonna find him and let him know that all of us don't object to him bein' here. But Casey is right about one thing, we have to be careful how we let some people know he's here.

MARY ANN

Why?

DEBBIE

Think about it, sweetie. Can't you see how hard it would be on JB?

MARY ANN

Actually Mom, I think JB might already know?

DEBBIE

How?

MARY ANN

JB was at the restaurant this morning when Casey had to get between Pete and Franklin.

DEBBIE

Franklin Knox?

MARY ANN

Yes, he was yellin' at the boys and Pete stood up to him.

DEBBIE

Franklin is a jerk. Hopefully he'll keep his distance until this is all over.

MARY ANN

And he was here too. Just a few minutes before you got here.

DEBBIE

Pete?

MARY ANN

Yes. He left just before Casey got here.

DEBBIE

(Looking around the graveyard)

Where did he go?

MARY ANN

(Pointing to the opposite side of the hill)

I told him to go down the old trail over there so he could get by Casey.

DEBBIE

(Disappointed that she missed him so closely again)

We didn't see him on our way here.

MARY ANN

(Shrugs)

I don't know. He could have gone by after you turned up the hill and ahead of Casey leaving.

DEBBIE

(Looking worried)

I hope Casey didn't run into him.

MAGGIE

Wait. I don't want to interrupt, but this goose chase is startin' to give me a head ache. If it's all the same to you, I think I'd like to get a room somewhere so I can get into somethin' a little more comfortable before we start runnin' all over the place.

DEBBIE

Both of you can stay at the house.

MAGGIE

We couldn't do that.

DEBBIE

It's okay. It's just me and Casey in that big house. The kid's rooms are not being used and there's a guest room too, so there's plenty of room for everybody.

MAGGIE

Well, okay.

(Turning to Boss)

Is that okay with you?

BOSS

Sure, but how 'bout you two go on. I'd like to see if this young lady here would be willin' to drive me around a little. Maybe I can spot that old truck somewhere.

MARY ANN

(Smiling)

I don't mind. I'm not sure I know where to start though.

BOSS

Hell, looks to me like we just start. No offense, ma'am, but it ain't exactly like we have to look all over Dallas or someplace like that. Can't be too many places he could go.

MARY ANN

I guess you're right. Okay Mom,
I'll call you if we find anything

INT. PETE'S TRUCK - AFTERNOON

Pete is sitting in his truck. He is still on the old trail, just above the tree line and from time to time can see people using the boat ramp. Through the trees he can also see the old silo that used to be attached to their barn. After about 10 minutes, when no one follows him down the trail, he figures it is safe to leave.

He starts the truck and pulls down to the boat ramp and turns back toward town on the paved road.

He stays off the main road and uses his fuzzy memory to take some of the back roads to the highway south of Loudon.

It takes him over half an hour, but he finally finds the old highway south of Loudon and turns south. He soon sees a tavern ahead, with a neon sign flashing "Hank's". Pete pulls around to the rear of the building and parks the truck.

INT. HANK'S BAR - AFTERNOON

The bar is one large room partially divided by a half wall that starts from the back of the room and comes midway to the front. On the side closest to the door is an area of tables and chairs toward the front, with several pool tables along the back wall. The other half of the room has a small dance floor in the front with more tables and chairs behind it. In the front corner, near the dance floor is a small, raised stage.

Pete walks toward the tables behind the little dance floor and sits with his back to the far wall. There is only one other person on this side of the bar and he doesn't look up as Pete walks by.

As he sits down he drops his hat in the chair beside him. It is a bit darker on this side of the room and someone would have to look close to recognize him.

As he sits down a WAITRESS comes to his table.

WAITRESS

What'll it be, hon?

PETE

I'll have a beer and a burger with
everything you can get on it,
please.

She scratches out his order on a note pad and walks away.

Pete sits and looks about the bar. The smoke is thick and the country music coming from the jukebox is loud. If anyone noticed him walking in, they had forgotten all about him now

since the few people that are in the bar are either sitting at tables talking or playing pool.

The waitress brings his order and he settles into his seat, starting to relax a little. The bar fills up with more people as he eats, but that is okay with him. The more people there are when he leaves, the less conspicuous he will be.

As he finishes eating he hears the loud, booming voice of the big man he had words with earlier. He instinctively leans back against the wall, using the shadows to stay out of sight.

INT. MARY ANN'S CAR - AFTERNOON

BOSS

(Looking out the car window)

I'll tell you one thing. I wish I could take some of these hills and trees and put 'em on my ranch. It sure is pretty country you got here.

MARY ANN

What's your ranch like.

BOSS

Nothin' like this. It's a lot flatter, not near as many hills. We have a few trees, but nothing like these. Nothin' much to block that old blue norther that seems to blow all winter, or the dust that boils up in the summer.

MARY ANN

So it's a windy place?

BOSS

Wind blows almost all the time, day and night. Thunder, hail and a few tornadoes in the spring and summer and snowstorms in the winter. Let me tell you, nothin' can get as cold or as hot as a saddle when you gotta sit it all day.

MARY ANN

You sound like you don't like it.

BOSS

(Smiling)

I love it. It's home, and it's pretty in its own way. My people have lived there for six generations, and my son will carry

(MORE)

BOSS (cont'd)
on after I'm gone, and his kids
will carry on after him.

