

ONLY IN AMERICA

By
Andrew Garrett & Arty Finkelstein

Based on a true story lived by
Arty Finkelstein

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FADE IN:

INT. LIBERTY APARTMENT - KITCHEN

Name-tags, lots of them, are stuck scatter-shot into a cork-board with a wooden frame.

One reads "LIBERTY LANES" with a pair of criss-crossed bowling pins, and the name "ARTY FINKELSTEIN" below. Someone's hands pluck the name tag off the board.

The hands carefully pin the name tag through a uniform; the door opens, and morning sun streams in.

The hands grab a notice off the front door. It reads "LATE--PAYMENT DUE" and then more info in smaller text.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY LANES BOWLING ALLEY

The hands polish a bowling ball with a rag as pins crash in the background.

The hands grab pairs of two-toned shoes off racks and push them across a wooden counter.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY APARTMENT

The door opens. The shirt comes off, the hands grab another name tag off the cork-board: "GROSSINGER'S HOTEL", and again the name, followed by "WAIT STAFF".

CUT TO:

INT. GROSSINGER'S HOTEL - DINING ROOM

The hands slip plates of food onto linen tablecloths next to carefully folded napkins.

The hands take dirty dishes away.

The hands plunge the dishes into soapy water and scrub hard.

CUT TO:

INT. JUNIOR COLLEGE - CLASSROOM

ARTY, early 20s, eyes the clock, scribbling quickly on his test paper. He hurries to the front of the classroom and tosses his paper into an IN box on the teacher's desk.

Most of the other students are still writing at their desks -- the TEACHER glances up at the clock, showing a quarter 'til.

TEACHER
Sure you're done, Arty?

Arty taps his watch, nodding.

TEACHER (CONT'D)
Not what I meant. I hear you're leaving us after this semester.

Arty shrugs wistfully.

ARTY
Bills to pay.

TEACHER
(sighs)
Give my best to your mother.

CUT TO:

INT. WLVP RADIO BROADCAST ROOM - NIGHT

Arty's nametag is record-shaped. He nods sleepily over an open textbook in his lap. He reaches over and drops a record on the turntable--maybe "Summertime Blues".

Arty wobbles, nearly dropping the book. A WHAM-WHAM-WHAM-WHAM sound--the MANAGER bangs on a large windowpane, glaring. Arty winces and shrugs apologetically.

The Manager opens the door, sets an egg timer on a nearby shelf to three minutes, and shakes a fist at Arty.

MANAGER
Sleep between songs. You're no good to me dead.

Arty nods, kicks back in the chair, and shuts his eyes.

INT. JUNIOR COLLEGE - HALLWAY

Arty runs his finger down a long list labeled "FINAL TEST RESULTS". He stops at "A. FINKELSTEIN" and sees a large "B+". Written in red next to the grade is a note.

ARTY
 Good Luck--Don't get drafted.
 (chuckles bitterly)
 Cheery thought.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY MARKET

EDIE Finkelstein--late 40s, short; fiery red hair and a temper to match--wheels a shopping cart around a corner. She pauses to catch her breath and take her pulse.

Further down the aisle, she stops at a shelf stacked high with canned beans. She picks up a can, but winces.

EDIE
 Ah--damaged goods.

She turns it around--there's a huge dent. At the sound of nearby brakes, she looks around--a car muscles into a parking space beyond the front window of the store.

It's Edward WODA, late 40s/early 50s, in his dark blue Lincoln Continental. He whips off his sunglasses, checks the rearview mirror and slicks his hair back.

EDIE (CONT'D)
 And ham in a can, gone bad--

She puts the dented can back and wipes her hands in disgust.

CUT TO:

EXT. LIBERTY MARKET - PARKING LOT

Edie retrieves her bags, shoves her cart into a corral, grits her teeth, and walks past Woda's car. Woda leans out, resting an elbow on his car door and attempting cool.

WODA
 Hey, Little Edie. What's cooking?

He grins wider. Edie pulls a can from one of the bags, hefting it. She pegs the can at Woda's head--THUMP! He slumps against the wheel, car horn blaring.

A flash--Edie shakes her head to clear it. She's gripping the can tightly, but puts it back. Woda waves, uncertainly.

WODA (CONT'D)

Edie?

EDIE

Don't mind me, Edward. Went to my happy place for a second. What brings you all this way?

Woda shrugs, and eyes her--a hungry look.

WODA

The selection.

Edie rolls her eyes and leans on the car, up in his face.

EDIE

What am I, a married man magnet? Shove off.

Below, out of Woda's sight, Edie twists a key against a hubcap. She tucks the key away, turns, and stalks off.

WODA

Now, hold on, you don't just--

He pops his door open and hops out. He slams the door and takes a step after Edie.

The hubcap pops off and clatters to the asphalt--Edie grins.

WODA (CONT'D)

God damn it.

Woda snags the hubcap and tosses it into the car, then hurries to catch up with Edie.

WODA (CONT'D)

I'd worry about your son if I were you. Draft age, isn't he?

Edie stumbles half a step, and shivers. It's not the cold.

EDIE

That's unexpected, even from you.

WODA

A man of my position could make things very difficult for Arty.

Woda puts a hand on her shoulder, and grips.

WODA (CONT'D)
Understand?

Edie kicks him in the shin. He lets go with a yelp and sucks in his breath, biting back the pain.

EDIE
Perfectly. You're a sad little man
who gets off on power. Go home.

Edie turns and walks away. Woda sits down and rubs his leg.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY APARTMENT - KITCHEN

Edie is stacking her dry goods onto a mostly-empty shelf. A jingle of keys at the door--Arty turns the doorknob and pops inside. He startles a bit.

ARTY
Oh, Mom--you went out?

EDIE
You can't be everywhere at once,
not that it stops you from trying.

Arty pats his chest.

ARTY
Please be careful, Mom--Doc
Silberman says your ticker's gonna
throw a rod again.

Arty snags milk and bologna from a nearby counter, kneeling the refrigerator open and depositing them.

ARTY (CONT'D)
Pick up any news?

EDIE
Eh, nothing but static. From radio
station--
(gestures for the letters)
W-O-D-A.

Arty winces.

ARTY
Woda--aw, jeez what a creep. Did
you break it off with him?

EDIE

There are many things on that man
that I would love to break off.
But yes, yes I did.

ARTY

How'd he take it?

Edie massages a sudden knot out of her forehead.

EDIE

Arty, I think I got you drafted.

CUT TO:

INT. COUNCIL CHAMBERS

Seated at a curving table, Woda and two Draft Board MEMBERS,
40s, shuffle folders. Reaching under the table, Woda
massages his injured shin. He grits his teeth and sneers.

MEMBER 1

Now, ah, to the business of this--
reconsideration request.

MEMBER 2

Why are we even looking at this?

Member 2 leafs through a large folder. Member 1 gets up and
looks over Member 2's shoulder.

MEMBER 2 (CONT'D)

--stack of letters here, teachers,
employers--

MEMBER 1

(plucks out a page)
--here's a medical affidavit--

Woda snorts, rolls his eyes, and rises out of his seat.

WODA

--for his mother, not for himself.

Member 1 waves him down.

MEMBER 1

Now, now, drafting this boy would
put his mother on welfare. That's
against New York state law--

WODA
 --dammit, Stevens, how about your
 kid? Eighteen, isn't he? Prime
 cannon fodder?

An awkward silence descends. Member 2 coughs.

MEMBER 2
 I think we can approve this without
 any further trouble.

CUT TO:

EXT. LIBERTY APARTMENT

Arty drags a stack of letters out of the mailbox and shuffles through them -- one's marked LATE, another OVERDUE--

ARTY
 Bills, bills--somebody else's
 bills... ooh.

One is marked "Selective Service". Arty rips into it--"ORDER TO REPORT FOR INDUCTION" leaps off the page. Arty sighs.

ARTY (CONT'D)
 Well, crap.

INT. LIBERTY APARTMENT - ARTY'S BEDROOM

Arty stuffs T-shirts and jeans into a duffel bag. A pair of two-toned bowling shoes sit on the dresser. Arty picks them up and chuckles but sets them back.

ARTY
 Wouldn't match the uniform.

He snags sneakers from an open closet, then shuts it--on the door is a poster of Raquel Welch in a cavegirl outfit.

ARTY (CONT'D)
 Hold down the fort, Raquel.

CUT TO:

EXT. SHORTLINE BUS STATION - LIBERTY, NY

Several young men around Arty's age, and a couple of older ones, are tossing luggage into a compartment in the side of a Shortline bus, or already lining up to board it.

Arty, his bags at his feet, hugs Edie, but breaks free and digs in his pocket.

ARTY

Almost forgot--got a nice price for the Buick.

Arty pulls out a wad of cash--she waves him off but he makes a dismissive "pshh" sound and folds her hand around it.

EDIE

Oh, Arty, you loved that car...

ARTY

You're going to love not freezing to death this winter.

EDIE

There's still Canada, Arty. My brothers would love to have us--

ARTY

What, move someplace even colder? I don't want to give up on this country, mom. Our country.

The BUS DRIVER taps the horn twice. Arty tosses his duffel bag into the luggage compartment as an attendant begins to fasten it. He hops onto the steps and waves.

ARTY (CONT'D)

Love ya! Call that Army number and stay on the paperwork!

EDIE

You bet!

CUT TO:

INT. SHORTLINE BUS

Arty takes his seat as the bus starts away. Behind him is CARL Jenkins, a tall, blond, pretty-boy quarterback type in bell-bottomed jeans. He kicks at Arty's seat.

CARL

Glad you could join us, Mama's boy.

Scattered chuckles.

ARTY

Believe me, gentlemen, I wish I could say I felt the same.

Arty turns his face to the window. The dotted line of the highway rolls by, to the rhythmic slap of the bus tires.

FADE TO:

MONTAGE:

The Shortline bus opens its doors. The passengers file out.

A bigger Greyhound bus, with its familiar logo, opens its doors and the passengers get back on.

Fields and forests give way to flatlands and scrub brush. The bus passes mile markers and "Welcome To" signs, ending with SOUTH CAROLINA. The bus seats get more and more packed.

END MONTAGE.

CUT TO:

EXT. REST STOP

The bus pulls over and its passengers stumble out to stretch. They sit on picnic benches and grass. Red-faced SGT. JACKSON patrols the flaky edges of the drifting group.

SGT. JACKSON
NO PISSING IN THE TRASHCANS!

EXT. REST STOP - PICNIC BENCHES

The soldiers file by a couple of serving dishes with waiting cooks--Arty gets a scoop of glop on his tray.

ARTY
Breaking us in gently?

Carl gets his glop and bends over it, digging in hungrily.

CARL
Don't gripe, shrimp. This is still
civilian food.

ARTY
What makes it civilian?

Carl waggles one leg of his floppy bell-bottomed jeans. He points his fork around at the group--

FRANK Mueller, Arty's height but a little husky, fans himself with a cowboy hat. His suede jacket has a bit of fringe.

NEIL Fisher (shorter, thin, wiry) in a checkered sportcoat, has his legs kicked up on a picnic bench. He leafs through a tattered paperback with a chess knight on its cover.

CARL
The dress code.

ARTY
I will miss the variety.

CUT TO:

INT. GREYHOUND BUS

Arty sleeps with his head against the window, snoring.

Carl shakes Arty's shoulder. Arty groans and stretches.

ARTY
We there yet?

CARL
Sure enough, short stuff.

Carl points--beyond the window, a commotion of buses and jeeps, white-helmeted MPs directing traffic.

FRANK
Welcome to the meat grinder.

EXT. FORT JACKSON - ENTRANCE COURTYARD

Buses discharge their civilian-clothed passengers. Arty and his bunch disembark, shuffling uncomfortably and lining up.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT JACKSON - CAPTAIN RICE'S OFFICE ENTRANCE

Across the courtyard, a uniformed ASSISTANT marks on a clipboard. He's by a screen door with a slim, short man, late 30s, shock-white hair--CAPTAIN RICE, holding a coffee mug.

Captain Rice gestures with his mug, toward the buses.

CAPTAIN RICE
How's the new crop?

ASSISTANT
Green, sir.

Captain Rice swigs his coffee and reaches for the clipboard.

CAPTAIN RICE
Let's see your chicken scratches.

The Assistant hands over the clipboard and Captain Rice thumbs through the pages clipped to it.

CAPTAIN RICE (CONT'D)
Red flag here. What's the story?

ASSISTANT
Square peg, sir, name of "Arty Finkelstein".

CAPTAIN RICE
And I do not have the file in my hands because--?

ASSISTANT
On it, sir.

He nods and steps inside. Captain Rice sighs, back to his coffee. The Assistant shoulders the screen door open and hands Captain Rice a stuffed manila file folder.

CAPTAIN RICE
Ugh. Thick. Where's our subject?

The Assistant hovers a finger in the air, and points.

ASSISTANT
Should be in... that group--

Seen from a distance, Arty hefts his duffel bag and wobbles.

CAPTAIN RICE
I think I picked him out. Healthy-looking fella. Troublemaker?

Captain Rice shuffles through the paperwork.

ASSISTANT
Trouble magnet. Dirt poor, mother's sick--ah, there's his hardship request.

Captain Rice snorts.

CAPTAIN RICE
Time they clear out the backlog, he'll be slogging through the Mekong Delta with the rest of 'em.

Captain Rice pulls out a paper with a distinctive letterhead.

CAPTAIN RICE (CONT'D)
Christ, he's roped the Red Cross
into this. Don't they usually
handle P.O.W. cases?

ASSISTANT
(a beat)
We're all prisoners of war in a
way, sir.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT JACKSON - INDUCTION ROOM

Arty and the others stand in rows, still in civilian clothes. Sgt. Jackson stands at a podium, hands clasped behind his back. He looks over the ragtag bunch and clears his throat.

SGT. JACKSON
Greetings, gentlemen! You are
about to be inducted into the Armed
Forces of the United States--

CUT TO:

INT. FORT JACKSON - UNIFORM DEPOT

Hands run an Army uniform through a sewing machine, stitching on a misspelled FINKELSTIEN name badge.

ARMY TAILOR 1 (O.S.)
Hey, is Finkelstein with an "i.e."
or an "e.i."?

ARMY TAILOR 2 (O.S.)
Hell if I know.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT JACKSON - UNIFORM DEPOT

At a long, low table, clerks are taking boxes of personal items and handing out cellophane-wrapped uniforms.

SGT. JACKSON (V.O.)
Frank Mueller! Army!

Frank stuffs newspaper around his cowboy hat in a box, and pushes it across the table. A STORE-ROOM CLERK puts the box on a shelf and hands Frank a uniform.

STORE-ROOM CLERK
(singing)
*Happy trails to you... until we
meet again...*

Frank startles, but makes a hat-tipping motion in thanks.

INT. FORT JACKSON - SUPPLY STATION

A SUPPLY SOLDIER wobbles on a step-stool and tries a helmet on Carl. It sits on his head like a beanie, far too small.

SGT. JACKSON (V.O.)
Carl Jenkins! Army!

SUPPLY SOLDIER
"One size fits all", my ass--

INT. FORT JACKSON - MEDICAL OFFICE

SGT. JACKSON (V.O.)
Neil Fisher! Army!

Neil holds out his arm--whipcord-tough, thin, and scratched--wincing as an ARMY DOCTOR squares up a vaccination syringe.

NEIL
Hope you don't miss again, Doc.
You'll pin me to the wall.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT JACKSON - BARRACKS RESTROOM

Arty buttons his uniform. He frowns at the mirror above the sink, looking down and tracing the (misspelled) name tag.

SGT. JACKSON (V.O.)
(trouble pronouncing)
Arty Finkel-sty-yen! Army!

CUT TO:

INT. FORT JACKSON - TESTING FACILITY

In cubicles, soldiers scribble, heads down. A TESTING CLERK retrieves Arty's file folder from a cart, flipping through.

TESTING CLERK
Let's see here--mm-hmm. You test well... Have you considered Officer Candidate School?

ARTY
No disrespect, but I've considered getting out of the Army as quickly as possible.

The Testing Clerk rolls his eyes wearily.

TESTING CLERK
If you figure it out, let me know.
(Looks past Arty)
NEXT!

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT JACKSON - OBSTACLE COURSE

Arty crawls through mud, under barbed wire, as soldiers fire blanks over his head from the edges of the course.

Caked with muck, uniform torn, hands scratched and bleeding, he pulls himself through the last stretch, exhausted.

Other trainees are wiping mud off their own and each other's uniform shirts, medics bandaging the occasional wound.