MARY ANN
So Pete lives with you?

BOSS
Not in my house, no. He's got his
own room in the bunkhouse when he's
not with Maggie. Then on his
birthday we gave him a little piece
of the ranch and it's got a house
on it that he can move into
whenever he wants to.

MARY ANN
Wow! That's a nice gift.

BOSS
Well, it ain't exactly a palace,
but he's part of the family. I'm by
him almost like I am my own boy,
John. Besides, it will be good to
know he'll always be close.

MARY ANN
So Maggie is his girlfriend?

BOSS
Yeah, and she has been for a good
long time. I don't know why he just
don't go ahead and marry her.

MARY ANN
Maybe he don't want to.

BOSS
It ain't that, or at least I don't
think it is. He's as crazy about
her as a man can be about a woman.
He's waitin' on something, I just
don't know what it is, and I'm not
real sure he does either.

They are silent for a few moments.

BOSS
Any ideas how we should be doin'
this?

MARY ANN
No. I guess we just start on one
end of town and work our way
through. He's got to be hungry, but
he won't go back to JB's to eat.
Hopefully he'll stay here close and
not go up by Knoxville.

BOSS

You're right. So you do the drivin'
and I'll look for the truck

They drive in silence for a few minutes, closely watching the parking lots around restaurants and hotels.

They check a hotel and two small cafes south of town. Mary Ann drives through the parking lots slowly and glances in the windows while Boss looks for his truck. As they enter the south side of town, Mary Ann pulls into a convenience store parking lot.

MARY ANN

(Turning back out onto
the highway and heading
south)

I forgot one place. It's further
down the road.

In a few minutes they see the flashing neon sign of Hank's and Mary Ann eases the car into the parking lot.

BOSS

My God, this is a rough lookin'
place.

MARY ANN

(Laughing)

It just looks that way from the
outside. Inside it's even worse.

BOSS

You've been in this place?

MARY ANN

(Still laughing)

A few times.

BOSS

(Suddenly)

Wait! There's the truck.

The truck is hard to see at first. It is pulled far up between the vehicles on either side of it.

MARY ANN

Are you sure?

BOSS

I know my own damned truck when I
see it.

Mary Ann pulls the car into a parking space.

MARY ANN

You want to stay out here in the
car? This ain't the safest place
(MORE)

MARY ANN (cont'd)
around here. Especially if you
don't know anybody.

BOSS
(Already getting out of
the car)
I've been in my share of rough
bars. Texas has one or two.

INT. HANK'S BAR - AFTERNOON

Mary Ann and Boss enter the bar. Franklin sees Mary Ann almost immediately.

FRANKLIN
Well, look who's slummin' tonight.

Mary Ann ignores him and looks around the smoky room, trying to see Pete.

FRANKLIN
(Yelling louder)
What's the matter, bitch? You too
good to speak?

BOSS
(To Mary Ann)
Who is that?

MARY ANN
(Still looking for Pete)
Just the local asshole.

Franklin starts walking toward the front of the room. Two other men leave their seats and fall in behind him.

FRANKLIN
I think you need a lesson in
manners like your friend did this
mornin'.

POOL PLAYER
C'mon Franklin, let's finish the
game.

FRANKLIN
(Without looking back)
Later. This is more important.

Half way to the front of the room a man stands up and steps in front of Franklin and starts to say something. Without breaking stride, Franklin shoves the man hard and sends him crashing over a table and sliding almost to the dance floor.

WAITRESS
Franklin, don't start anything. I'm
gonna call the law!

FRANKLIN
 (Without taking his eyes
 off Mary Ann)
 I don't give a damn. This is only
 gonna take a minute.

The big man is now within reach of Mary Ann and is flanked
 on each side by his friends.

FRANKLIN
 Now, Are you gonna come back there
 with me or am I gonna have to carry
 you back there?

MARY ANN
 Franklin, just leave me alone. I
 ain't stayin'. I'll be gone in a
 minute.

FRANKLIN
 (Reaching for her)
 Not if I don't want you to, you
 ain't. Stay here and you and me can
 have some fun.

Boss steps between Franklin and Mary Ann.

BOSS
 If she says she ain't goin' with
 you, then she ain't goin' with you.

FRANKLIN
 Who the hell are you?

BOSS
 That don't matter. What matters is
 you leavin' her alone.

FRANKLIN
 And who's gonna stop me?

A man stands up behind Franklin.

MAN IN BAR
 Leave 'em alone. That's just a
 woman and an old man.

The man starts to walk around to the left of Franklin but
 the big man's friend on that side turns suddenly and hits
 the man, knocking him against the wall.

At that same moment, the first deputy comes walking in the
 door and the big man's friend swings again, knocking the
 deputy out cold.

Franklin grabs for Mary Ann.

BOSS
(Yelling)
Leave her alone!

Boss tries to grab the big man's arm, but Franklin pushes him aside with very little effort.

Pete hears the old man's bark and stands up, looking toward the front of the bar.

PETE
(To himself)
Boss?

He sees Boss trying to protect Mary Ann, as Franklin pushes him aside. Pete hurries toward the front of the room.

Just as Pete gets to the front of the bar, he sees Casey coming in the front door. The big man sees Casey too and momentarily stops.

CASEY
What's goin' on here? Franklin! Let
her go!