A boot splashes into the mud by Arty's head, splattering him further. Arty looks up--it's LT. SPORANO, an ugly little man with a rifle slung over his back.

LT. SPORANO
What was that, Finkel shit?
(to all)
Hey, Private Finkel shit here wants to start over. Isn't that right?

Arty looks around--all are silent, but Carl (his helmet is beaten up and welded together) gives Arty a worried nod.

ARTY
(sighs)
Yes, Lieutenant Sporano.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT JACKSON - TRAILS

The platoon jogs along, with Lt. Sporano bringing up the rear. Lt. Sporano screams at a staggering, gasping recruit.

LT. SPORANO
I got stubby legs! What's your
excuse, ya asthmatic sack of crap?

Neil nudges Arty and points forward--they slip through a gap in the pack and move up to the middle.

NEIL
Staying away from that asshole
seems to be a good strategy.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT JACKSON - OBSTACLE COURSE

Arty strains to haul himself over a stack of logs, his hands bandaged and uniform stained.

Across a grassy divide, Lt. Sporano sits on a bench with Sgt. Jackson, sporting a twitchy grin.

LT. SPORANO
Ah, there's the Fink. I hear his
poor old mother has a heart
condition. Could run in the
family, whatcha think?

SGT. JACKSON
I think you're pissed off you
haven't broke him yet.

Lt. Sporano leaps up and screams in Sgt. Jackson's face.

LT. SPORANO
Jesus Christ, you too? Everybody
from Captain Rice on down wants to
save their special Jew!

A jeep rolls up, driven by an MP, who honks the horn lightly.

LT. SPORANO (CONT'D)
What the hell is it?

MP
(salutes)
Sir, a Private--Finkelstein?
Emergency message, from his mother.

LT. SPORANO
 Mother, eh? Hope it's something
 serious.

He stalks toward the obstacle course, whistling cheerfully.

LT. SPORANO (CONT'D)
 Hey, Finkelshit! Tragic news!

CUT TO:

INT. FORT JACKSON - POST EXCHANGE (P. X.)

Arty rushes in the door and sets down his backpack by a shelf of groceries. He makes a "telephone" gesture at the P. X. Clerk, who points Arty toward a corner table with a phone.

Arty, seated, drums his fingers nervously on the table.

EDIE
 (filtered, over telephone)
 Hello, Arty? Are you there?

ARTY
 Yes, Mom. Are you all right, is it
 your heart again?

EDIE
 (filtered, over telephone)
 Not right now--

Arty lets out a "whoosh" of relief.

ARTY
 Well, that's something at least.
 Lieutenant made it sound serious.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY APARTMENT - KITCHEN

Edie is on tiptoes, phone cord stretched tight, reaching into a cabinet with a spatula, after half a sleeve of crackers. She knocks it further in - nothing else there but dust.

EDIE
 It's serious enough.

Edie walks to the window and peers through the curtains.

EDIE (CONT'D)
 Little pricks--they're like a tag
 team of Chihuahuas, when they eat
 you they start with the ankles--

INT./EXT. LIBERTY APARTMENT - KITCHEN WINDOW

Two near-identical, VERY SHORT MEN are walking away down the sidewalk, bickering over a wad of cash. One peels a bill off and stuffs it in the other's shirt pocket, waving a finger.

EDIE (O.S.)
 They took it for back rent, all the
 money you sent. They'll be back
 next week, and I'm so hungry, Arty--

CUT TO:

INT. FORT JACKSON - POST EXCHANGE (P. X.)

Arty looks around the store--shelves stacked with bread; refrigerated sections with milk and cheese and lunchmeat.

ARTY
 I wish I could work harder and send
 you more.

EDIE
 (filtered, over telephone)
 You are working hard, Arty. It's
 just work that's going to k--
 (chokes)
 --kill you one of these days--

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY APARTMENT - KITCHEN

ARTY
 (filtered, over telephone)
 Aw, mom...don't worry so much--

Edie picks up a vegetable strainer from the sink and chuckles wearily, turning it over and spinning it on one finger.

MOM
 Just feeling the strain.

ARTY
 (filtered, over telephone)
 You tell them I'll find money.
 Don't let them push you around.

Edie puts the strainer on her head like a helmet and pats it into place, then throws a salute.

EDIE
 Yes sir, Private Finkelstein.
 (suddenly serious)
 Oh, and Arty?

ARTY
 (filtered, over telephone)
 Yeah, Ma?

EDIE
 Keep your helmet on. Just one of
 those feelings.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT JACKSON - MESS HALL

A ladle deposits another scoop of glop on a mess tray.

At a long low table, Carl, Frank, and Neil are digging at their chow. Arty's picking at his.

FRANK
 I used to think Tabasco would fix
 anything.

CARL
 Dig on those peas, Arty.

NEIL
 Yeah, remember your tactics.
 Outflank them sumbitches.

ARTY
 I shouldn't complain. At least I
 get three, um--

Arty turns over a forkful of stuff and drops it back.

ARTY (CONT'D)
 --"functional" meals a day. More
 than my mom gets.
 (a beat)
 Ah, what the hell. I'm calling in
 an airstrike, fellas.

He pushes the tray away. The others grin.

CARL
AIR STRIKE!

They swoop their forks in from various directions, Carl making an airplane noise, and remove all traces of food.

FRANK
Target neutralized.

Neil leans in and whispers to Arty, a bit too loudly.

NEIL
Speaking of targets, I think you got one on your back, "Arts".

The others look around nervously, shushing Neil.

ARTY
No, please, gimme intel.

NEIL
That Lieutenant--Soprano, was it?

CARL
(wincing)
Soprano.

NEIL
Soprano, right. He was screaming about you earlier.

ARTY
He say anything in particular?

NEIL
Something about putting Jews back behind barbed wire--

CARL
Sounds like he's making the most of Captain Rice's little vacation.

FRANK
Better watch out. I heard he offered a recruit once.

Neil and Carl shudder.

CARL
Be quiet with that shit.

FRANK
 God's honest truth. Sporano had it
 in for him, they found him hanging
 in a supply closet.

CUT TO:

INT. BARRACKS - SUPPLY CLOSET

A soldier with a bucket and mop opens the closet, but
 recoils, knocking over the bucket. A swollen-faced Dead
 Recruit hangs from a strap on a hook, barely off the ground.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT JACKSON - MESS HALL

The others stare at Frank in horror.

CARL
 What makes you think--

FRANK
 --dude was six-foot two. Coulda
 reached that hook just fine.

Frank takes another bite of goulash.

FRANK (CONT'D)
 Found him next to a stepladder.
 You do the math.

NEIL
 You think Sporano climbed up and--

Frank nods. Neil and Carl exchange looks.

NEIL (CONT'D)
 We're going out on maneuvers with
 that little psycho tomorrow.

ARTY
 A walk in the woods, I'm sure it'll
 be swell.

CARL
 Grenade practice.

ALL
 (glumly)
 Yayyyy...

ARTY

Great.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT JACKSON - STREETS

Offices, induction center, training grounds--all deserted.

The wind thrums a hoist line against a metal flagpole.

Dogtags on a long chain rattle against a porch post.

A pole topped with loudspeakers blasts the tune of Reveille.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT JACKSON - BARRACKS

Soldiers stir as Sgt. Jackson flings the door open.

SGT. JACKSON

Up! Up! Rise and shine and give
God the glory, gentlemen! Last one
out gets a boot in the ass! UP!

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT JACKSON - BARRACKS

The soldiers stand at attention in a line--helmets, backpacks
and all. Lt. Sporano puts his hands behind his back and
slowly walks up the line.

LT. SPORANO

Well, well. Don't we look rested
and comfortable?

Lt. Sporano whirls around and stalks up to Sgt. Jackson.

LT. SPORANO (CONT'D)

Sergeant! How long these lazy
bastards been stinking up my
training facility?

SGT. JACKSON

Four disastrous weeks, Lieutenant!

LT. SPORANO

That long already?
(faces the soldiers)
(MORE)

LT. SPORANO (CONT'D)
I got to say, you have been a piss-
poor investment of time.

Sporano draws an imaginary line down the middle of the group of soldiers. Arty and his friends are on the right side.

LT. SPORANO (CONT'D)
All of you--
(waves at the left)
Lucky you. You go with Sergeant
Stevens. The rest of you--
(waves at the right)
--will be with Sergeant Jackson--

Sporano turns halfway toward Sgt. Jackson.

SGT. JACKSON
Sir!

Sporano turns back toward the soldiers.

LT. SPORANO
--and myself. Hey, Finkelshitt!

Arty grits his teeth.

ARTY
Yes, Lieutenant?

Sporano kicks at a wooden crate nearby--chunky cast iron practice grenades clunk against each other.

LT. SPORANO
Practice grenades. You and Jenkins
are a matched pair--grab 'em.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT JACKSON - TRAIL

The platoon moves along, Sporano taking the lead for once. Far back in the pack, Arty and Carl struggle with the crate (their height difference sends them off at a tilt).

ARTY
They coulda put these on a jeep,
driven them out there.

CARL
Not as much fun.

ARTY

For who?
 (a beat, chuckles)
 Never mind.

Up ahead, Lt. Sporano looks over his shoulder, grinning.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT JACKSON - GRENADE RANGE

The trail opens up into a large muddy clearing. Beyond a couple of short walls, like blast shields, there's a row of human-shaped plywood cutouts.

They're missing arms or legs, huge chunks of their bodies.

Most of the platoon are stacked up behind the blast shields. Carl and Arty, wheezing under their load, finally arrive.

LT. SPORANO

Took your own sweet time, di n' cha?

He waves them off to the side of the blast shields.

LT. SPORANO (CONT'D)

Put 'em over there with the others.

Two or three other crates are sinking into the mud. Carl and Arty share a look, but lug their own crate over and set it down. They rub their aching muscles.

LT. SPORANO (CONT'D)

Finkel shit! Front and center!

Arty sighs and steps up.

LT. SPORANO (CONT'D)

Hold it right there.

Lt. Sporano stalks out to the row of targets, grabs one, and wrenches it up, post and all. He carts it to the side of the clearing and tosses it down, wiping his hands.

He walks back to Arty and looks him up and down, idly tossing the cast-iron dummy grenade in the air, over and over.

LT. SPORANO (CONT'D)

Nothing beats a real flesh and blood target.

SGT. JACKSON

Um, sir, I don't think that's--

LT. SPORANO
 You volunteering?
 (a beat)
 Didn't think so. Move it,
 Finkel shit.

Arty bites his lip, nods, and strides out into the opening. There are a few uncomfortable murmurs from the platoon.

Lt. Sporano dog-whistles. Arty turns back, and edges closer.

LT. SPORANO (CONT'D)
 Christ, not with your full kit.
 Drop your pack and helmet first.

Lt. Sporano grins and yanks Arty's chinstrap loose, letting the helmet dangle from one hand. He makes a rolling motion.

LT. SPORANO (CONT'D)
 C'mon, c'mon.

Arty shrugs off his pack and drops it. Lt. Sporano hefts the grenade, testing its weight, and points toward the field.

LT. SPORANO (CONT'D)
 Now get your kike ass out there.

Arty backs slowly onto the field, one eye on Lt. Sporano.

Back in the main group, Neil mutters under his breath.

NEIL
 Don't turn your back, don't turn
 your back...

Unwisely, Arty does. Lt. Sporano cocks his arm back and hurls the practice grenade at Arty's head with all his might.

NEIL (CONT'D)
 Arty, watch out!

In slow motion, the grenade sails at Arty. Faces in the platoon barely have time to register the shock. Arty turns at Neil's warning, and the grenade whooshes past his head.

ARTY
 (very slowly)
 What?

Back in regular time, the grenade splats into the mud beyond Arty. It skips a couple of times, then buries itself.

Some of the platoon take a few steps toward Lt. Sporano.

SOLDIERS
 What the hell? You could have
 killed him! Asshole! (etc.)

Sgt. Jackson unslings his rifle, uncertain--not pointing it directly at Sporano but ready for trouble.

Lt. Sporano flips the catch off a holster and draws his pistol, backing away, jumpily aiming at no one in particular.

LT. SPORANO
 Back. All of you, stay back.

Through a crowd of dirty looks, he backs out to the clearing entrance, lowers his gun, then turns tail and scuttles away.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT JACKSON - CAPTAIN RICE'S OFFICE ENTRANCE

Captain Rice sits at his desk, looking over an official Army telegram. He chuckles--once--as he sees:

CPT. RICE - BE ADVISED REQUEST APPROVED - ACTIVE COMBAT DUTY VIETNAM - GODSPEED AND GOOD LUCK.

CAPTAIN RICE
 Well, I did ask for it.

He looks up as his Assistant thrusts the door open.

ASSISTANT
 Sir, sorry to interrupt--

CAPTAIN RICE
 --no, please. Speak.

ASSISTANT
 We've got a--situation. Sporano.

Captain Rice tosses aside the telegram and rubs his temples.

CAPTAIN RICE
 Ahh, Christ. Call out the MPs.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT JACKSON - BARRACKS

A few stragglers climb into bed. Sgt. Jackson whistles.

SGT. JACKSON
 Life goes on, gentlemen. Lights
 out!

Out they go. Arty, in his upper bunk by the window, shivers and moves his blanket--underneath is his helmet.

He tucks it in and lays his head down--no sleep tonight.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT JACKSON - TRAILS - DAY

Arty and the other soldiers are on the march again, double-time. Up front, Captain Rice leads the pack.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT JACKSON - OBSTACLE COURSE

Arty drags himself through the dirt of the barbed wire crawl.

He stands, stretches, and brushes off. A hand thumps his shoulder, sending dust flying. It's Captain Rice.

CAPTAIN RICE
 Decent time, Finkelstein. Keep
 working at it.

ARTY
 Yes, sir.

Captain Rice slaps his shoulder again and walks off. He pauses and turns for a moment, though.

CAPTAIN RICE
 It would be a waste of training,
 but I'd like that hardship
 discharge to come through.

ARTY
 Honestly, not counting on it, sir.

CUT TO:

MONTAGE:

Arty and the others clamber along monkey-bars.

Arty, lying prone at the rifle range, squints down a rifle sight and fires at a fluttering paper target.

Arty, in a row of others, skewers a mannequin with the business end of a bayoneted rifle, yelling a bitter warcry.

CUT TO:

EXT. BIG CITY HOUSE - EVENING

A city bus pulls up to a huge house, and Edie steps out. As the bus pulls away, Edie eyes the massive set of steps.

EDIE

Oh, come on, they're only steps.

Edie pushes herself up the first one. Faintly, a heartbeat is heard--whoosh, whoosh, whoosh. Edie takes another step. Another. The heartbeat sound grows faster and louder.

At the top, nearly deafened by her own now-pounding heartbeat, Edie knocks on the wide door--

JUDITH, late 30s, pops the door open, adjusting an earring--dressed to the nines and ready for a night on the town.

JUDITH

(Looking over shoulder)
Steven? Mrs. Finkel something is here.

EDIE

(out of breath)
--stein...

Judith shoulders on a purse, opening and closing it distractedly, taking out tickets and shoving them back in.

JUDITH

Sorry, Edie, I always forget.

Judith looks over Edie's shoulder down the steep stairs.

JUDITH (CONT'D)

You know, you should try the service elevator--off the garage?

Edie does a double-take.

EDIE

El ev...
(sighs)
Yes, I really should.

STEVEN, also in his late 30s, in a tuxedo, steps behind his wife and hooks his arm through hers.

STEVEN

Judith, honey, we'll miss curtain.
 (to Edie--nods over
 shoulder)
 Don't let the wrecking crew run you
 ragged.

EDIE

Ah, they're good kids. Go on, get
 out of here before Mayor Lindsay
 calls you on his red telephone.

JUDITH

(Laughs)
 I'm just his assistant, not Bat-
 Girl.

CUT TO:

INT. BIG CITY HOUSE - KITCHEN

Wide counter tops, tiled floor - full cupboards. Edie sets
 her purse on the counter. From the other room, small
 thudding feet and the squeals of someone being chased.

A note taped on the (industrial-sized, shiny new) fridge,
 catches Edie's eye. She touches it and gasps.

"Edie--make yourself a big sandwich."

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. BIG CITY HOUSE - FRIDGE

Edie peeks in, eyes wide. She opens the door fully--bottles
 of milk, paper-wrapped cold cuts, packaged cheese slices...

In a flash, Edie unwraps a slice of cheese and inhales it.
 She rips into a package of ham and devours a handful. She
 shoves the food back, teary and sobbing as she swallows.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT JACKSON - BARRACKS - MORNING

Soldiers are shining shoes, making beds, packing items into
 footlockers, when somebody whistles.

SGT. JACKSON (O.S.)

Ten-hut!

The soldiers drop what they're doing and stand at attention, facing the center of the aisle of beds. Arty glances down at his hands, still grimed with shoe polish, and grimaces.

SGT. JACKSON (CONT'D)
All right, ladies! Get this place
in order, if it's within your
limited abilities. As you were!

ALL ASSEMBLED
Yes, Sergeant!

They all turn to their tasks, but a quick cough from Sgt. Jackson stops Arty cold. Neil cuts a worried look at Arty.

SGT. JACKSON
Not you, Finkelstein. Get that
shit off your hands and your dress
uniform on--you're coming with me.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT JACKSON - STREETS

Sgt. Jackson marches Arty along. Arty's uniform is starched and stiff, his helmet securely fastened, rifle shouldered.

SGT. JACKSON
Remember the rifle salute.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT JACKSON - CAPTAIN RICE'S OFFICE ENTRANCE

Sgt. Jackson knocks, then stands back a respectful distance. Arty waits at attention, at the bottom of the stairs.

Captain Rice opens the screen door--Sgt. Jackson salutes.

SGT. JACKSON
Reporting with Private Finkelstein
as ordered, Sir!

He coughs at Arty, who begins running through his rifle salute step by step. Captain Rice waves him down.

CAPTAIN RICE
That'll do, Private. Ditch the
rifle. And the helmet.

Arty sets the rifle against the side of the steps, and with trembling fingers begins unstrapping his helmet.

ARTY
Rather fond of the helmet, sir.

Captain Rice grits his teeth as Arty lifts off the helmet.

CAPTAIN RICE
I haven't seen any pint-sized
assholes with practice grenades.
(to Sgt. Jackson)
That'll be all, Sergeant.

Sgt. Jackson frowns, puzzled, eyeing Arty cautiously.

SGT. JACKSON
Sir?

CAPTAIN RICE
Your presence is not required.

SGT. JACKSON
Sir, yes sir!

Sgt. Jackson salutes, does an about-face, and walks briskly away, a bit disappointed.

CAPTAIN RICE
Come on in, Finkelstein. Figured
we could do without the audience.

INT. FORT JACKSON - CAPTAIN RICE'S OFFICE

Arty's massive military file and a globe are on a desk.
Captain Rice gestures at an armchair in front of it.

CAPTAIN RICE
Have a seat.

Arty sits cautiously down, cradling the helmet.

CAPTAIN RICE (CONT'D)
Son, I've seen a lot of cases, but
never one quite like yours. You
have no effing business being in
this man's Army.

Arty's eyes go wide.

ARTY
Glad to hear one other person
thinks so, sir. What now?

Captain Rice sits at his desk and flips open Arty's file.

CAPTAIN RICE
 You're moving on to Advanced
 Infantry Training. You'll be
 trained as a jungle fighter and
 shipped off to Vietnam. And your
 mother will be screwed.

Arty gulps, sinking further into his chair.

CAPTAIN RICE (CONT'D)
 Or--

ARTY
 (perks up)
 "Or", sir?

Captain Rice reaches over and turns the globe. He taps the
 word (and nation) CANADA pointedly. Arty squints at it.

CAPTAIN RICE
 You only have one option left. You
 have to go AWOL. Go home, get your
 mother, and get your ass up to
 Canada as quick as you can.

Captain Rice scoots his chair back from the desk and stands.
 Arty leaps to his feet as Captain Rice holds out a hand--Arty
 whistles in disbelief, but takes it and shakes it.

CAPTAIN RICE (CONT'D)
 You won't be alone. You'll have
 help when it's time.

ARTY
 Thank you, sir.

Captain Rice lets Arty's hand go -- Arty salutes him.

CAPTAIN RICE
 (a little choked)
 Dismissed, Private.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT JACKSON - A.I.T. BARRACKS

Carl, Frank, and Neil sit on lower bunks and footlockers,
 exchanging shocked looks as Arty waits.

ARTY
 So, crazy, right?

FRANK

No, no--I can believe it, the hell
you've gone through.

CARL

So that's how we all ended up in
the same A-I-T group. Captain Rice
pulling strings again.

NEIL

We were wondering when you'd make a
break for it. Didn't think the
Captain would make it an order--

Arty tilts his hand in a seesaw motion.

ARTY

Order, shmorder. More like a
strong suggestion.

CARL

Well, it's a damned good one.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT JACKSON - A.I.T. BARRACKS - LATER

Lights are out. Arty is asleep, sawing logs again.

A hand sneaks across Arty's nose and pinches it shut. Arty
wakes up with a huge gasp--

Frank puts a finger to his lips--Arty squints, but nods.

Arty snags a duffel bag from under the bunk and quietly
follows Frank.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT JACKSON - A.I.T. BARRACKS

Frank looks both ways as he heads out the door and motions
Arty along. Halfway down the steps, they pause, caught in a
flashlight's beam.

CARL

Name, rank, and serial number!

The flashlight lowers--they see it's only Carl, and growl.

CARL (CONT'D)

Evening, fellas.

ARTY
Keep it down! You want to get
thrown in the stockade?

CARL
Spoilsport. I'll take him from
here.

Carl hooks Arty by the elbow and whisks him down a walkway,
looking ahead for any signs of activity.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT JACKSON PERIMETER

Low bushes line the dirt road where a taxi waits. The TAXI
DRIVER starts up the engine and the headlights blare. Neil
leans close, waving a hand urgently.

NEIL
Low beams 'til you hit the highway!

The Taxi Driver rolls his eyes but kills the high-beams, the
road ahead dipping back into murky darkness.

Neil straightens up and salutes--

NEIL (CONT'D)
Ten-hut!

Carl steps out of the bushes, and salutes back. Arty tries
to salute, but catches his bag on a bush and yanks it free.

CARL
I'll met by moonlight, Neil.

NEIL
I keep forgetting you can read, ya
moose.

Neil opens the taxi's rear passenger door. Arty tosses his
bag in, and climbs in after.

ARTY
Guys--you saved my life already,
and here you are doing it again--

CARL
Saving your mom's life this time.

NEIL
You take care of her, all right?

Arty nods, biting his lip. Neil thumps on the taxi a couple of times and points down the road--

NEIL (CONT'D)

Now go on, get out of here.

The Taxi Driver puts the taxi in gear, heading into the dark.

CUT TO:

INT. SHORTLINE BUS - NIGHT

The miles roll by outside, Arty asleep against the window. He smacks his mouth as the bus pulls over, and is jostled awake as it jerks to a stop. He rubs his eyes.

The Bus Driver pops the door open. A hand slaps on the stair-rail as a man in uniform pulls himself up.

It's Lt. Sporano. He scans the seats.

LT. SPORANO

Ah! Finkelshit! There you are.

Arty jumps to his feet, shocked.

ARTY

Lou-lu-lu-lu-Lieuetenant--

LT. SPORANO

Shaddup. I got something for you.

He pulls a cast-iron practice grenade from behind his back, winds up, and lobs it--

--it hits Arty's head with a terrible thump. He slumps into the aisle, a pool of blood spreading from his cracked head.

The panicked Bus Driver mashes the horn frantically.

CUT TO:

INT. SHORTLINE BUS - MORNING

Arty gasps and wakes up, feeling his head, and sighs with relief. The Bus Driver taps the horn, glancing in the rear-view as a few stragglers exit the bus.

ARTY

I gotta improve my dream life.

CUT TO:

EXT. LIBERTY APARTMENT - DAY

Arty steps up onto the porch, duffel bag in tow. He knocks on the door--the blinds nearby part a little and snap back. Edie flings the door open and puts her hands to her face.

ARTY

Hey, ma.

She wraps him up, knocking his duffel bag to the ground.

EDIE

Oh, Arty, I'm so glad you're home.
They finally let you out!

Arty winces.

ARTY

I wouldn't put it that way.

INT. LIBERTY APARTMENT - KITCHEN

Arty sits at the kitchen table, feet up on another chair.

EDIE

They're looking for you, then?

ARTY

I hear there are thousands of
AWOLs. They can't chase us all.

Edie grunts and grabs a coffee can from the counter, banging the bottom of the can to free up the last.

EDIE

Well, they certainly can't chase
you all the way to Canada.

ARTY

Not going.

Edie pauses in mid-bang.

EDIE

We'd have a place, Arty, my
brothers--

ARTY

Red Cross is still working on it,
the Army paperwork will go through.
I can't just desert my country.

Edie puts the coffee can down and faces him, hands on hips.

EDIE
So what now?

Arty stands, takes the coffee can, and thumps it, listening.

ARTY
Groceries, for starters.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY MARKET

Arty wheels an overflowing shopping cart up and starts unloading it onto a checkout counter. The CASHIER lady, 30s with big hair, looks at him doubtfully but then smiles.

CASHIER
Arty, sugar! You're out!

She starts ringing Arty up, but waves at the MANAGER.

CASHIER (CONT'D)
Mr. Edelman! Look who's back from the Army!

The Manager breaks off from a conversation with a customer and stalks over, hand out. Arty shakes it.

MANAGER
You left a hole in our night shift, Arty. Got any work lined up?

Arty shakes his head. The Manager digs under the counter--

MANAGER (CONT'D)
Lemme see here...

--and pulls out an apron. He holds it out and Arty snags it.

Arty turns it over and chuckles. It still has his name tag.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY MARKET - NIGHT

Upbeat shopping music plays (i.e. "Holiday For Strings"). Arty shoves a dolly stacked with crates down an aisle, parks it, and starts unloading cans onto shelves.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY APARTMENT - KITCHEN

Edie takes groceries out of the bags and sets them on the kitchen counter, as Arty stacks them on the shelves.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY APARTMENT. - ARTY'S BEDROOM

Under the sultry gaze of the Cavegirl Raquel Welch poster, Arty snores in his bed. The alarm goes off--5:00 AM.

Arty slaps the alarm clock into silence.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY APARTMENT

Arty's hands tack on a Liberty Lanes bowling alley nametag.

CUT TO:

MONTAGE:

Arty, polishing a bowling ball; on his hands and knees buffing a rough spot out of a bowling lane.

Grabbing another name tag, pushing a wheeled cart with hanging clothes down a hotel hallway in a bellhop's uniform.

Washing a car, sweeping a floor, scrubbing dishes.

END MONTAGE.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY APARTMENT

Edie hefts a hamper with unfolded clothes up onto the table, breathing too hard. Faint TV sounds come from the other room.

ARTY (O.S.)

Ma, I told you I'd help with those!

EDIE

My son, the Swiss Army Knife. Get some rest!

The phone rings on the counter--Edie startles but answers it.

EDIE (CONT'D)

Edie here.

It's Judith, the lady from the Big City house.

JUDITH

(filtered, over phone)

Edie! Glad I reached you. Is now a good time?

Edie peers around the doorway into the living room. Arty's got his feet up on the couch, a nametag on, watching "Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In" on the tiny set and laughing.

Edie leans back into the kitchen, smiles, and nods.

EDIE

Yes, it really is. What's up?

JUDITH

(filtered, over phone)

I was hoping you could watch the kids tomorrow night. Is that Arty in the other room?

EDIE

Mm-hmm.

JUDITH

(filtered, over phone)

He fixed his Army trouble?

Edie rubs her temples.

EDIE

If we're playing twenty questions--

JUDITH

(filtered, over phone)

I'm sorry, don't mean to pry. I just hear things at work.

EDIE

Like what?

JUDITH

(filtered, over phone)

Like... if someone were in trouble, say Army trouble--if they went back in before thirty days were up, it would be a lot less serious--

Edie sits down in a kitchen table chair and hangs her head.

EDI E
That's good to know. So, tomorrow,
usual time?

JUDI TH
(filtered, over phone)
You got it! You really are good
with kids, Edie. Mine and yours.

EDI E
Thank you, Judi th. Good night.

Edie hangs up. She takes a deep breath and sighs, scrunching
up her nose as if something distasteful is coming.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY APARTMENT - ARTY'S BEDROOM

Arty stands in front of a calendar by his closet door, and
makes an "X" on it. There are already many x'd-out days.

CUT TO:

EXT./INT. SHORTLINE BUS

Arty steps up into the bus, duffel bag in tow. The Bus
Driver looks him up and down with a nod of recognition.

CUT TO:

EXT. PORT AUTHORITY NEW YORK

Arty shoulders open one of the terminal's doors--people buy
newspapers, talk on pay phones, climb into and out of taxis.

One of the taxis' passengers leans out--Arty's friend JERRY,
early 20s. He waves and whistles, getting Arty's attention.

INT. TAXI

Jerry scoots over into the far seat and grabs Arty's duffel
bag as he shoves it in.

JERRY
Hey, Arty! Surprised to get your
call. What brings you here?

ARTY
A bus.

JERRY

Ha, ha.

ARTY

I'm headed to Brooklyn for a hot dog and some handcuffs.

JERRY

That some kinda military code?

Arty shakes his head.

EXT. BROOKLYN STREETS / INT. TAXI

Arty watches kids double-dutch jump-roping--people drinking coffee at a corner cafe, getting shoes shined.

Sunlight shines through the trees. Arty closes his eyes and basks in it, smiling peacefully and drinking in the city.

JERRY (O.S.)

Better?

Arty nods, eyes still closed.

JERRY (CONT'D)

Ready?

ARTY

Nope.

CUT TO:

INT. BROOKLYN POLICE STATION - FRONT DESK

Phones ring at smaller desks further in. Typewriters clackety-clack and file cabinets slide open and shut.

Arty walks up to the front desk. The DESK SERGEANT, 50s, talking on the phone, puts up a finger. Arty nods meekly and waits, rocking on his heels and readjusting his duffel bag.

DESK SERGEANT

(into phone)

I told you, we can't drop everything else just because some hippie has his music up too loud.

(a beat)

Talk to you later, mom.

He hangs up the phone.

DESK SERGEANT (CONT'D)
 (to Arty)
 Yes?

ARTY
 I'm AWOL from the Army, and I'd
 like to turn myself in.

INT. BROOKLYN POLICE STATION - INTERROGATION ROOM

Arty waits at a table. The Desk Sergeant opens the door for a uniformed NEW YORK MP with a huge file folder under an arm.

NEW YORK MP
 (to Desk Sergeant)
 Thanks for giving us a call.

The Desk Sergeant tips his hat and shuts the door.

The New York MP turns and looks Arty up and down. He holds the file folder up for Arty to see, then slams it down on the table. Arty jumps, scooting his chair back.

The New York MP looks up, grinning.

NEW YORK MP (CONT'D)
 Sorry. That's for making me tote
 the damn thing around.

Arty eyes it warily--it's his battered, monstrous Army file.

ARTY
 Hello, old friend.

The New York MP scoots up a chair, sits, and flips pages.

NEW YORK MP
 Christ, kid. They sell a Cliff's
 Notes version of this thing?

Arty perks up a bit.

ARTY
 Think it would sell?

The New York MP chuckles, still reading.

NEW YORK MP
 Yeah, yeah. Seems like you're
 trying to do the right thing. I
 suggest you get on a bus.

Arty puts his head in his hands.

ARTY

Ehh, another bus. Where to?

NEW YORK MP

Right back to Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Probably the stockade.

(a beat)

Or go north. Way, way north.

(a beat)

You didn't hear me say that.

EXT. BROOKLYN POLICE STATION

Arty heads down the steps with his duffel bag--the New York MP has his helmet on, and a meaty hand clamped on Arty's shirt collar. A few passers-by give them the eye.

NEW YORK MP

No offense.

ARTY

None taken.

The New York MP guides Arty to a olive drab military van with a star on its side, parked on the curb. He opens a door, pushes Arty's head down, and wedges him inside.

INT. MILITARY POLICE VAN

Arty sits down in the back seat and reaches for the seat belt, but the New York MP hops behind the wheel, takes off his helmet, and pats the front passenger seat.

NEW YORK MP

Sit up front if you want. Short trip to the Port Authority.

Arty warily slides into the passenger seat, buckling himself in. The New York MP starts up the engine and pulls out.

The New York MP knocks on a center divider compartment.

NEW YORK MP (CONT'D)

File says you were a D.J. --go on, crank some tunes.

ARTY

Excuse me?

The New York MP pops the lid on the compartment--it's full of 8-track tapes. Arty sorts through them, kid in a candy store. The New York MP gestures around at the van.