Casey ducks as Franklin's friend swings at him and throws his own punch, knocking the man to the floor. Franklin sees an opening, steps away from Mary Ann and Boss and slams a big fist into Casey's jaw, sending the Sheriff sprawling over one of the tables.

PETE
Boss!

Franklin's other friend sees Pete coming and rushes toward him. Pete waits until the man gets close, sidesteps him and hits him hard behind the ear.

As the man goes down, another man who has been standing near the door rushes Pete too. The man doesn't consider Boss a threat and it is a big mistake. As the man brushes past Mary Ann, Boss swings his foot around and hooks the running man's feet, tripping him. The man goes down hard on his chin and lays there dazed for a moment. He starts to get back up just as Boss swings his other foot, this time catching the man hard on the side of the head, knocking him out

On the other side of the room, Casey is scooting across the floor, trying to get far enough away from Franklin in order to get to his feet. Franklin stays after him, pushing tables aside as he chases after the scurrying Sheriff until he finally gets him trapped against the wall.

Pete rushes across the room just as Franklin reaches down and picks Casey up by the neck. The big man pulls his fist back to hit Casey but Pete grabs his wrist. Franklin turns to see who has grabbed him as Pete's fist hits the big man hard under the eye.

Franklin staggers a little and releases his grip on Casey. He turns and starts toward Pete, but Casey has recovered enough to swing and hit the big man hard on the jaw.

Franklin staggers again, not sure which of the men to go after first. Pete takes the opportunity to drive his fist hard into Franklin's chest, knocking the air from the big man's lungs.

The fight is almost gone from him now, and Franklin grabs wildly at Pete and Casey, but both of them manage to stay just out of his reach. Finally, the big man goes to his knees and Casey hits him hard behind the head, knocking him forward onto the floor. As Franklin lays there, Casey kneels down and puts a knee in the middle of his back. He takes out his handcuffs and secured the big man's hands behind him.

Pete limps a little more than usual as he walked toward Boss and Mary Ann.

PETE

(Throwing his arm around
BOSS's shoulder)

What in the hell are you doin'
here?

BOSS

(Laughing)

Come to get you. Damn, I ain't had
this much fun in years.

PETE

(Looking worried)

What do you mean you come to get
me? What's wrong?

BOSS

Bob Franks stopped by the ranch and
said they had you back here in
jail, so we come to get you out.

PETE

Who's we?

BOSS

Me and Maggie.

Pete actually laughs out loud.

PETE

Where is she?

BOSS

She went home with Debbie.

PETE

(Laughing more)

You're kiddin'!

As the three of them talk, more deputies arrive and join Casey in getting Franklin and his friends into the patrol cars. Casey finishes giving instructions to the deputies and walks over.

CASEY

I want to tell you two how much I appreciate what you did.

BOSS

(Laughing)

Wasn't nothin'. I was just tellin' Pete here how much fun it was.

PETE

Don't worry about it, Casey. It was sorta like playin' football again.

CASEY

(Smiling and smacking
PETE on the back)

Well, what say we head for the house. I know somebody there who's gonna want to see you. I have to swing by the jail for a minute. You all can stop in with me or go on to the house, it's up to you.

MARY ANN

He can follow me to the house, Casey.

BOSS

(As they leave)

If it's all the same to you Mary Ann, I'll just ride along with your Daddy.

MARY ANN

That's fine.

INT. GOODMAN HOME - EVENING

Debbie busies herself around the kitchen while Maggie settles into the spare room. There is a knock at the door and Debbie moves to answer it.

DEBBIE

(Moving aside to let him
in)

Hi, Uncle Jimmy. Come on in.

The older man steps inside the room.

UNCLE JIMMY

Debbie, I hate to bother you, but I was wonderin' if maybe Casey was home.

DEBBIE

No he's not. I guess he will be soon though. Can I help?

UNCLE JIMMY

I don't know. It's just that, well, there was some trouble at the restaurant this mornin'. Franklin Knox and this stranger almost got into it and Casey had to break it up. The thing is the other fella looked a lot like Pete to me, and it's been troublin' me all day. I was hopin' Casey could tell me who that man was.

DEBBIE

I don't know, Jimmy. I saw Casey earlier today but he didn't say anything about that.

UNCLE JIMMY

But Casey acted like he knew him. He tried to tell me he was a drifter or something, but I think there was more to it than that.

DEBBIE

Well, Casey knows a lot of people.
(Pause)
Would you like some coffee while you wait?

UNCLE JIMMY

That would be good. I appreciate it.

He follows her into the kitchen and she pours them both a cup of coffee.

DEBBIE

Jimmy, You shouldn't let yourself get so worked up.

UNCLE JIMMY

I can't help it. All day long I've been thinkin' of Mama and Pete. When he left he didn't think I could take care of her, I could see it in his eyes, and then he ain't gone no time before she died.

DEBBIE

That wasn't your fault, Jimmy. It was her time, that's all. There's nothin' you or anybody else did that caused it. Pete wouldn't have been able to stop it either.

MAGGIE (O.S.)

Oh, excuse me, I didn't know you had company.

DEBBIE

No, it's okay. This is a good friend of ours, Jimmy Simpson. Jimmy, this is Maggie.

UNCLE JIMMY

(Standing up and nodding his head)

Pleased to meet you.