NEW YORK MP
 Military--still a van. Van needs
 tunage. Pick me a winner.

ARTY
 Yes sir. Ah. This is new--

Arty digs out a tape and slaps it into the player in the dash. Steppenwolf's "Magic Carpet Ride" (or maybe The Who's "Magic Bus") blasts out of the speakers.

NEW YORK MP
 Give me a little D. J. patter.

Arty grins and shakes his head.

ARTY
 (radio voice)
 All right, here's a track that'll
 keep things rolling...

EXT. BROOKLYN STREETS

The van grooves along. In the distance, across the water, the Manhattan skyline glimmers.

EXT. PORT AUTHORITY NEW YORK

The passenger door pops open and Arty clambers out onto the curb. The New York MP leans toward him from behind the wheel.

NEW YORK MP
 Fort Jackson! No detours!

Arty nods, biting his lip. He turns and heads for the big glass doors of the terminal.

EXT. FORT JACKSON ENTRANCE COURTYARD

Distant troops jog in formation--jeeps shuttle back and forth between the buildings.

Arty steps down from a bus--only a few passengers get off, and he's the only one in civilian clothes.

With a heavy sigh, he walks to the guardhouse and knocks on the window. An MP inside looks up warily from a clipboard.

ARTY
Hello--I'm in a bit of trouble.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT JACKSON - BARBER SHOP

An MP with a rifle stands in a doorway, gritting his teeth at Arty, who is in the barber's chair getting a buzz cut.

EXT. FORT JACKSON - STOCKADE COURTYARD

The MP pushes Arty through a sliding metal gate and clicks it shut behind him. Arty is back in his uniform, and carrying another, neatly folded.

He checks the perimeter--high fences, barbed wire, armed MP guards up in towers with big klieg lights (off for now).

ARTY
Lovely, I forgot my beach towel.

INT. FORT JACKSON - STOCKADE BARRACKS

Arty closes the lid on a footlocker. If not for the barred windows it would look a lot like his last set of barracks.

A few CARD PLAYERS sit on the floor playing for loose change; another prisoner is reading. Yet another sails a wadded up piece of scrap paper into a nearby wastebasket.

BIG ED, with tattooed arms as big around as oil barrels, sits down on the edge of Arty's bunk, making it creak and sag.

BIG ED
Hey, new guy. Help me settle a bet.

ARTY
Helpful is my middle name, please
don't kill me.

This earns a round of chuckles scattered around the room. Big Ed waves disarmingly.

BIG ED
I'm betting your first name is
"AWOL".

ARTY
Actually, it's "Arty", but yes,
that's the reason I'm here.

Big Ed claps his hands together and laughs, as a groan goes up from one of the Card Players.

BIG ED
 Evans had you pinned for larceny.
 (to the Card Player)
 Don't you know everyone's in for
 AWOL?
 (to Arty again)
 Yours truly excluded.

ARTY
 May I ask--

Big Ed nods good-naturedly. He pounds his massive fists together for illustration.

BIG ED
 These kind of remove heads. I
 don't make a habit of it, but once
 was enough.

Arty grimaces and shudders.

ARTY
 Yeesh.

BIG ED
 So, Arty, why would you wish to
 leave the--
 (gestures around)
 --generous hospitality of the
 United States Army?

Arty sighs.

ARTY
 Well, it started off when my mom
 wouldn't sleep with this creep from
 the Draft Board, named Woda...

CUT TO:

TITLE CARD ON BLACK BACKGROUND: "ONE SPIEL LATER..."

CUT TO:

INT. FORT JACKSON - STOCKADE BARRACKS

The Card Players have migrated to the foot of Arty's bed, game forgotten, listening to his story with rapt attention.

ARTY

...whereupon I was unceremoniously
dumped into this palace of
detention with you fine gentlemen.

CARD PLAYER ONE

It turn out all right for your mom?

CARD PLAYER TWO

(whacks Card Player One)

You idiot! He's in the middle, he
doesn't know how it turns out.

BIG ED

You'll have to excuse Lester, he
has a poor grasp of time. Didn't
go AWOL so much as turn up late.

STOCKADE SERGEANT (O.S.)

Lights out, maggots!

The lights go out.

BIG ED

(Loudly)

Could we get a little variety with
our insults, please, Sergeant?

STOCKADE SERGEANT (O.S.)

I gave your mother variety, maggot!

Big Ed chuckles appreciatively.

BIG ED

I honestly love that man.

The prisoners disperse back to their bunks. Big Ed pats Arty
carefully on the shoulder. Arty winces and rubs it.

BIG ED (CONT'D)

Keep kosher and carry on, Arty. It
can only get better from here.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT JACKSON - COURT-MARTIAL COURTROOM - MORNING

A COLONEL, a Major, Captains and Lieutenants--nine in total--
sit at tables in front. There's a murmur of conversation;
the Colonel bangs his gavel three times and it quiets down.

The Colonel leans forward.

COLONEL

This court-martial board acknowledges that the accused was drafted under--unusual circumstances.

Arty, at a table with his LAWYER, both in uniform, nods vigorously. The Lawyer nudges him and he stops nodding.

COLONEL (CONT'D)

However, there is no officer present with sufficient rank to grant an honorable discharge outright. We strongly caution the accused to pursue his discharge through proper channels. Not guilty, returned to normal duty.

The Colonel bangs his gavel. Arty groans. The Lawyer sticks out his hand and Arty shakes it numbly.

LAWYER

Welcome back to the Army. Thanks for upping my win percentage.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT JACKSON - P. X.

Arty's at a pay phone. He leans back to look both ways down the street--nobody nearby. He drops a couple of coins in, dials a number, waits a moment, and nods.

ARTY

(into phone)

Yes please. The access road by Fort Jackson. Half an hour? All right.

CUT TO:

EXT./INT. TAXI

The cab kicks up dust. Arty, in the back, drums his fingers on his duffel bag as Fort Jackson recedes in the distance.

TAXI DRIVER

You need to make up your mind, kid.

ARTY

So does the Army.

CUT TO:

EXT. LIBERTY APT. - STREET - NIGHT

Arty heads up the sidewalk toward the apartment. The light goes on as he steps up onto the porch. Arty freezes for a second, but then smiles as Edie opens the door.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY MARKET - NIGHT

The Manager strains to move a stack of canned goods on a dolly--Arty knocks on the window and he looks up. Arty steps inside the door, grabs his apron from a hook, and puts it on.

He holds his arms out and turns in a full circle--the Manager rushes up and hugs him. Arty is surprised, but pats his back.

CUT TO:

EXT. GROSSINGER'S HOTEL - DAY

Arty is pushing a mower on the lawn--leaves are turning gold, red, and brown. Arty wipes sweat from his brow, but grins.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY PHARMACY

Arty's hands push cash across the counter and take back a white package from other hands in long lab-coat sleeves.

PHARMACIST (MOSTLY O.S.)
Here's your mom's medicine.

CUT TO:

INT. OFFICE

Arty's hands push cash across the desk. Very small hands snatch it.

VERY SHORT MAN 1 (MOSTLY O.S.)
All of it? I thought we'd have to
kick your mother out of that dump.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY APARTMENT - ARTY'S BEDROOM

Arty twiddles a pen, then crosses a day off the calendar. A few weeks are already crossed out. The phone begins ringing off-screen in the kitchen.

ARTY
Hold my calls, Raquel.

The poster doesn't respond.

ARTY (CONT'D)
Raquel? Ah, well, I didn't hire you for your phone skills.

Arty puts the pen on the dresser by the two-toned bowling shoes, and stalks off toward the phone--

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY APARTMENT - KITCHEN

The kitchen door is open, the screen door rattling on its latch in the autumn breeze. Arty picks up the phone.

ARTY
Yee-ellow.

JUDITH
(filtered, through phone)
Arty! This is Judith, friend of your mom's.

Arty looks suspiciously out the window, then the screen door.

ARTY
Wait--Judith? I remember, you said I should go back to the Army--

JUDITH AND ARTY
(Judith filtered, through phone)
--within thirty days.

He stretches the phone cord over and shuts the "solid" door quietly with his foot.

ARTY
That was actually pretty helpful, it worked out.

JUDITH
 (filtered, over phone)
 Did it? Did it really, Arty?

Arty chuckles wearily.

ARTY
 Mom told me about you, all right.
 Inquisitive.

JUDITH
 (filtered, over phone)
 It's a work habit. You want to get
 out of the Army and stay out?

ARTY
 Like nobody's business.

JUDITH
 (filtered, over phone)
 Think you could fake going crazy?

Arty thinks about it, scratching his head.

ARTY
 Who said anything about faking?

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY APARTMENT - ARTY'S BEDROOM

Edie runs her fingers through her hair nervously. Arty is stuffing random clothes into his trusty knapsack.

EDIE
 Judith--she means well, but I don't
 know, Arty.

Arty looks uncomfortably up at Cavegirl Raquel and hangs a shirt over the poster, blocking her sultry gaze.

ARTY
 What's to know? If the doctor buys
 it, I spend some time in the
 hospital, get my psych discharge.

Edie bites her lip and pats Arty's arm, nodding.

EDIE
 You give it a try, then, but be
 careful. Ever since you got back
 this time, I've been hearing bells.

ARTY
Bells?

EDIE
(nods)
Faint, far off, but like a warning.

ARTY
I have no idea what that means, but
I'll keep an ear out.

CUT TO:

EXT./INT. SHORTLINE BUS

Arty steps up onto the stairs and heads past the Bus Driver. Arty turns, finger raised, and opens his mouth to speak.

BUS DRIVER
I'll say it for you. We really
have to stop meeting like this.

Arty nods, and takes a seat.

CUT TO:

EXT. MANHATTAN - OFFICE BUILDING

Arty trudges up the steps, runs his finger down a row of buttons, and pushes one marked "DR. R. BELL". There's a tinkling of bells. Arty frowns, mouthing the word "bell".

CUT TO:

INT. DR. BELL'S OFFICE

Diplomas and bookshelves line the walls. A pen set and metronome (blissfully still) are on the desk.

Arty's sitting in front of the desk, not on the nearby psychiatrist's couch. DR. BELL, balding, late 50s, is bent over his desk toward Arty, resting his chin on one hand.

ARTY
(gulps)
It's like this, Doc--

DR. BELL
Try not to call me "Doc". It's all
right if you do, just try not to.

ARTY

All right--Doctor Bell. Hm. Has a familiar ring to it.

Doctor Bell clicks his tongue and ticks a mark on his desk blotter with his pen. There are dozens of similar marks, all in a neat row. Doctor Bell smiles and folds his hands.

DR. BELL

Bell, ring, good. I often find that my clients joke when they're nervous. Are you nervous, Arty?

ARTY

(nodding)
You bet.

Doctor Bell taps his fingers together.

DR. BELL

Why don't you tell me about it?

ARTY

Okay. The government is after me.

DR. BELL

Really.

Arty leans in and whispers conspiratorially.

ARTY

Army, police, meter maids, they're all in on it. They pop up out of nowhere and try to grab me. I can't sleep, I hear them talking all the time, through the walls.

Dr. Bell glances around the office, then looks back at Arty.

DR. BELL

Do you hear them right now?

ARTY

Loudly. Clearly.

Dr. Bell makes a 'hmm' sound and scribbles on Arty's chart.

Doctor Bell turns the folder around and pushes it across the desk. He holds the pen out to Arty and taps the folder.

DR. BELL

Sign here.

CUT TO:

INT. BELLEVUE MENTAL WARD

Arty is flanked by two massive ORDERLIES, who hustle him down a white-walled, white-tiled hallway.

DR. BELL (V.O.)
Persecution complex, paranoia,
visual and auditory hallucinations.

They come up to a massive door with a little square window with wire-reinforced glass. The eye of another orderly peers through from the other side--the eye "nods".

DR. BELL (V.O.) (CONT'D)
No physical indications of tumor or
injury. Likely shell-shock and
underlying psychological issues.

With a "bzzt" the door unlocks and swings open. Other mental patients--some in street clothes, others in loose-fitting gowns--shuffle past in a daze, one leaning on the wall. A giddy, far-off scream sounds from down the hall.

Another pair of orderlies drag the Screamer--wild-haired, pale-faced wraith of a man, screeching incoherently--past Arty. He's tightly strapped in a straightjacket.

ARTY
What's with him?

A nearby patient, Phil, looks like he's been there for longer than Arty's been alive. He croaks a reply.

PHIL
Straightjacket. Can't move, can't
scratch. Itch on your shoulder
grows 'til you think it's a black
hole. Then you fall in.

ORDERLY
Shaddup, Phil. Time for your meds.

CUT TO:

INT. BELLEVUE MENTAL WARD - HALLWAY - LATER

A line of patients, including Arty, stand outside their rooms, arms at their sides. Many need a shave badly.

An orderly comes by with a tray of liquids in little paper cups, handing them to the patients. They down them quickly.

DR. BELL (V.O.)
 Recommended treatment--the usual
 Thorazine cocktail. Augment with
 other psychotropics as needed.

Arty takes his cup and sniffs at it. He looks up, grimacing--
 an orderly hefts a straightjacket toward him and pats it.

Arty downs the medicine. He recoils, batting at his tongue.

CUT TO:

INT. BELLEVUE MENTAL WARD - HALLWAY - LATER

Arty wobbles along the hallway, feet slapping unevenly.

CUT TO:

INT. BELLEVUE MENTAL WARD - PATIENT BUNKS

Arty collapses into bed, one foot still on the floor and no
 energy to lift it. All around him, other patients do similar
 nosedives into bed like puppets with their strings cut.

CUT TO:

INT. BELLEVUE MENTAL WARD - PATIENT BUNKS - MORNING

An orderly shakes Arty awake. Arty rolls over and curls up
 into a ball. The orderly unfolds Arty's arms forcibly.

ORDERLY
 Get up. There is no sleep.

ARTY
 Yes, Sergeant.

CUT TO:

INT. BELLEVUE MENTAL WARD - HALLWAY

Arty joins the other patients stumbling out of bed and into
 the hallway. Arty squints at the sunlight coming in a high
 window, and leans on the wall, inching forward.

ORDERLY
 Keep walking. Got a straightjacket
 with your name on it.

ARTY
 (shakes head slowly)
 Unh-uh.

Arty blinks, and rubs his eyes. The hallway stretches unnaturally, a Vertigo-style effect. Arty moves ahead and turns a corner--there's a revolving door in his way.

He puts up both hands and pushes on the door, but there's no exit on the other side, just the way he came in.

Nearby, a DESK ORDERLY watches Arty--there is no revolving door, just Arty staggering in a circle with his arms out.

DESK ORDERLY
 What the--

One of Arty's legs goes sideways and he clatters to the floor, a broken toy. The Desk Orderly fumbles for his whistle and blows it--footsteps thunder closer.

CUT TO:

INT. BELLEVUE MENTAL WARD - EXAMINATION ROOM

Two orderlies lay Arty, slack-jawed, onto a gurney, as a BELLEVUE DOCTOR puts a stethoscope over Arty's heart.

Slowly, a see-through "copy" of Arty sits up, looking at his transparent hands. This FLOATING ARTY is in his Army uniform. He puts one of his hands through the Bellevue Doctor with no resistance and pulls it back out.

Floating Arty looks up--there's a warm friendly glow. He smiles, rising through the air.

Back on the gurney, a NURSE lays her fingers across the limp, lifeless wrist of Arty's body. Floating Arty turns to watch.

NURSE
 Doctor, he has no pulse!

DOCTOR
 Holy hell. Never seen a reaction like this--

The doctor rips open the shirt Arty's body is wearing.

Floating Arty turns back toward the light. His uniform unbuttons itself, loosening up. The misspelled "FINKELSTIEN" name patch un-stitches itself and floats free from his shirt.

Floating Arty does a double-take and snatches the name patch back, trying to pat it back on.

FLOATING ARTY
 Hey, I need that!
 (a beat, listening)
 No, I can't leave! Mom needs me!
 I need me!

Floating Arty "swims" against the current pulling him toward the light, straining to reach down toward his body.

The doctor grabs the defibrillator paddles. A rising tone sounds as he presses them against Arty's bared chest.

BELLEVUE DOCTOR
 CLEAR!

The Nurse steps back--the Doctor pushes a button on one of the paddles. ZZZAAP!!!

Arty's physical body arches its back--Floating Arty is sucked suddenly back into it. He takes a gasping breath.

CUT TO:

INT. BELLEVUE MENTAL WARD - EXAMINATION ROOM - LATER

Arty is sitting up on the gurney, mostly dressed again, finishing a tray of hospital food. A chart hangs from the foot of his bed, with big red text reading "NO THORAZINE".

There's a knock at the door--the Nurse opens it and leans in.

NURSE
 Mister Finkelstein? May I come in?

Arty smooths his hair back.

ARTY
 A visit from an angel is always welcome. Please, call me Arty.

The Nurse steps inside--but not too close to Arty.

NURSE
 All right--Arty. Just wanted to tell you--some men are coming, to take you to a military hospital.

ARTY
 So, what, a couple of weeks, they give me my discharge...

NURSE
 (shakes her head)
 They'll probably hold you for a
 long time, Arty.

Arty sighs and hangs his head.

ARTY
 I might have known.

CUT TO:

EXT. BELLEVUE HOSPITAL - ENTRANCE

Arty shields his eyes from the sunlight as he steps out of the arched entryway. Uniformed MPs (an MP SERGEANT and an MP SPECIALIST) flank him--they force his arms down gently.

MP SERGEANT
 Whoa, easy there.

MP SPECIALIST
 Nah, he's just been inside a while.

They lead him to a large white military ambulance at the curb. An MP Driver steps out and opens the rear door.

ARTY
 How long was I in there?

MP SERGEANT
 A week. Less, maybe.

ARTY
 That's all? It felt like years--

MP SPECIALIST
 Time's funny that way, innit?

He and the MP Sergeant help Arty in--he's a little wobbly--and climb in after. The MP Driver shuts the back door.

CUT TO:

INT. ARMY AMBULANCE

The MP Driver slides behind the wheel. The MP Sergeant sits a little closer to the driver, the Specialist right by Arty.

The ambulance starts up and gets rolling. Arty looks out the back window--they pull onto the highway, maybe forty or fifty miles per hour.

He takes a deep breath, stands--

MP SERGEANT
Hey, what the--

--and shoves the door handle, popping the door open and launching headfirst onto the road--flapping and rolling, broken, cars swerving away from his mangled body--

A flash--Arty shivers. He didn't really jump. He's glad.

ARTY
So, do you see a lot of soldiers,
with, um--

MP SPECIALIST
--your kind of problem?

ARTY
I was going to say, "a screw
loose", but yes.

MP SPECIALIST
(shrugs)
We keep busy. Guys who probably
wouldn't crack in civilian life,
but this pushes their buttons.

ARTY
Me in a nutshell. As it were.

MP SPECIALIST
At least you're one of the calm
ones. Thorazine, right?

Arty grins nervously. He nods slowly.

ARTY
Ri i i g h t . . .

CUT TO:

EXT. QUEENS, NEW YORK - STREET

The ambulance drives by a fenced, spacious parking lot with a scattering of cars. Beyond is St. Albans Hospital --curved in a huge arc, 5 stories tall, broken by taller towers.

CUT TO:

EXT. ST. ALBANS HOSPITAL - ENTRANCE GATE

The ambulance pulls up to a gatehouse with vehicle entrances/exits to either side. The MP Driver rolls down his window as a GATE MP leans out with a clipboard.

GATE MP
Hello. Bringing someone in today?

The MP Driver nods.

MP DRIVER
Transfer from Bellevue. Headed for the upstairs ward, long-term.

GATE MP
Restraints?

MP DRIVER
Nah, he's a pussycat.

GATE MP
Careful --they turn pretty quickly.

The Gate MP raises the entry gate bar and waves them through.

CUT TO:

EXT. ST. ALBANS HOSPITAL - ENTRANCE COURTYARD

The van pulls to a stop--the MP Sergeant and MP Specialist get out, and help Arty out the back.

Vehicles drop off and pick up patients; doctors, people in civilian clothes and military uniforms--Navy, Marines, Army.

Arty looks up at the massive hospital and gulps.

ARTY
Abandon ye all hope who enter here.

The MP Specialist leans in.

MP SPECIALIST
They really try to make you better.

ARTY
That's what I'm afraid of.

CUT TO:

INT. ST. ALBANS HOSPITAL - ELEVATOR

Arty and the MPs step in. The MP Sergeant pushes a button for the fourth floor--the elevator hums and gets moving.

CUT TO:

INT. ST. ALBANS HOSPITAL - MENTAL WARD ADMISSIONS

"Ding!" the elevator opens--Arty follows the MPs meekly.

A high, wide desk is ahead; to either side, a long curving hallway. A bathroom with a MEN'S sign is down the hall.

As they move toward the desk, the "MEN'S" sign slips out of sight around the bend. Arty glances back with a "hmm" sound.

At the desk, an ADMISSIONS CLERK looks up.

MP SERGEANT
Checking in.

ADMISSIONS CLERK
Here's the usual.

He hands over a clipboard with a thick stack of forms.

Arty is transfixed by the massive wooden door by the desk. Tiny little reinforced window. He gulps and closes his eyes--

--but still sees thick heavy doors, slamming, bolting shut--

A flash. Arty shakes his head to clear it. He shuffles nervously as the MP Sergeant scribbles on the clipboard. Arty turns to the MP Specialist.

ARTY
I think I saw a restroom on our way
in. Do you mind--

MP SPECIALIST
Hm? Oh, sure. Come right back.

Arty nods and turns, hands in pockets, hurrying down the hallway. He mouths "Come right back?" in disbelief.

After several strides, Arty is out of sight around the bend. He looks ahead at the "MEN'S" sign but turns to his left and shoves open the exit doors, rushing inside.

CUT TO:

INT. ST. ALBANS HOSPITAL - STAIRWELL

Arty scurries down the stairs, his footsteps echoing. A couple of flights down, a NAVY CAPTAIN, 50s, looks up.

NAVY CAPTAIN

In one hell of a hurry, aren't you, son?

Arty slows down and shrugs, turning his hands out as he passes the Navy Captain on a landing.

ARTY

I come in late for group therapy one more time, Dr. Bell's gonna throw me in isolation.

The Navy Captain startles.

NAVY CAPTAIN

Well, then, get moving!

ARTY

Yes sir.

Arty heads down; the Navy Captain heads up.

CUT TO:

EXT. ST. ALBANS HOSPITAL - PARKING LOT

Arty walks toward the MP gatehouse, speeding up and slowing down, forcing himself not to run. He snags a paper "VISITOR" tag off a parked car.

Ahead, a soldier walks past the gatehouse, tapping his ID tag as the Gate MP waves him through.

Arty steps closer, and the Gate MP narrows his eyes. Arty waves his "VISITOR" pass hopefully.

A car on the other side of the gate taps its horn--the Gate MP swivels his chair, leaning out of the booth.

As the Gate MP talks to the driver, Arty gulps and walks calmly past the booth, taking a left turn down the sidewalk.

The Gate MP lets the car through, salutes as it leaves, and drops the bar back in place. He turns, looking for Arty--no one there. He shrugs and goes back to shuffling papers.

CUT TO:

EXT. QUEENS, NEW YORK - STREET

Arty runs, full-out, coat flapping. Homes and multi-level apartments flank the street.

Arty cuts into an alley and ducks behind garbage cans. He pulls one close, walling himself in. He curls up in a ball and laughs, breathing hard. He cries a bit and laughs again.

CUT TO:

EXT./INT. QUEENS BUS

Arty steps up and drops change into the fare box.

He flops into his seat and wobbles, eying the window wearily as the bus moves. A distant alarm bell sounds.

INT./EXT. QUEENS BUS

St. Albans Hospital comes into sight--and the MP gatehouse. Arty slides down lower, turning up his coat collar. The alarm bell is closer now, louder. Arty grimaces.

ARTY (V.O.)
(echo, from memory)
Bells?

EDIE (V.O.)
(same)
Faint, far off, but like a warning.

ARTY
More like alarm bells. And yes,
I'm alarmed...

Armed MPs sweep the parking lot, looking under cars. The Gate MP is out of his booth--he looks down, shamefaced, as a superior officer curses him out and points down the sidewalk.

The bus moves on. Arty lets out a whoosh of relief.

CUT TO:

EXT. BROOKLYN COLLEGE - ENTRANCE GATE

Arty steps through a gate with a roofed entrance, the copper letters on the roof reading "BROOKLYN COLLEGE".

EXT. BROOKLYN COLLEGE - LIBRARY

Arty trudges past a long building with a clock tower. It's around 8 in the evening, warm light in the windows.

INT. BROOKLYN COLLEGE - DORMITORY

Faint music plays. The usual sardine-can rooms, scuffed carpets, and battered doors. Arty knocks on one, and his friend Jerry pops out. He looks at Arty, at a loss.

JERRY

Arty? Jesus, you look like shit!
What happened to "see you Monday?"

CUT TO:

EXT. JUNIOR'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT

The red neon "JUNIOR'S" sign lights up the night. Beyond the windows, tables sit in pools of light from hanging fixtures.

INT. JUNIOR'S RESTAURANT - NIGHT

At a table, Arty wolfs down a hamburger. Jerry sitting nearby. Also at the table is another friend MIKE, and MIKE'S GIRLFRIEND. All are leaning in to hear Arty speak.

MIKE

Thora-what?

ARTY

Thorazine. I cannot in good
conscience recommend it.

MIKE'S GIRLFRIEND

Sounds like a bad trip.

Arty has finished his hamburger.

ARTY

I would not get a shot of it in my
soda, that's all I'm saying.
(pounds table)
Hit me again.

Mike grabs another hamburger off a small pile, holding it out gingerly. Arty snags it and tears off a huge chunk.

CUT TO:

EXT. BROOKLYN COLLEGE DORMITORY ENTRANCE - NIGHT

Arty drops coins into a pay phone, and dials. "For Sale" and concert flyers flutter on a nearby bulletin board.

ARTY
 (into phone)
 Hey, Ma? No, I'm all right.
 (a beat, listens)
 No, turns out being crazy was not a
 great career choice.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. SHORTLINE BUS

Arty steps up to the Bus Driver and raises his ticket.

BUS DRIVER
 You look like fifty miles of bad
 road. And I'm an expert.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY MARKET - NIGHT

Arty flicks a switch--fluorescent lights crackle on. He grabs a broom leaning on the wall, and starts sweeping the aisles.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY LANES BOWLING ALLEY - DAY

Arty is renting shoes at the counter. The Very Short Men step up, and one of them knocks on the counter for attention. Arty leans out (they're too short to see otherwise).

ARTY
 Gentlemen! To what do I owe the
 pleasure?

VERY SHORT MAN 1
 Killing two birds with one stone.

ARTY
 You're here a day early to threaten
 me about Mom's rent. What else?

Very Short Man 2 shrugs.

VERY SHORT MAN 2
Figured we'd bowl a few frames.

ARTY
Just a short game, huh?

VERY SHORT MAN 1
Rent us the shoes, asshole.

Arty looks forward and turns around to check the racks.

ARTY
You present me with a challenge--
(grabs two pair)
--ah, there you go. Kids' Large.

He pushes them across the counter. Very Short Man 1 grumbles, but slaps down a couple of bills and grabs a pair of shoes. So does Very Short Man 2.

VERY SHORT MAN 2
Lucky guess.

ARTY
"Know thine enemy--and his shoe
size."

They wave him off and go to find an open lane.

JOEL (O.S.)
Hey, Arty!

Arty turns--JOEL (20s, big guy, in a police uniform) stands grinning, hand out. Arty shakes it with a nervous smile.

ARTY
Hello, Joel. How's the Chief?

JOEL
Oh, Dad's talking retirement again.
Never happen, department's
stretched thin with the draft.

ARTY
Hey, don't look at me, I've got
five jobs already.

JOEL
Too busy to bowl?

Arty straightens his name tag proudly.

ARTY
Always time for that.

JOEL
Got a league spot open for you.

Arty just smirks and chuckles, rubbing his hands together.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY LANES BOWLING ALLEY - LATER

A group in green monogrammed shirts fiddle with pencils and polish their bowling balls. One checks his watch. A GREEN TEAM MEMBER looks up as Joel approaches in a red shirt.

GREEN TEAM MEMBER
Hey, Joel! Running late. Still
one man short?

ARTY (O.S.)
Just a second!

GREEN TEAM MEMBER
Who the--

Arty straightens his Red Team shirt and steps out from behind the counter, a bowling ball case in tow.

The Green Team groans. Arty rests the case on a seat and pries it open, the ball gleaming. Arty cracks his knuckles.

ARTY
Let's make this quick, gentlemen--
someone's gotta run this place.

MONTAGE:

Arty makes his run-up to the lane and releases--the ball glides in a graceful arc, scattering all the pins.

The scorekeeper marks an X on Arty's frame.

A Green Team bowler skids a bit on his run-up, leaves a spare and snaps his fingers.

ARTY (CONT'D)
Watch that approach, it's slippery.

Arty steps up, sets up a tough split, but gauges his next shot and sends a pin dancing, picking up the spare.

More frames, more X's and one or two spares. The scorekeeper puts his head down on the scoring table, and grips a pencil so tight that he snaps it.

END MONTAGE.

The bowlers pack up, Red Team high-fiving each other and Green Team muttering.

ARTY (CONT'D)
Season's young. No hard feelings?

GREEN TEAM MEMBER
I don't blame you, Arty.

The Green Team Member socks Joel in the shoulder.

JOEL
(playing it up)
Oww...

GREEN TEAM MEMBER
I blame this prick for bringing in a ringer.

JOEL
Just be glad I'm not in uniform, or I'd haul you in.

The Green Team Member wiggles his hands, mock-scared.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY LANES BOWLING ALLEY - LATER

Arty flips the light switches off, all the lanes empty. Joel is on his way out the door but turns--

JOEL
Way to wipe the lanes with 'em.

Arty shrugs humbly.

ARTY
Home court advantage.

JOEL
Says you. Good night!

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY APARTMENT - ARTY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

All is dark. Close nearby--way too close--comes an insistent knock at the front door of the apartment, thump-thump-thump.

Arty opens one eye (now we see the scene)--sucking in his breath and holding it, looking nervously at the bedroom door.

Off-screen, the front door clicks and squeaks.

EDIE (O.S.)
Yes? Oh, Joel, it's you. What brings you out this way?

Arty pulls a pillow over his head and grits his teeth.

ARTY
Please don't say it, please--

JOEL (O.S.)
Ah, a little bit of a business visit, Mrs. Finkelstein.

There's a polite cough from someone else in the hallway.

JOEL (O.S.) (CONT'D)
These gentlemen came up from the city asking about Arty, and I said, it's obviously a mistake--

Arty scrambles out of bed, in a Liberty Lanes T-shirt, boxers, and socks. He lands with a thud, wincing.

FBI AGENT 1 (O.S.)
What was that?

FBI AGENT 2 (O.S.)
Did he get out?

They thunder off down the hallway.

INT. LIBERTY APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM

Arty edges the door open and eases into the room, hands up.

ARTY
Hey, I don't want any trouble--

Edie leans heavily on the door frame. She turns, trembling.

ARTY (CONT'D)
Mom? Mom, where are they?

EDIE
Gone. Just for a second. Can't they leave you alone?

ARTY
 They're just doing their job, ma.
 I gotta go do mine.

Arty hugs her and lets go, racing back into his bedroom as she reaches after him.

INT. LIBERTY APARTMENT – ARTY'S BEDROOM

Arty throws open the window, batting snow off the screen. He looks down at his bare feet and wiggles his toes, casting about the room--he snags the bowling shoes.

EXT. SLOPE OUTSIDE LIBERTY APARTMENT

Arty crashes through the screen and skids down the slope, flailing. Near the bottom, he hits a rock under the snow and pitches forward--his shoes stay stuck in the snow behind him.

Arty plows headfirst into a snowbank and pushes himself up.

JOEL (O.S.)
 Arty, stop!

Arty looks back. Above, Joel scrambles around the house.

Joel slips on the sidewalk, and his feet go out from under him. He falls on his behind, knocking the air out of him.

Arty turns and stumbles toward the woods as Joel struggles to get back up. Arty calls over his shoulder.

ARTY
 Watch that approach, it's slippery!

EXT. WOODS - NEAR FROZEN BROOK

Arty climbs over logs, brushes through tree branches, and slogs through the snow. At the side of the brook, he tests the ice--it creaks, but holds. He slips across but punches through at the far edge, splashing into the icy water.

He claws his way up the far bank, lies on his back for a moment, and takes a few deep breaths, gathering energy.