MAGGIE

I'm pleased to meet you too, Mister Simpson.

UNCLE JIMMY

(Almost blushing)

Oh, none of that mister stuff.

(Then to Debbie)

If I knew you had company I would have dropped by another time.

DEBBIE

It's not a problem, Jimmy, really it's not.

The phone rings

DEBBIE

(To Uncle Jimmy and Maggie as she picks up the phone)

Excuse me.

(Into the phone)

Hello.

MARY ANN

(Heard over the phone)

Mom, we found him and we're on our way there. All of us.

Debbie stands there silently, her memories flying back many years to the last time she saw Pete.

MARY ANN

Mom? Mom? Are you still there? Mom? Are you even listenin' to me?

Debbie is jolted back to reality.

DEBBIE

(Trying to find her voice)

Oh, uh, I'm sorry, Mary Ann. What did you say?

MARY ANN

You haven't been listenin'? I said they're followin' me now. All except Casey. We'll be there in a few minutes.

DEBBIE

(A bit shaky)

Okay.

Debbie quickly clears her mind. She knows she has to deal with Uncle Jimmy before everyone gets there. She doesn't have many options since Pete will be walking through the door soon. She decides to be direct.

DEBBIE

(Starting slowly)

Jimmy, there is somethin' I have to tell you, and I ain't got a lot of time to say it. Believe me, it's not goin' to be any easier for me to say than it is for you to hear it.

Uncle Jimmy looks at her intently.

DEBBIE

You know that man you saw this mornin' in the restaurant, the one you said looked like Pete?

Uncle Jimmy shakes his head slowly, his eyes wide with a mixture of fear, joy and excitement.

DEBBIE

Well.

(takes a breath)

It was Pete.

There is an audible gasp from Uncle Jimmy and she realizes he has been holding his breath while he was waiting.

DEBBIE

(Quicker)

And that's not all. He's on his way here, right now.

UNCLE JIMMY

(Stunned)

But how? We buried him. Where has he been for so long?

DEBBIE

He's been livin' in Texas. Maggie here is one of his friends from out there.

Uncle Jimmy turns and looks at Maggie as if he was seeing her for the first time.

INT. LOUDON JAIL - EVENING

Casey is talking to a couple of deputies as Franklin and the others are being booked into jail.

FRANKLIN

Casey, I'm sorry I hit you.

CASEY

It's okay Franklin, just go on in there and sleep it off.

FRANKLIN

Who was that other fella, Casey?

CASEY

Just a guy I used to know. He's here payin' us a visit. He'll most likely be gone a long time before you get outta here.

Franklin huffs at Casey's joke, not thinking it was so funny, then disappears down the hallway with the deputy.

EXT. GOODMAN HOME - EVENING

Pete pulls the truck up a small gravel driveway and stops behind Mary Ann's car. The house is on a small wooded bluff overlooking the river. The trees directly behind the house have been thinned out to provide a better view of the water. The front yard has one colorful flowerbed after another and the bright colors and shade trees give everything a quiet, peaceful feel, the kind of place you would look forward to after a long hard day. But Pete isn't so sure he wants to be here now.

Mary Ann steps out of her car and waits for the two men to get out of the truck.

MARY ANN

Jimmy's in there too.

BOSS

(Smacking Pete on the back as he walks past)

Too late to back out now. Besides, it's better to kill two birds with one stone.

MARY ANN

(Perplexed, to Boss)

Where did you come from? I thought you was ridin' with Casey.

BOSS

Don't know what gave you that idea.
(Turning to Pete)
Come on, I wanna cup of coffee.

Pete hesitates again at the bottom of the porch steps.

BOSS

(Standing at the door,
waiting on him)

You're gonna have to come in sooner
or later. I doubt anybody in here
will bite you.

Mary Ann lags behind, watching the two men. She has a nagging feeling that there is more here than meets the eye. Her mother is always a very calm person, not easily worked up about much, but she is very nervous about seeing this man, and he is just as nervous about seeing her. And why did Boss say he was going to ride with Casey but ended up in Pete's truck?

INT. GOODMAN HOME - EVENING

As Pete enters the house he sees Maggie and smiles. He reaches out his hand and she grasps it tightly.

Uncle Jimmy stands a few feet in front of him, nervously fidgeting from one foot to the other. The older man looks amazed. His eyes swept Pete up and down as if he can't believe what he's seeing.

UNCLE JIMMY

(Softly, his eyes tearing
up)

Pete. Is it really you?

Pete steps closer and takes his uncle's shoulders in his hands, smiling into the tear filled eyes.

PETE

Yeah, Uncle Jimmy, it's me.

UNCLE JIMMY

(Still shaky)

I don't understand. Where have you
been? We buried you.

PETE

I am so sorry Uncle Jimmy. Somebody
somewhere made a bad mistake. If I
had known about it, I would have
been back here a long time ago.

UNCLE JIMMY

But why didn't you come back
anyway? Why did you wait so long?

PETE

(Shaking his head)

I ain't got an answer, Uncle Jimmy.
I wish I did, but I don't.
Everything was so mixed up back

(MORE)

PETE (cont'd)

then. I was mixed up. I meant to come back, I really did. But everything was so strange. Including me. I still hurt from the war and from Grandma dying and I didn't have any idea what I was going to do with myself.