ARTY
 Okay, once more, without feeling--

He swings his half-frozen legs around and grabs a tree trunk, scrabbling upright. He shivers, and blunders up the slope toward a house with a long driveway.

Back in the woods, Joel shields his eyes, peering after Arty. He holds his injured behind.

The FBI Agents, in dark suits, rush up behind. One flips the safety catch off his holster, but Joel waves him off angrily.

JOEL

Cut that out! Arty's no fighter.

INT./EXT. GARAGE

Joel limps up to the garage door. He looks down--smeared, watery snow-melt footprints lead up to the car.

Underneath the car, Arty tucks his frozen fingers under his armpits, shivering.

JOEL (O.S.)

Arty, Arty. I'd say "nice try" but I'd be lying.

ARTY

You could s-say it anyway, it might make me f-feel better.

JOEL (O.S.)

Come on out, Arty.

Arty flops out from under the car. Joel helps Arty up, keeping one meaty hand clamped on his arm as Arty wobbles.

ARTY

I'm sorry I made you ch-chase me. How's the b-butt?

JOEL

I'll live.

Joel shakes his head and begins to unbutton his own policeman's coat. Arty winces, waving him off.

ARTY

Aw, J-Joel --

JOEL

You, on the other hand, are bucking for a case of pneumonia.

He holds out the coat.

JOEL (CONT'D)
Take the coat.

CUT TO:

EXT. LIBERTY STREETS

The FBI Agents roll up in their big dark sedan at the bottom of the slope. Joel leads Arty, shivering, down the driveway.

One of the FBI Agents pops out, flicking open a pair of handcuffs. Joel grabs his forearm, shaking his head.

FBI AGENT 1
You're kidding me.

JOEL
Gonna run again, Arty?

ARTY
(shakes head)
J-j-j-j...

JOEL
(to FBI Agent 1)
No cuffs.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY POLICE STATION

Under the harsh fluorescent lights, in a wood-paneled booking room, Arty sits in a plastic chair. He's snuggled up in a threadbare but thick comforter--eyes watering, nose red.

He eagerly reaches out as a police secretary, 50s, PHYLLIS, hands him a paper cup full of steaming coffee.

ARTY
(hoarsely)
Thank you, Phyllis.

PHYLLIS
(low raspy voice)
Save your voice.

The FBI Agents stand guard at the door. A police officer pushes it open for Edie (she has a sack full of clothes).

EDIE
(out of breath)
Oh, Arty, are you all right?

She rushes to him, setting down the sack, rubbing his shoulders. He wobbles, trying not to spill his coffee.

ARTY
I still f-feel like an Arty-sicle.

FBI AGENT 2
He's faking.

Joel, scrawling in a nearby police blotter, turns and snaps at the FBI Agent. He jumps a bit--Edie jumps too.

JOEL
You want to drag his corpse back?
(to Edie)
Sorry about this, Mrs. Finkelstein.

A PASSING POLICEMAN puts a hand on Arty's shoulder.

PASSING POLICEMAN
Tough break. They'll work it out.

FBI AGENT 1
(groans)
Is everybody best friends with this piece of crap draft dodger?

Joel steps over, getting in the FBI Agent's face.

JOEL
Arty is a pin-setting, floor-sweeping, car-washing, bell-hopping, shelf-stocking, disk-jockeying draft dodger.

He turns to Arty, who is huddled up sipping his coffee, and clicks his tongue wistfully.

JOEL (CONT'D)
He works hard at it.

CUT TO:

EXT./INT. FBI SEDAN

FBI Agent 1 pushes Arty's head down gently as he climbs through the back passenger door. Arty's in an old coat.

FBI AGENT 1
Don't make us use the cuffs.

ARTY
Consider me warned.

INT. FBI SEDAN

The FBI agents settle in. Arty buckles his seat belt. Next to him is a file box--he cautiously pries up the lid. FBI Agent 2 coughs warningly, and Arty drops it.

FBI AGENT 2
Your personnel file.

FBI AGENT 1
It weighs more than you do.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT HAMILTON, BROOKLYN - JAIL - NIGHT

Arty stretches out on the thin mattress of a low bunk in his bare, brick-walled cell (thick bars for the "open" wall).

The other detainees are asleep--not Arty. Through a high, barred window, headlights flash across a bridge nearby.

ARTY
The Plaza Hotel it isn't, but you
can't beat the view.

CUT TO:

INT. MILITARY POLICE BUS

Groggy and rumpled, Arty slouches in his seat. The bus is filled with other grumpy prisoners, still in civvies.

Arty squints at the sunlight coming in the mesh-reinforced windows; there's an ARMED MP with a rifle, keeping watch from the front; some seats are ripped and none are padded well.

The bus squeaks and jostles. They hit a bump, and the passengers mutter uncomfortably.

ARTY
At least we're going in style.

ARMED MP
You can put up with it for half an
hour if I can.

ARTY
Half a--that's all? Last time,
they sent me back to Fort Jackson,
South Carolina--

ARMED MP
 (shakes his head)
 Fort Dix, New Jersey, this time.
 You're a local problem now--and
 shortly, not my problem.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT DIX - ENTRANCE COURTYARD

Arty and a line of his fellow convicts are led off the bus, waved along by other MPs. The Armed MP escorts them to a gate in a chain-link fence topped with barbed wire.

Above the gate is a sign with the motto: "OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW IS FREEDOM". Arty looks up at it wearily.

ARTY
 Obedience to the law is freedom?
 All obedience ever got me was a
 kick in the shins.

An MP beyond the gate opens it, and the prisoners shuffle in.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT DIX - STOCKADE BARRACKS

Arty, crew-cut hair and uniform again, is making his bed. So are others, like MAFIA JOHN, late 20s--no good at it (his bed is a mess, but his uniform is immaculate, extra starch).

A door opens and an officer with a file folder -- CAPTAIN GORDON -- steps inside. He scans the room.

CAPTAIN GORDON
 Private Finkelstein? Arty
 Finkelstein?

Arty raises his hand and Captain Gordon spots him.

ARTY
 Sir! Over here, sir.

Mafia John nudges Arty with an elbow.

MAFIA JOHN
 They sent Captain Gordon? He's the
 best! What did you do?

ARTY
 Wish I knew.

Captain Gordon approaches. Arty salutes.

CAPTAIN GORDON
At ease, Private. Quite a merry
chase you've led the Army.

ARTY
Couldn't help it, sir.

CAPTAIN GORDON
So it seems. I've read your file.
(shakes the folder)
Just the greatest hits, of course.

ARTY
Can you straighten it out? Can you
get me out of the Army?

Captain Gordon shakes his head sadly.

CAPTAIN GORDON
You're set for a special court-
martial. You'd need a general
court-martial for that.

ARTY
(winces)
And my hardship discharge?

Captain Gordon smiles kindly, if a little wearily.

CAPTAIN GORDON
There's always an outside chance.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT DIX - STOCKADE BARRACKS - HOLDING CELL

Benches and long tables; a dozen men or more wait. Arty is leafing through a tattered magazine. Mafia John has his feet up, buffing his fingernails on his uniform.

A BARRACKS MP pounds on the door for attention, opening it and stepping in. Everyone looks up.

BARRACKS MP
Listen up! If they don't call you
in fifteen minutes, you're going to
lunch, court-martial after.

He shuts the door with a loud click. Some groan, including Mafia John, who goes back to buffing. Arty just shrugs.

ARTY
 Look on the bright side, John, I
 hear they're serving spaghetti.

Mafia John stops buffing and eyes him doubtfully.

MAFIA JOHN
 Are you serious or is this another
 "Italian" wisecrack?

ARTY.
 Both. Spaghetti is the rumor, but
 we'll see how it winds up.

MAFIA JOHN
 (groans)
 Winds up, ugh. . .

A few of the others overhear and groan as well.

MAFIA JOHN (CONT'D)
 You should take that act on the
 road.

Mafia John leans in, suddenly grave, and speaks quietly.

MAFIA JOHN (CONT'D)
 No, seriously. Take it on the
 road. In about fifteen minutes.

ARTY
 How do you mean?

MAFIA JOHN
 Let us stretch our legs for a
 moment.

ARTY
 Okay.

They get up and stretch out. Mafia John nods toward the back
 of the room. They walk nonchalantly toward a broom closet.

MAFIA JOHN
 I've noticed they aren't taking a
 head count. It's always--
 (air quotes)
 --"what happened to so and so", and
 it turns out they took him to the
 wrong courtroom, or they were
 thinking of somebody else.

ARTY
 Ah, is that a fact?

Mafia John looks around. Nobody is paying attention, or they're specifically not paying attention on purpose.

MAFIA JOHN

If you hide in this closet, keep it open just a smidge--I'll make sure I'm the last one out the door.

ARTY

They'll lock me in--

MAFIA JOHN

And they're gonna bother with an empty room?

Arty raises his eyebrows. Light dawns.

ARTY

Ohh...

Mafia John steps in front of the closet and casually pries it open. Arty scuttles inside, pressing against the wall.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT DIX - STOCKADE BARRACKS - HOLDING CELL - LATER

Most of the men are on their feet, in a single-file line as the Barracks MP holds the cell door open and waves them past. Mafia John is a little slower to get up.

BARRACKS MP

Move it, chow's getting cold.

MAFIA JOHN

Be right there.

(gets up, unsteady)

This bench is wobbly.

The Barracks MP eyes him warily as he approaches.

BARRACKS MP

Nobody likes that one.

The MP moves ahead, leaving Mafia John holding the door open with one hand and gesturing with the other.

MAFIA JOHN

They drill down into the post, then they usually brace both sides--

He gently closes the door--it hits his shoe heel instead of closing properly. He and the MP walk off down the hallway.

BARRACKS MP (O.S.)
 Yeah, I've done that kinda work
 before. So?

MAFIA JOHN (O.S.)
 (fading)
 I see a lot of half-ass repair jobs
 where they forget to put the...

Back at the closet, Arty peers through the gap.

MONTAGE (fading between shots):

Inside the closet, Arty sits down, stands up, looks through the gap, wads up a piece of paper and tosses it in the air.

END MONTAGE.

Arty opens the closet door gingerly, sticking his head out. He steps out--no one around--then up to the cell door. It looks closed but he reaches for the knob, wincing.

He grabs it and turns--pulls--the door swings open. Arty lets his breath out, relieved.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT DIX - STOCKADE BARRACKS - HALLWAY

Arty slinks ahead, scanning for trouble. Something creaks and makes him jump.

Arty peeks around a corner--there's a desk with a steaming mug of coffee by a radio set. Someone opens a door--Arty cringes against the wall--but the door shuts again.

Arty longingly eyes the open door at the end of his hallway, takes a few deep breaths, and runs for it.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT DIX - STOCKADE BARRACKS

Arty barrels out the door, down a step, and kicks up a little gravel. Arty winces, looking around to get his bearings.

Against a nearby building, a '68 Mustang is up on ramps--its owner, the MP CAPTAIN (thin and lanky, 30s, in good shape), scoots out from under it. He has a rag and a wrench.

MP CAPTAIN
 Hey! What are you doing out here?

Arty turns and walks in the other direction, slowly at first, then more briskly. The MP Captain gets up, wiping grease on his uniform. Arty breaks out into a run.

MP CAPTAIN (CONT'D)

Oh, goddammit--

The MP Captain ditches the wrench and takes off after Arty.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT DIX - OUTBUILDINGS

Arty zips past storage sheds, office buildings, a garage. He zigs--the MP Captain is right behind. He zags, looks over his shoulder--the MP Captain points him out and bellows.

MP CAPTAIN

GUARDS! STOP THAT MAN!

Arty turns a corner. He pulls up short--it's a corridor of buildings with a U-shaped one at the end. Blocked.

The MP Captain catches up, and sees he has Arty cornered. Arty turns, and puts his hands out, taking a step forward.

ARTY

I'm really sorr--

The MP Captain puts a hand up to stop him, doubling over. Arty nods, and the MP Captain breathes deeply.

MP CAPTAIN

You're quick--I'll give you that.
Ballsy bastard.

ARTY

Look, I'm not supposed to be here.
I was drafted illegally, I'm trying
for a hardship--

MP CAPTAIN

Well, this isn't helping you any.

Arty opens his mouth and retrieves something from his back teeth. The MP Captain watches with fascination and a tinge of disgust as Arty unfolds it.

ARTY

Got a twenty here--what say you
take it and forget you saw me?

The MP Captain waves him off.

MP CAPTAIN
Give you a free ride to the mess
hall.

ARTY
I don't know...

MP CAPTAIN
Got a Mustang. Don't make me drag
you behind it.

CUT TO:

INT. MP CAPTAIN'S MUSTANG

The MP Captain pushes Arty gently through the passenger door. Arty sits down, but feels around the seat belt, confused.

ARTY
Am I missing something?

The MP Captain gets behind the wheel and looks Arty over, but laughs and reaches for the seat belt. He pulls it across Arty, who fumbles an arm under it as the buckle clicks.

ARTY (CONT'D)
Oh, it's got a shoulder strap, just
like a race car. Clever.

The MP Captain whips his seat belt on.

MP CAPTAIN
New for model year '68. Nifty,
innit?

He starts up the car and off they go.

MP CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
In my report, I can say I used
restraints.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT DIX - MESS HALL

Mafia John regards a steaming tray of spaghetti marinara and meatballs, licking his chops. A TABLEMATE eyes Mafia John's tray suspiciously.

TABLEMATE
Hey, there weren't any meatballs.

MAFIA JOHN
Not in yours, no.

TABLEMATE
Where did you g--

Mafia John spears him with a look as steely sharp as a fork.

TABLEMATE (CONT'D)
(meekly)
Okay.

Mafia John breathes on his fork and rubs it to a shine on his uniform, then skewers a meatball.

The mess hall doors bang open--Mafia John looks up, jaw dropping as a white-helmeted MESS HALL MP, red-faced with anger, escorts Arty inside.

The MP shoves Arty toward the serving line, heads back out the doors, and locks them again. Arty gets his tray; the server ladles him up some spaghetti.

Mafia John gapes at Arty as he approaches.

MAFIA JOHN
(mouth full)
What the fudge happened?

Arty sits down and begins winding spaghetti.

ARTY
Got out of the cell, as planned.
(takes a bite)
Guard Captain chased me down.

MAFIA JOHN
Christ. Was he pissed off?

ARTY
Pissed off. Amused. Fifty-fifty.
MPs are hopping mad--they're gonna
catch hell for letting me out.

John shakes his head, chuckling. He impales a meatball and catapults it into Arty's spaghetti.

MAFIA JOHN
You have fought valiantly. The
Meat God smiles upon you.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT DIX - MESS HALL

A line of prisoners (with more than a few spaghetti sauce stains) climb one by one into the back of a transport truck.

TRANSPORT MP (O.S.)
Scoot on up! Make room!

Arty is a few places back from the truck when the Mess Hall MP slaps a hand on his shoulder. Arty turns to look at him.

MESS HALL MP
Not you, Mister Track and Field.

ARTY
Track and... Oh, right, with the running and escaping. Hope you aren't still sore about--

The Mess Hall MP points to an idling jeep nearby. A DRIVER MP and a front seat PASSENGER MP glower with hate. The Passenger MP reaches back to pat the rear seat.

MESS HALL MP
--get in, if you value your teeth.

Arty sighs and nods, stepping out of line. Mafia John steps up onto the transport truck and watches Arty go, whistling with concern. He makes the sign of the cross and sits down.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. FORT DIX - FOREST ROAD - IN JEEP

Arty, in the back seat, looks dead ahead. The jeep bumps along the uneven road, up the wooded hill. No seat belts. The Passenger MP turns, elbow on his headrest, sneering.

PASSENGER MP
So, Jew York--you scared of us?

Arty raises his eyebrows and gives a dismissive "hmph".

DRIVER MP
He's playing hard to get.

PASSENGER MP
Back in 'Nam I made a V.C. prisoner talk with a red-hot bayonet, now that was scared.

He pulls the bayonet (it's cooled off now) halfway from its scabbard on his belt, for Arty to see, and lets it fall back.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT DIX - HILLSIDE CLEARING

The jeep stops at a cluster of ramshackle buildings. The MPs get out and stand by the jeep, one of them pointing Arty toward a building. He nods, and trudges toward its steps.

INT. FORT DIX - HILLSIDE STOCKADE OUTPOST

It's a dusty place with old papers littering a desk, old recruitment posters on the wall. The Driver MP kicks at a bench along the wall--Arty takes the cue and sits down.

The Mess Hall MP towers over him.

MESS HALL MP

We got you now, you little shit.
Nobody can hear you scream out here.

ARTY

(takes a deep breath)
I'd like to talk to my lawyer.

MESS HALL MP

(mocking)
"I'd like to talk to my lawyer."
(normal angry voice)
What do you think this is, an episode of Dragnet?

ARTY

(genuinely interested)
Is that still on the air?

MESS HALL MP

SHADDUP!

ARTY

Guys, that jeep ride was rough. I gotta take a leak.

The Mess Hall MP drags Arty to his feet roughly and shoves him toward the Passenger MP.

MESS HALL MP
Get him out of my sight while I
dream up something painful.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT DIX - HILLSIDE CLEARING

The Passenger MP marches Arty to a building with a drinking fountain on the porch, and thrusts a door open--it's the latrine. Arty walks in and the Passenger MP shuts the door.

The Passenger MP listens until he hears a zip and stream of urine, then quietly backs away, watching the door. Several paces away, he DASHES to the steps of the bigger building.

The other MPs hustle out of the building as the Passenger MP waves them along. They hoof it toward the treeline.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT DIX - WOODS NEAR CLEARING

The MPs spread out, taking cover. The Mess Hall MP pops up behind a fallen log and rests his rifle on it for support.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT DIX - HILLSIDE CLEARING

Arty opens the latrine door, wiping off his hands, and steps out onto the porch--nobody around.

He looks down the road back to (what passes for) civilization. He steps toward the edge of the porch.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT DIX - WOODS NEAR CLEARING

The MPs all have their guns trained on Arty.

MESS HALL MP
Wait until he runs for it.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT DIX - HILLSIDE CLEARING

Arty thinks about it, steps back, and gets a drink of water from the fountain. He sits against the building and waits.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT DIX - WOODS NEAR CLEARING - LATER

The Driver MP checks his watch. The Passenger MP, leaning against a tree, is sharpening a stick with his bayonet. The Mess Hall MP looks down his gun sight.

PASSENGER MP
He move yet?

The Mess Hall MP lowers his gun and shakes his head.

MESS HALL MP
I think he got wise.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT DIX - HILLSIDE CLEARING

Arty, still sitting on the porch, bangs the back of his head (not hard, but impatiently) against the building.

MESS HALL MP (O.S.)
(disappointed)
All right, we're coming out. No sudden moves.

ARTY
Why start now?

The MPs come out of the woods, weapons lowered. Arty very carefully gets to his feet and stretches out.

Arty does a double-take--more MPs (maybe four) come out from other directions. One, chewing tobacco, turns and spits.

ARTY (CONT'D)
Oh, how nice. You brought friends.

PASSENGER MP
Why didn't you run?

Arty slowly shakes a finger at him.

ARTY
 Come on, I know what you were up
 to. I'm not about to do something
 like that.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. FORT DIX - FOREST ROAD - IN JEEP

Arty's in the back again, grinning slightly. The MPs ride in
 sullen silence, looking anywhere but at Arty.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT DIX - STOCKADE BARRACKS

The jeep pulls up. Arty gets up to get out, but the Mess
 Hall MP helps him along with a boot to the rear.

Arty stumbles out. The jeep peels out, leaving in a cloud of
 dust. A STOCKADE MP by the barracks entrance looks on.

STOCKADE MP
 What was all that about?

ARTY
 Just a friendly chat.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT DIX - STOCKADE BARRACKS

Mafia John has his feet up on a bunk, reading a girly mag.
 He looks over the top as Arty steps in, and leaps up,
 grinning and hand outstretched.

MAFIA JOHN
 Arty! You made it back alive!

ARTY
 (shakes his hand)
 Never let 'em see you sweat, right?

Mafia John lets go and looks him over, in awe.

MAFIA JOHN
 They had you alone for hours, and
 not a scratch! It's like Daniel in
 the lion's den.

ARTY
 Something like that. Didn't know
 you were a man of faith.

Mafia John blushes and raises the magazine. The cover girl
 is in a school uniform--barely.

MAFIA JOHN
 This sorta took me back to Catholic
 school.

Arty cocks his head, examining the cover.

ARTY
 It's taking me back, and I never
 went!

CUT TO:

INT. FORT DIX - STOCKADE BARRACKS - LATER

Arty and Mafia John play checkers by a window--Arty's losing.

MAFIA JOHN
 King me.

ARTY
 (sighs, does it)
 I can see where this is headed.

Mafia John chuckles. He gestures around.

MAFIA JOHN
 "This"?
 (taps the checkerboard)
 Or this?

ARTY
 Both, I suppose. Circling the
 drain.

MAFIA JOHN
 Yes, but if you give a damn, you
 dig in with both hands and try to
 clog the pipes.

CAPTAIN GORDON (O.S.)
 Ah, our resident philosopher.

Captain Gordon, with his file folder, walks up. Mafia John
 and Arty rise, but Captain Gordon waves Arty down.

CAPTAIN GORDON (CONT'D)
 (to Mafia John)
 Mind if I finish this match?

MAFIA JOHN
 No, sir. Softened him up for you.

Mafia John makes a clicking sound and points at Arty (i.e. "good luck") then walks off. Captain Gordon scans the board.

ARTY
 Your move, sir.

Captain Gordon takes one of Arty's pieces, not looking up.

CAPTAIN GORDON
 I heard about your little game of hide-and-go-seek. Nice try. You did postpone your court-martial.

Arty rolls his eyes and groans, but makes a move.

ARTY
 Kind of desperate to get out, sir.

CAPTAIN GORDON
 At least they can't tack on any time for your escape attempt. Six months maximum, either way.

ARTY
 Six months--that's six more chances for my mom to get thrown out on the street every time rent is up.

CAPTAIN GORDON
 That should earn you a few points with the court-martial panel.

ARTY
 (a beat)
 I was thinking she could tell them herself, sir.

Captain Gordon chuckles, raising his eyebrows.

CAPTAIN GORDON
 Good move.

CUT TO:

EXT. BUS STATION - LIBERTY, NY

Edie, wheezing, carries a heavy suitcase, but drops it near the open cargo hold of the bus.

EXT./INT. SHORTLINE BUS

Edie grabs the handrail and pulls herself up. She stumbles, but the Bus Driver puts an arm out to steady her.

BUS DRIVER
You all right?

EDIE
No. But thanks for asking.

Edie wobbles past him and collapses into a seat near the front. A couple more riders get on, then an attendant closes the door and the Bus Driver puts the bus in gear.

INT. SHORTLINE BUS

Edie looks out the window, her mind many miles away. The Bus Driver glances at her in the mirror.

BUS DRIVER
Where's your young man?

Edie shakes her head to clear it, paying attention now.

EDIE
Arty? He's trying to get out of the Army. You know him?

The Bus Driver shrugs.

BUS DRIVER
We've gotten acquainted. FBI came looking for him a while back.

EDIE
What did you say?

BUS DRIVER
Said I never saw the fella.

He chuckles. Edie smiles.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT DIX - COURTHOUSE - HALLWAY

Captain Gordon is seated with Edie, going over some papers. She's been crying.

CAPTAIN GORDON
Just like you told it to me, Mrs.
Finkelstein. Okay?

Edie nods curtly.

ARTY (O.S.)
Hey, Ma.

Edie sights Arty as he approaches, vaults out of her chair and goes to hug him. Captain Gordon rises.

CAPTAIN GORDON
Hello, Private. Ready to go?

ARTY
Ready and then some. Post-ready.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT DIX - COURTROOM

Arty's at a table with Captain Gordon. Edie's behind a railing. She reaches over it and pats Arty's shoulder--he gives her hand a reassuring squeeze.

At the front: lieutenants, a linebacker-sized black Fort Dix Captain, and a FORT DIX COLONEL. They shuffle papers and settle into their chairs.

FORT DIX COLONEL
Let's get this moving.
Prosecution, what have we got?

A PROSECUTING OFFICER stands up behind another table, halfway hidden by large file boxes, marked "Finkelstein, A., Pvt."

PROSECUTING OFFICER
Sir, as the--
(gestures to the boxes)
--lengthy record will show, the
accused has gone AWOL multiple
times and resisted all attempts to
rehabilitate him toward normal
duty. We ask for the regulation
six months.

The Fort Dix Colonel snorts.

FORT DIX COLONEL
Does the defense have any response?

Captain Gordon rises.

CAPTAIN GORDON
Yes, sir. The accused should not be under the jurisdiction of the Army, having been illegally drafted, and his family under great financial and medical hardship.

The Fort Dix Colonel closes his eyes, sighs, and massages the bridge of his nose.

FORT DIX COLONEL
This isn't going to be one of those open-and-shut cases, is it?

CAPTAIN GORDON
Not in the slightest, sir.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT DIX - COURTROOM - LATER

Edie slides into the witness stand. Captain Gordon stands in front of her. Everyone settles down, all eyes on Edie.

CAPTAIN GORDON
Would you please state your name?

EDIE
Edie Finkelstein.
(gestures for the letters)
E-D-I-E.

FORT DIX COLONEL
That's the easy part to spell.

This gets a few scattered chuckles--not from Arty, Edie or Captain Gordon--but the Fort Dix Colonel waves them down.

CAPTAIN GORDON
You're Arty's mother.

EDIE
Correct.

CAPTAIN GORDON
Can you tell us a little bit about your health condition?

EDIE

A little, hm. Past five years, three strokes--minor to middling, thank God. Heart attack had me down for a few months. Rheumatoid arthritis, not so easy to chase around after the kids.

CAPTAIN GORDON

You baby-sit?

EDIE

Brings in a little money. No-ways enough to live.

Captain Gordon turns toward Arty. The court-martial board is rapt with attention and concern.

CAPTAIN GORDON

What is it like with Arty gone away, and in the Army?

EDIE

I worry about Arty, for sure--but me, I just get so tired and hungry, and my heart beats out of my chest without the pills. I get so I'm just sure I'm gonna die.

Arty winces.

ARTY

Aw, mom. . .

CAPTAIN GORDON

Is it easier when you have Arty?

EDIE

God, yes. He always says, "Mom, what can I do for you today?" Medicine, groceries, the rent, he works 'til he falls over.

The big black Captain in the court-martial board, touched, wipes away a tear. Edie turns toward the board.

EDIE (CONT'D)

It's hard on him, but Arty buys me time. I don't have to hurt so bad, or worry I'll come home and find all my things on the curb.

She turns toward Arty and smiles warmly at him.

EDIE (CONT'D)

Why should he have to fight for the Army when he fights so hard for me?

Silence. The Fort Dix Colonel coughs, a little teary.

FORT DIX COLONEL

Prosecution--any questions?

The Prosecuting Officer looks down, ashamed.

PROSECUTING OFFICER

No, sir. I think that does it.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT DIX - ENTRANCE COURTYARD

Military traffic passes by--big black staff cars, jeeps, transports. An MP waves a yellow taxi up to the curb. Arty opens the door for Edie and she climbs in.

ARTY

Well, not guilty--but not out of the Army yet, either!

EDIE

I should have said more.

ARTY

You did great, Mom. I'll call you when I get reassigned.

EDIE

I hope I still have a phone.

ARTY

Chin up, mom. Love ya!

He kisses her goodbye through the open window.

EDIE

Love you too, Arty. To pieces and pieces.

The cab pulls away as he waves.

ARTY

Well, back to square one.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT DIX - REGULAR MILITARY BARRACKS

It's before dawn--soldiers asleep in their bunks. Arty is snoring up a storm. A nearby soldier creaks an eye open and rolls over, folding the pillow over his head.

Suddenly a hand reaches out and shakes Arty's shoulder. He startles awake and blinks, focusing on--CAPTAIN HOLDER, 40s, in full dress uniform, looking groggy and displeased.

ARTY

Sir? Captain, um--

He knuckles his forehead, trying to think of the name.

CAPTAIN HOLDER

--"Captain" is fine. Get dressed and let's get out--this is enough of a mess without waking half the company.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT DIX - MAIN ROAD - DAWN

One of the big black staff cars is rolling down the gravel road, no other activity in the early morning.

INT. CAPTAIN'S CAR

Arty and Captain Holder sit in the back, drinking coffee from paper cups as the driver wheels around the corner.

CAPTAIN HOLDER

Already pulled five ways from Sunday with this Congressional investigation on base...

Arty tilts his coffee, trying not to spill, but a little does splash onto Captain Holder's shoes. Captain Holder curses and bends to wipe them off as Arty cringes.

ARTY

Sorry, sir.

CAPTAIN HOLDER

Wasn't you.
 (to the driver)
 Don't whip it around like that!
 (to himself)
 What am I even doing out at this hour? Feel like an errand boy.

EXT. FORT DIX - HEADQUARTERS

The imposing three-story structure has a wide porch with columns. It radiates strength and authority.

The car pulls up. Captain Holder pops the door open, steps out, and straightens his uniform. Arty's right behind.

At the entrance, two HEADQUARTERS MPs snap to attention.

HEADQUARTERS MP 1
Sir, can I help you, sir?

CAPTAIN HOLDER
Captain Holder, here with Private Finkelstein--

HEADQUARTERS MP 2
--Major Hollingsworth is expecting you, sir. Go on through.

He holds one of the massive doors open, waving them inside.

INT. FORT DIX - HEADQUARTERS - RECEPTION AREA

There's a reception desk, hallways running in all directions. MAJOR HOLLINGSWORTH, 50s, strides over, hand out--for Arty.

Arty's eyes boggle. He salutes, then takes the hand and shakes it uncertainly.

MAJOR HOLLINGSWORTH
Glad to meet you, Private--your file precedes you.
(to Captain Holder)
Captain, thank you for delivering this young man, you can go.

Captain Holder bites his tongue, but salutes and turns away.

CAPTAIN HOLDER
(under his breath)
Yep, goddamned errand boy.

Major Hollingsworth and Arty walk deeper into the offices.

MAJOR HOLLINGSWORTH
Just come on in, your mom is here waiting to see you.

ARTY
(fading slightly)
Mom?

MAJOR HOLLINGSWORTH
 (fading slightly)
 Yes, as in "female parental unit".

CUT TO:

INT. FORT DIX - HEADQUARTERS - TYPING POOL

Arty and the Major walk past branching hallways, with near-identical doors. It sounds like an ocean of typewriters.

Lady civilian typists sit with piles of forms, typing away, ripping forms out of the typewriters and rolling more in.

MAJOR HOLLINGSWORTH
 Best stick close, or they'll find
 you in a file drawer burning
 transfer forms to keep warm.

One of the typists - reasonably attractive - looks up and winks. Arty lingers for a second.

ARTY
 Not a bad place to get lost.

MAJOR HOLLINGSWORTH
 Inter-office romance never works.
 Ah, almost there.

INT. FORT DIX - HEADQUARTERS - HIGH-RANK OFFICES

Fewer typewriters clacking away--and fewer desks, though they are much bigger, some with two and three telephones.

Some desks have maps spread out over them, covered in ominous weather-like patterns, illuminated by lamps on swing-arms.

Everyone at the desks is at least 40 years old, and definitely male. The Major leans in to whisper to Arty.

MAJOR HOLLINGSWORTH
 The bigger the desk, the bigger the
 ego.

Arty nods, enlightened. The Major opens another door.

INT. FORT DIX - HEADQUARTERS - GENERAL WRIGHT'S OFFICE

Three-star GENERAL WRIGHT is behind an enormous desk. Flanking him are overflowing boxes--Arty's personnel file.

Seated with a mug of coffee, chatting away with the General, is Edie. She positively glows with life and relief.

MAJOR HOLLINGSWORTH
General? Here he is.

General Wright rises from behind the desk, waving Arty in.

GENERAL WRIGHT
Private Finkelstein! Come right in.
(to Major Hollingsworth)
Thank you, Major.

MAJOR HOLLINGSWORTH
(nods and salutes)
Call if needed, sir.
(to Arty)
Good luck, kid.

He pats Arty's shoulder then backs out, shutting the door.

GENERAL WRIGHT
Son, sit down with your mom.

Arty takes a seat by Edie, who takes his hand and squeezes it, smirking like a schoolgirl with a secret.

GENERAL WRIGHT (CONT'D)
It looks like a big mistake has
been made here. We're going to get
you out of the Army.

Edie lets Arty's hand go and thrusts both of her own up in the air, whooping with delight.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT DIX - HEADQUARTERS - HIGH-RANK OFFICES

The Majors and Colonels turn to look, but shake their heads distractedly and turn back to their maps.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT DIX - HEADQUARTERS - GENERAL WRIGHT'S OFFICE

Edie covers her mouth, embarrassed. Arty nearly falls out of his chair, thunderstruck. Edie hugs him tight.