UNCLE JIMMY

(His voice beginning to crack)

I was still here. Wasn't I worth comin' back to?

Pete wraps his arms around his uncle's shoulders.

PETE

Oh, Uncle Jimmy, I wasn't tryin' to stay away from here because of you. You're the only family I've got left. I just didn't know what was back here and I was afraid to find out.

BOSS (O.S.)

Mister Simpson, that ain't exactly all there is to it.

Jimmy looks away from Pete for the first time.

UNCLE JIMMY

Who are you?

PETE

I'm sorry, Uncle Jimmy, this is Boss Wallace. He owns the ranch where I work.

UNCLE JIMMY

(Stepping over to shake Boss's hand)

Pleased to meet you, Mister Wallace. What were you sayin'?

BOSS

Well, it ain't my way to jump into other folk's business, but there's a little bit more to it than what Pete here is telling you

UNCLE JIMMY

Go on.

BOSS

Well, sir, what he ain't sayin' is when he first showed up at my place he was messed up pretty bad from

(MORE)

BOSS (cont'd)

the war. He had scars from head to toe. Kate, that's my daughter-in-law, has some nurse trainin' and she said he should be looked over by a doctor. So I took him to ol' Doc Blair.

(To Pete)

I lied to you then, Pete. I told you it was somethin' I made all the new hands do, but it wasn't. You was the first. Oh, they all do it now, but you was the one who got it started.

Pete smiles and lightly slaps Boss on the shoulder.

BOSS

Anyway, Doc said whatever we did, we should do it slow and easy or he might rip something open again, and if that happened he could die on us. So that's what we did.

(Pause)

The truth is Kate wouldn't have let me let him go even if I wanted to. She said I wouldn't have done it to a calf, and she was right. If he had left back then to come here he might have ended up dead on the side of the road somewhere. So it was as much us keepin' him there as it was him stayin'. At least to start with.

Uncle Jimmy stands silently for a few moments and then smiles.

UNCLE JIMMY

(Starting to smile)

I guess everything has a reason for happenin'. Who am I to question anybody? What's done is done and there ain't no goin' back. Maybe it's best that it worked out this way.

Pete wraps an arm around his uncle's shoulders again.

UNCLE JIMMY

You also have an aunt and two cousins you don't know about. Mildred would be tickled pink to see you. I think I'll run home and get her and bring her back. over here if that's alright.

PETE

(Smiling)

That would be great. Please do. I'd love to meet her.

Debbie has been leaning against the kitchen door frame during the exchange between Pete and his uncle, but her eyes never leave Pete.

After Uncle Jimmy leaves, Pete turns to Debbie and smiles. She hesitates at first but then walks over to him, reaches up and lightly touches his scarred cheek and wraps her arms around his middle. He pats her back and feels her begin to shake and sob.

DEBBIE

(Suddenly embarrassed and wiping her eyes)

Goodness. Just look at the way I'm actin'. I must be a sight.

PETE

Don't worry about it, you look fine to me.

DEBBIE

I can't believe my manners. Let me at least make you people some coffee.

BOSS

I could sure use some.

MAGGIE

(To Boss as she walks over to Pete and Debbie)

You hush.

(Then to Pete and Debbie)

You two go on out on the deck. Mary Ann and me can get the coffee. Go on now. You got a lot of catchin' up to do.

Pete smiles at her to let her know he appreciates what she's doing. Then Maggie and Mary Ann walk into the kitchen as Pete and Debbie go out on the deck.

MAGGIE

Your mama seems very excited.

MARY ANN

She's a little spooky if you ask me.

MAGGIE

Spooky?

MARY ANN

Yeah. She's never this emotional,
except maybe with the little ones.

MAGGIE

Well, she went a long time thinkin'
he was dead.

MARY ANN

Maybe. But I know I wouldn't get
that worked up over a guy unless he
meant something to me, whether I
thought he was dead or not.

150.

EXT. GOODMAN HOME - DECK - EVENING

Pete and Debbie stand for a time and look out over the
river.

PETE

(Breaking the silence)
This is a nice place.

DEBBIE

Why didn't you come on home?

PETE

There was nothin' to come home to.

DEBBIE

(Softly)
There was me.

PETE

And Casey.

DEBBIE

There wouldn't have been if I knew
you were still alive.

They fall into silence again. Neither of them knowing how to
get past it all.

DEBBIE

(Pointing into the
darkness)
I talked Casey into building this
house here because of you. That
hill of yours is right over there.
The one where I met you the night
before you left.
(Pauses to sniffle)
The night I heard you were killed,
I went up on that hill and laid
down under that tree and cried till
my eyes hurt. It was the worst day
of my life.

PETE

Believe me, there were many times I felt hurt of my own.

DEBBIE

I guess you ended up bein' right after all. You tried to tell me you might not be comin' home, and I wouldn't listen.

PETE

Maybe, but I didn't mean the way it turned out.

DEBBIE

I know you didn't. We worried so much about the war we didn't think there might be other reasons.

PETE

Look, I know I could have done things better, or different, and I would have if I knew folks back here thought I was dead.

DEBBIE

(Beginning to cry again)

I used to dream you weren't dead. That you'd come walkin' up the walkway one day. I'd give anything if that would have happened. Now that it has, it just makes me wonder why you didn't even so much as try to call anybody in thirty years.

PETE

(Slowing shaking his head)

If I had come back, we couldn't have just picked up where we left off. I don't know how else to say it. You got your reasons for bein' mad at me, and I had my reasons for stayin' gone.

DEBBIE

We're no better at this than we were before you left, when you kept trying to push me away. I guess we're destined to always struggle with things when it comes to us.

INT. GOODMAN HOME - EVENING

Mary Ann watches them through the window. She was going to offer them coffee, but when she caught sight of them she stopped. It is obvious from the way they act that whatever they are talking about is upsetting them both.

MAGGIE (O.S.)

You want me to go check on him?

It takes Mary Ann a moment to realize Maggie is talking to her and she can hear David crying downstairs.

MARY ANN

No. I'll, uh, I'll go.

Mary Ann hurries from the kitchen to attend to David. Boss walks into the kitchen as she leaves.

BOSS

Things sure are a mess ain't they?

MAGGIE

Yeah they are.

They stand for a minute watching Pete and Debbie outside.

BOSS

You reckon she'll tell him about
Mary Ann bein' his?

MARY ANN (O.S.)

What did you just say?

Neither of them had heard Mary Ann come back into the room.

BOSS

(Trying to cover his
blunder)

Uh, nothing.

MARY ANN

(Pushing past Boss and
Maggie)

Don't try to tell me that.

Boss and Maggie both try to catch Mary Ann before she bolts outside, but can't.

EXT. GOODMAN HOME - DECK - EVENING

Debbie sees Mary Ann out of the corner of her eye and starts to smile. Pete can see Debbie is distracted by something behind him and starts to turn to see what it is. He hasn't turned completely around when Mary Ann smacks him hard.

MARY ANN

(Livid)

You son of a bitch. Just who do you
think you are?

She moves closer to him, pounding against his chest with her fists. Debbie finally works her way between them.

DEBBIE
 (Yelling)
 Mary Ann! Stop!

MARY ANN
 (Yelling)
 How could you?
 (Then looking at Debbie)
 Both of you!

Before Debbie can stop her, Mary Ann bounds down the deck steps and into the yard.

DEBBIE
 (Yelling after her)
 Mary Ann!

Debbie runs after Mary Ann. Pete is dazed, more by the suddenness attack than any of the blows.

EXT. GOODMAN HOME - FRONT YARD - DAY

Casey is getting out of his car and sees Mary Ann running around the corner of the house. She is looking back at Debbie and has not seen him yet. She stops with a jerk when she does see him, almost running into him. She is in shock.

MARY ANN
 (Beginning to cry)
 How could everybody keep this a secret from me so long? Why didn't somebody tell me?

Debbie finally catches up to Mary Ann.

DEBBIE
 (Reaching for her daughter)
 Don't sweetie. Don't run. Let me explain.

Mary Ann backs away from her, ready to run again until Casey grabs her arm. She turns to smack him but he catches her wrist.

CASEY
 (Through clinched teeth as she struggles)
 Now hold on! What's going on here?
 What's got you so upset?

DEBBIE
 (Pleading)
 Please, sweetie. Please let me explain. Pete doesn't know either.

Casey now understands why she's upset.

MARY ANN
 (Staring blankly at her
 mother)
 He doesn't?

DEBBIE
 No, he doesn't. Now come on, it's
 about time everyone knew the whole
 story.

Casey lets go of her when he sees she isn't resisting anymore. Mary Ann's chest heaves in the wake of the exertion and anxiety, but she allows Debbie to lead her back toward the house.

EXT. GOODMAN HOME - DECK - EVENING

Pete is still on the deck and watches through the windows as Debbie comes through the front door, her arm around Mary Ann's shoulder. Casey is right behind them.

Casey steps out onto the deck while Debbie and Mary Ann sit down at the kitchen table. Debbie is still trying to calm the younger woman, as Maggie and Boss watch everything going on around them.

CASEY
 (Holding open the door.)
 Pete, it's time we all had a long
 talk. This includes you. Could you
 come in here, please?

INT. GOODMAN HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Casey steps aside and holds the door open as Pete steps into the kitchen. Debbie and Mary Ann sit at the table, looking up at him with teary eyes. Maggie and Boss stand behind the table, watching everyone else.

DEBBIE
 (Half whispering)
 Pete, please sit down. There is
 something we have to talk about.

Pete sits opposite Debbie and Casey sits opposite Mary Ann, but the younger woman doesn't take her eyes off Pete. Debbie reaches out and takes hold of Casey's hand. Maggie moves behind Pete and puts her hands on his shoulders.

DEBBIE
 Pete, it's getting' to be a habit
 sayin' this, but this ain't gonna
 be easy, no easier than it was for
 us to see you again. So I guess the
 best thing to do is start at the
 beginning.

Debbie tenses and squeezes Casey's hand harder.

CASEY

(Softly)

Just take your time.

DEBBIE

(Taking a deep breath)

Pete, after you left, and Grannie Simpson died I thought I was going to go crazy. It hurt me so much when she passed, but it hurt me more 'cause I knew how bad it must be on you to be half a world away with nobody to share your hurt with. It was like I was carryin' the weight of everything for both of us.

(Pause)

Then, we got the word about you.

Debbie starts to cry. Casey holds her hand in his, softly stroking it, trying to help her get through the ordeal. Maggie squeezes Pete's shoulders since she knows what's coming.

DEBBIE

I thought my world was gone forever. All I could think about was that you tried to tell me before you left that something might happen to you, and it did, or at least we had been told it had.

(Another deep breath)

But what made it worse was knowin' I... was... pregnant.

Mary Ann whimpers and sobs as Debbie looks into Pete's eyes, trying to find some sign that he understands what she is trying to tell him.

Pete sits silently listening to everything she says, until suddenly the full meaning of what she has said sinks in. He sits stunned, looking back and forth between Debbie and Mary Ann. His shoulders slip from Maggie's grip and he slumps down as if someone had let the air out of him. He doesn't cry, although his eyes fill with tears.

PETE

(searching for words)

I'm sorry. If I had known I would have come back a long, long time ago.

Mary Ann leans forward and looks deeply into his eyes. Pete leans closer and wraps his arms around her shoulders, nearly pulling her into his lap. He holds her tightly, patting her back, and sobs.

PETE

I'm very sorry. It looks like all of this is my fault.

CASEY

It's nobody's fault. Not really. Things just worked out the way they did. You can't always lay fault for that. If you had known, you would have come back. Even I know that.

PETE

But I was the one who made the decision not to come back here.

BOSS

You can't change a thing that's happened, no more than you can stop the turnin' of the earth.

DEBBIE

He's right. If you had decided to come back here you would have missed the life you have now and wouldn't know these good people. You've had a good life, Pete.

MARY ANN

Have you, Mama?

Debbie looks at her daughter and then into the anxious face of Casey and smiles.

DEBBIE

Yes I have. It's not the life I thought I wanted at one time, but things change. People change. So you have to adjust as you go along.

Debbie squeezes Casey's hand and looks at Mary Ann.

DEBBIE

I need to tell you something else.

MARY ANN

You don't have to tell me anything, Mama

DEBBIE

Yes I do. You need to hear it and Casey deserves for you to know just what kind of a man he is.

(She smiles up Casey)

When I found out I was pregnant I was hopelessly lost. I wasn't even sure how Mama and Daddy were gonna take it. People were different back then. Loudon was different. People

(MORE)

DEBBIE (cont'd)

didn't have much to do with a woman who had kids and had never been married. They didn't treat her or the kids good at all. Always lookin' down their noses at her, sayin' mean and hateful things, it was awful.

(Pause)

I thought about leavin'. I thought about a lot of things. I thought about so many things it just about drove me crazy. Well, one night when I was with Casey I just let it all bust out.

Debbie smiles and squeezes Casey's hand harder.

DEBBIE

He didn't even blink. He told me he would take care of everything, and he did. He said he would marry me and stay with me until you were born and then if I wanted him to leave he would. He was willin' to give up whatever he was plannin' on doin' to help me, and you.

Casey almost blushes, and Mary Ann laughs, but then started to cry again.

DEBBIE

I didn't love him at first, and he he knew that, but after a while I did. He never put any conditions on me or you kids and he's always been right there whenever we needed him. He always put our needs and wants in front of his own. What more could a woman ask for in a husband?

Casey stands up and pulls Debbie into his arms. Pete hugs Mary Ann tightly and after a moment, pulls Maggie into the hug with them.

Behind him he hears Boss's booming laughter. He looks and Boss has picked up Debbie, as soon as Casey let her go, and has her in a bear hug.

BOSS

(Laughing)

With all this huggin' goin' on around here, I'd better get in on it too.

UNCLE JIMMY (O.S.)

Well it's no wonder nobody answered the door.

They all turn to see Uncle Jimmy standing in the doorway and beside him is his wife, MILDRED.

UNCLE JIMMY

We let ourselves in. My Lord, you people are makin' so much racket!

Uncle Jimmy walks over and puts his hand on Pete's shoulder and pulls him toward the woman.

UNCLE JIMMY

Pete, this is your aunt Mildred.

Pete steps closer and put his arms around her shoulders, drawing her to him and hugging her warmly.

PETE

I sure am glad to meet you. Thank you for takin' care of Uncle Jimmy

MILDRED

(Smiling)

We take care of each other. Welcome home.

EXT. GOODMAN HOME - DECK - MORNING

Pete and Maggie sit on the deck watching the sun rise.

MAGGIE

It sure is pretty here.

PETE

I almost forgot just how pretty it is.

Casey comes through the door with a cup of coffee in his hand.

CASEY

Mind if I join you?

MAGGIE

We were enjoyin' the view. You have a really nice home.

CASEY

Thank you. This is my hidin' place. When I want to get away and unwind, this deck is the place I want to be.

PETE

Casey, I'm gonna need your help on somethin'.

CASEY

What's that?

PETE

I need to find out who's in that box.

CASEY

Not sure I follow you.

PETE

The casket y'all buried. Since it's not me in there, then who is?

CASEY

(With a bit of a frown)

I'm not sure anybody knows. Why don't we just leave it at that.

PETE

I can't do that. I thought about it almost all night, and since it ain't me it might be one of the guys from my unit. Either way, somebody somewhere needs to know who it is.

Casey looks out across the river for a moment and then opens his cell phone and dials a number.

CASEY

Jake? When Betty Jo gets in, tell her I need her to contact the Army and find me somebody in the mortuary affairs group. I either need a number to call them or she can have him call me here at the house.

(Pause)

Oh, and tell her I won't be in today. Got it? Good. Thanks Jake

(Then to Pete)

Well, I guess we'll see what we can find out.

INT. GOODMAN HOME - MORNING

There is a collage of scenes with everyone chatting or playing with the kids. Pete spends a lot of time with the little ones and Mary Ann enjoys watching him with them.

BOSS

(To Pete)

You should bring them boys out to the ranch.

PETE

That's not entirely my call.

BOSS

I think they'd like it. Let 'em
summer out there if they want to.
There's nothing like growin' up on
a ranch.

PETE

I know that, but that would be up
to Mary Ann.

BOSS

(To Mary Ann)

What do you think?

MARY ANN

I have no objections.

BOSS

Good, then it's settled.

PETE

(Laughing)

Hey, that's awfully quick ain't it?

BOSS

Maybe, but it would do 'em good.
They could learn some things while
they were there; hang out with you
and help out, do a little work as
they get older. Besides, it would
be good to have some little ones
around the place.

PETE

You're right about that part.

BOSS

(Leaning down toward the
boys)

How would you two boys like to come
out to th' ranch and spend some
time with your Grandpa here?

Both boys squeal their approval.

CHARLIE

(To Pete)

You're our Grandpa too?!

PETE

(Beaming)

Yeah, I guess I am.

A few minutes later the phone rings and Casey answers it.

CASEY

Mornin' Betty Jo. You did? Good.
Put him on.

Casey pushes the speaker button on the phone.

CASEY

(To the others)

It's the call from the Army.

BETTY JO

Go ahead, Sheriff. I've got Major Williams from Fort Lee, Virginia on the line.

CASEY

Yes sir, Major Williams, this is Sheriff Goodman from Loudon County, Tennessee. How are you today?

MAJOR WILLIAMS

I'm fine, Sheriff. What can I do for you?

CASEY

Well, sir, we've got a problem down here we're gonna need your help with.

MAJOR WILLIAMS

And what is that, Sheriff?

CASEY

Thirty years ago the Army sent home what they said was the body of one of our local boys killed in Vietnam.

MAJOR WILLIAMS

(interrupting)

So now you sound like you doubt that for some reason. Let me assure you Sheriff, the Army goes to great lengths to make sure we don't make that kind of mistake. Everything is checked and double checked.

CASEY

Well Major, this time your checklist didn't work.

MAJOR WILLIAMS

May I ask how you are so sure the Army has made a mistake, Sheriff?

CASEY

Well, sir, the fella that's supposed to be in the casket is standin' right here in my livin' room.

There is silence on the other end of the phone.

MAJOR WILLIAMS

I assume then that you can prove
this is really that man?

CASEY

I've known him all my life Major,
and there ain't another one like
him in the world.

MAJOR WILLIAMS

Okay. That's enough to start the
process, I suppose, but the Army is
going to have to verify that this
man is who he says he is.

CASEY

He is, Major, and there are a lot
of folks around here that would
swear to it if they have to.

MAJOR WILLIAMS

Could I have the man's name please?

PETE

(Answering for himself)

Peter Simpson, sir.

MAJOR WILLIAMS

Well, Mr. Simpson, what's taken so
long for this to come up?

PETE

The first I heard about it was
yesterday, sir. I haven't been back
here in a long, long time.

MAJOR WILLIAMS

(with a touch of sarcasm)

Obviously.

(pause)

We're going to have to talk to you
more in depth. Where can we get in
touch with you?

PETE

You can find me at the Bend in the
River Ranch in Hutchinson County,
Texas. Everybody around there knows
where it is. I won't be hard to
find.

MAJOR WILLIAMS

Okay, Mr. Simpson. You will be
hearing from us.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE SPRING HOUSE - AFTERNOON

Pete leads Dollar around the open flats across from the
spring house. Charlie and David sit atop the horse, laughing

and squealing. They are both able to sit in the saddle with Charlie in front, and they are both decked out like little cowboys in jeans, boots and cowboy hats. Pete is laughing as much as they are.

Across the creek, Maggie, Kate and Mary Ann are standing on the spring house porch, watching the three of them play.

MARY ANN

They love it here.

KATE

He loves having them here. I've never seen him laugh so much in all the time I've known him.

MAGGIE

(Almost to herself)

Last night he asked me to marry him.

Kate and Mary Ann scream with delight and hug Maggie.

KATE

(Laughing)

Well it's about time.

Pete leads Dollar and the boys back toward the spring house. He can guess by the way the ladies are acting that Maggie has told them he finally popped the question.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE SPRING HOUSE - AFTERNOON

As the credits begin to roll, we get a tight close up of the back of the horse, Dollar, angled from the front left shoulder. A stirrup is thrown across the saddle as it gets uncinched and we can see Pete's hands and forearms as he unsaddles the horse.

Then the saddle is pulled off the horse's back, leaving the saddle blanket, and in the back ground we can see Pete swing the saddle over a saddle rack.

Next he grabs the saddle blanket and lays it atop the saddle.

Then he moves to the front of Dollar and removes the bridle. When he is finished he stands aside and the horse ambles into his stall and starts to feed.

THE END