General Wright picks up the phone, dials, and waits a moment.

GENERAL WRIGHT
 Lieutenant Rexford is on the case,
 one of my best men. It'll take
 some time, but the worst is over.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT DIX - REGULAR MILITARY BARRACKS

The Passenger MP - from Arty's ride in the woods - lays his beloved bayonet in a padded case. No MP armband, no helmet. He shuts the case and puts it in a foot locker.

The Mess Hall MP, similarly attired, kicks the foot locker.

MESS HALL MP
 Bring anything else back from 'Nam?

PASSENGER MP
 Nope. Just that, and the case.

MESS HALL MP
 Yeah--a case of the clap.

PASSENGER MP
 Bite my ass.

Coming in the side door, spare uniform under one arm, is Arty. A TRANSFER COMPANY SERGEANT (TC SERGEANT) points out a bed. Arty nods--the TC Sergeant ducks back out the door.

The Passenger MP taps the Mess Hall MP on the shoulder.

PASSENGER MP (CONT'D)
 Hey, look what the cat coughed up--

The Mess Hall MP sneers with instant disgust.

MESS HALL MP
 Aw, hell no.

The MPs get up and stalk toward Arty, who is laying out his things and organizing his footlocker. They tower behind him--he feels their shadow and turns.

ARTY
 Oh. Hello, gentlemen.

PASSENGER MP
 Hello, Jew York. Looks like we get
 another bite at the Big Apple.

MESS HALL MP
What the Christ are you doing here?

ARTY
Same as you. Getting the hell out.

PASSENGER MP
Only way you're getting out of the
Army is in a body bag.

Footsteps approach--the TC Sergeant knocks on the door frame.

TC SERGEANT
Any trouble here?

MESS HALL MP
Just getting reacquainted.

TC SERGEANT
Pull any schoolyard shit and you
may find your stint in the Army
extended. *Comprende?*

The MPs put their hands up and back away from Arty. The TC Sergeant turns to Arty.

TC SERGEANT (CONT'D)
Lest you think I'm playing
favorites, you're up for K.P. duty,
new guy.

ARTY
Yes, Sergeant.

TC SERGEANT
God knows what they've been
stuffing down that sink. Well,
God, and shortly you.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT DIX - MESS HALL - KITCHEN

Arty, only his legs visible, is clanking around underneath the sink, dragging a large hose with him. A splorching, splattery sound ensues, and Arty retches with disgust.

ARTY (MOSTLY O.S.)
Oh, God, it's everywhere...

CUT TO:

INT. FORT DIX - OFFICE WAITING AREA

Arty, mostly cleaned, points at a door--"this one?" A female SECRETARY, on the phone at a desk, nods and waves him on.

INT. FORT DIX - LT. REXFORD'S OFFICE

At his desk, LT. REXFORD, 30s, is signing a stack of papers. A knock sounds at the door.

ARTY (O. S.)
Permission to enter, sir?

LT. REXFORD
Granted. Come on in.

Arty steps in. Lt. Rexford stands and shakes Arty's hand.

LT. REXFORD (CONT'D)
Ah, Private Finkelstein. Good to meet you. You're a special case.
(a beat)
What's that smell?

ARTY
Tried to get it all off, sir. How goes the paperwork?

Lt. Rexford tilts his hand--"so-so".

LT. REXFORD
Never as fast as we'd like it.

ARTY
Isn't that the truth.

LT. REXFORD
Mmm-hmm. I hear a few of the other men resent your upcoming discharge.

ARTY
To put it lightly.

LT. REXFORD
Well, you know what they say--out of sight, out of mind...

Lt. Rexford pats Arty's shoulder, then grimaces at his hand.

LT. REXFORD (CONT'D)
 Take a shower and get off the base
 for a while. Don't worry about
 curfew, I'll put the word out.

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT DIX - ENTRANCE COURTYARD - MP GATE

Arty walks past the gatehouse. The FORT DIX GATE MP is
 inside--he raises his eyebrows, whistles.

FORT DIX GATE MP
 Lucky devil. See you when you feel
 like it.

ARTY
 Huh. Word travels fast.

CUT TO:

INT. BAR

Arty leans on the bar, a couple of longneck empties in front
 of him, watching the basketball game on the TV above.

It's the Knicks vs. the Lakers. The Knicks score again--it
 looks like they've got it wrapped up.

ARTY
 Come on, Lakers, shut 'em down...

CUT TO:

INT. FORT DIX - LT. REXFORD'S OFFICE - WAITING AREA

Arty steps up to the desk--the Secretary folds her hands.

ARTY
 Hello. I'm here to see Lieutenant
 Rexford.

SECRETARY
 Oh, he's not in.

ARTY
 It's been all week--

SECRETARY

--yes, a bad week. They've been dragging him all over the base, some budget thing.

ARTY

Did he leave any paperwork for me? Anything I could sign, or take somewhere?

SECRETARY

Let me check.

She opens up a file drawer and flips through folders.

SECRETARY (CONT'D)

Eggleston, Evers, Ferris--ah, here 'tis. Oh, that's too bad.

ARTY

What?

SECRETARY

You don't have clearance for these. Spend any time in the stockade?

ARTY

Yes, cleared of all charges.

SECRETARY

It still sort of hangs around and gums up the works, sorry. Need someone ranked Specialist or higher to handle these for you.

Arty sighs and hangs his head.

ARTY

I'll have someone come by.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT DIX - MESS HALL

Arty flips a couple of bills off a small wad as a FORT DIX SPECIALIST grins and grabs them.

ARTY

Remember, Lieutenant Rexford's office.

FORT DIX SPECIALIST

Rockford, right.

ARTY
Well, this is off to a great start.

EXT. FORT DIX - STREET BETWEEN OFFICES

Arty glumly kicks along. The TC Sergeant sights him and waves him down, walking over with a look of great concern.

TC SERGEANT
Private! Private Finkelstein!

ARTY
Yes, Sergeant?

The TC Sergeant puts a hand on his shoulder, then grins.

TC SERGEANT
Grease trap.

INT. FORT DIX - MESS HALL - KITCHEN

Arty glares at the black recess beneath the sink, holding the grease disposal hose. He nods, tossing the hose aside.

ARTY
Screw it.

CUT TO:

INT. BAR

Arty's a few beers in again. He pounds a fist on the bar, making the peanuts dance in their dish.

ARTY
Come on, Lakers, make 'em work for it...

CUT TO:

INT. FORT DIX - REGULAR MILITARY BARRACKS - NIGHT

Arty sneaks past sleeping soldiers and slips into his bunk.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT DIX - MESS HALL

Arty sits by the Specialist, who is digging into chipped beef on toast.

FORT DIX SPECIALIST
I took the paper to like five different offices, some lady punched it with a rubber stamp, and put it in a tray.

ARTY
What did the stamp say?

FORT DIX SPECIALIST
I don't know, the lady told me to go away.

ARTY
Great, I'll end up transferred to Timbuktu.

With their own trays full of food, the Mess Hall MP and Passenger MP walk behind Arty and the Specialist.

MESS HALL MP
Heard you been skipping out on K.P. duty, Fink.

ARTY
Rumors. Dime a dozen.

PASSENGER MP
Don't know how you've been getting away with all this shit, but if you come back tonight, we'll shove you down that kitchen sink in pieces.

They walk on and sit down one row over--the Passenger MP sneers at Arty and makes a throat-cutting gesture.

FORT DIX SPECIALIST
(brightens)
Hey, I do remember what that stamp said. It said "Pending".

ARTY
Pending?

The Specialist nods. Arty rolls his eyes, groaning.

ARTY (CONT'D)
As in "impending doom..."

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT DIX - MESS HALL

Arty is stepping out the entrance door, when a jeep passes.

TC SERGEANT (O.S.)
Finkelstein!

Arty does an about-face to go back in. The jeep backs up and the TC Sergeant vaults out.

TC SERGEANT (CONT'D)
Stop right there!

Arty lets the door go and turns back, gritting his teeth.

ARTY
Grease trap again, Sergeant?

TC SERGEANT
No time. You're going over to
Sixteen-Trans to get processed out!

Arty grabs the TC Sergeant by his shirtsleeves.

ARTY
Right now?
(lets him go)
Sorry.

The TC Sergeant waves him off and clambers into the jeep.

TC SERGEANT
Want a three-day weekend with these
homicidal idiots?

ARTY
Not particularly!

TC SERGEANT
Then get in!

CUT TO:

EXT. SIXTEEN-TRANS OFFICE COMPLEX - HILLSIDE

The jeep pulls away, leaving Arty. He looks toward an office building at the top of the hill--its windows shine, American flag flapping from a pole by the entrance.

Clumps of soldiers, 60 or 70 total, sit on the curb, on the ground, against trees. SGT. REILLY, clipboard in hand, stalks around yelling names--he has a bit of an Irish brogue.

SGT. REILLY
Andrews? Corporal Andrews?

A soldier, CORPORAL ANDREWS, stands up.

CORPORAL ANDREWS
Here, Sergeant!

SGT. REILLY
Phil, or Steve?

CORPORAL ANDREWS
Steve.

SGT. REILLY
Sit back down, Steve.
(notices Arty)
Who we got back here?

ARTY
Private Arty Finkelstein.

Sgt. Reilly rolls his eyes.

SGT. REILLY
One of God's own chosen, eh? You
people wandered the desert for
forty years--this'll be a snap.
(moves on)
Phillips!

CUT TO:

EXT. SIXTEEN-TRANS OFFICE COMPLEX - HILLSIDE - LATER

Arty shields his eyes from the sun. Half of the soldiers are gone. Sgt. Reilly whistles--the soldiers gather round.

SGT. REILLY
They're gonna shuttle the bunch of
you down to the mess hall. No good
waiting on an empty stomach.

A WIT from back in the crowd speaks up, in a broad but decent imitation of Sgt. Reilly.

WIT (O.S.)
 "Jaysus, Mary, and Joseph, I could
 maider a baked patayto about now."

The tired crew get a chuckle from this. Sgt. Reilly whips out his clipboard and scribbles.

SGT. REILLY
 Corporal Witmer, was it? Back of
 the line you go.

The Wit, still off screen, groans in frustration. Sgt. Reilly looks up and grins at Arty.

SGT. REILLY (CONT'D)
 Right before this Yid with the
 unpronounceable name.

CUT TO:

INT. FORT DIX - MESS HALL

Arty eats a spoonful of glop, chewing it like cardboard.

MESS HALL MP (V.O.)
 (echo, from before)
 Got you now, you little shit.

PASSENGER MP (V.O.)
 (same)
 We'll shove you down that kitchen
 sink in pieces.

The MPs eye him murderously. Arty glares back.

CUT TO:

EXT. SIXTEEN-TRANS OFFICE COMPLEX - HILLSIDE - AFTERNOON

Arty waits at the bottom of the hill again, gritting his teeth in disgust. There are only five left in the group.

SGT. REILLY
 Richardson! Jiminez!

They rise and walk up the hill. Reilly checks his clipboard.

SGT. REILLY (CONT'D)
 Rinaldi! Witmer!

They go ahead. Sgt. Reilly flips through his notes.

SGT. REILLY (CONT'D)
Feebl --Fenster--

ARTY
Finkelstein?

SGT. REILLY
Yeah, that's it--ooh, too bad.
Coming up on five-o'clock.
(chuckles)
Looks like you're not going today.

He and Arty turn at the sound of motorcycle engines--

SGT. REILLY (CONT'D)
Ah, Christ, it's the bagel brigade.

SPECIALISTS GOLDBERG and ROTH (nametags shown in close ups) pull up on twin 'cycles. Roth's has a suitcase strapped to it. They kill the engines and put their kickstands down.

SPECIALIST GOLDBERG
Ah, Finkelstein. There you are,
we've been looking for you.

SPECIALIST ROTH
Let's go--us Jews gotta stick
together.

They clamp a hand each on Arty's shoulders and walk him up the hill. Sgt. Reilly, crestfallen, violently marks Arty's name off his clipboard.

CUT TO:

INT. SIXTEEN-TRANS OFFICE

The wheels of a wooden chair clatter along the linoleum, one unbalanced wheel spinning free.

Arty's in the chair, gripping its arms. The Specialists push him through a door to a desk. A CONFUSED CLERK is locking a file cabinet and eying the clock--five minutes 'til.

CONFUSED CLERK
We're closing--

SPECIALIST ROTH
--but not closed.

Specialist Goldberg whips a paper off a stack and sets it in front of Arty--Specialist Roth sets a pen in his hand.

SPECIALIST ROTH (CONT'D)
 (indicating on paper)
 Sign, DON'T sign, initial here.
 (to Confused Clerk)
 Tell him what the pink copy's for.

CONFUSED CLERK
 (scratches his head)
 We shred them.

SPECIALIST GOLDBERG
 Tax dollars at work, Finkelstein.
 Moving on.

The Specialists jerk Arty down the hall, still in the chair.

MONTAGE:

Arty in different offices, papers in his arms.

SPECIALIST ROTH (O. S.)
 Stapled, not clipped.

SPECIALIST GOLDBERG (O. S.)
 Three copies.

SPECIALIST ROTH
 Here's your final pay.

SPECIALIST GOLDBERG
 (takes back a form)
 Oops, wrong "Arty Finkelstein."
 This one's from Louisville.

ARTY
 There's more than one?

END MONTAGE.

By two big doors, the clock says one minute to five. The Specialists wheel Arty to the doors and heft him to his feet.

SPECIALIST GOLDBERG
 Here you go. Personal effects--
 took the liberty.

He hands Arty a suitcase.

SPECIALIST ROTH
 You're out! *L'chaim!*

SPECIALIST GOLDBERG
And happy birthday!

ARTY
Birth... hey, you're right!

They open the doors and gently shove Arty through. He turns around, dazed.

ARTY (CONT'D)
Thank you, gentlemen.

SPECIALIST ROTH
(points)
Get back home to your mom.

Far off down the hill is a silver Greyhound bus, sitting in the entrance courtyard. They're packing the cargo hold.

SPECIALIST GOLDBERG
Go on, put this bullshit in the
rearview mirror! Run!

CUT TO:

EXT. FORT DIX - ENTRANCE COURTYARD

Arty bolts for the bus--they're just about to close the hold. He drops his suitcase off and flies up the steps.

INT. GREYHOUND BUS

Arty sits. The Greyhound Driver turns around, chuckling.

GREYHOUND DRIVER
Cutting it close, kid. Where to?

ARTY
Liberty. And freedom.

CUT TO:

EXT. LIBERTY APARTMENT

Arty bounces up to the door. He's in civilian clothes. He has the suitcase in one hand, and his uniform over his shoulder in a clear dry cleaner's bag.

He knocks, and Edie opens the door. She gasps and throws her arms around him. She pulls back and looks him in the eye.

EDIE
It's over? Dear God, is it over?

Arty holds out the uniform in its bag, nodding.

ARTY
This can go into mothballs.
(a beat)
Ehh, the moths can have it.

Edie bursts out laughing, but cries too, sobbing on Arty's shoulder. He puts down the suitcase and pats her hair.

INT. LIBERTY APARTMENT - ARTY'S BEDROOM

Arty hangs up the uniform in the open closet. He shuts the door and ogles Raquel for a moment.

ARTY
Well, Raquel, as uniforms go, that one isn't very practical, but it's nice to look at. Rrrrawr!

EXT. LIBERTY APARTMENT - MORNING

Arty grabs a wad of mail out of the mailbox, shuts it, and turns toward the house, sorting through it.

INT. LIBERTY APARTMENT - KITCHEN

Edie is making breakfast--new groceries are halfway put up; the shelves are re-stocked to the point of overkill.

ARTY
Bills, it never ends--ooh.

He frowns and turns over a letter, holding it up. It's obviously from the Army. He rips into it and unfolds it.

EDIE
More Army mail? What do they want?

Arty holds up a finger, reading silently. His eyes widen--

ARTY
They want me to spend four years in the Reserves!

EDIE
That nice man General Wright said over and done!

ARTY
I believe him. But I've got to go
to the draft board in frickin'
Monticello to fix this.

Edie shudders with disgust.

EDIE
I just hope you don't run into Woda
over there.

ARTY
Woda? He started this mess! I'd
probably cold-cock the bastard.

EDIE
That's what I mean. Why should you
have all the fun?

This gets a chuckle from Arty.

CUT TO:

EXT. MONTICELLO, NY - GOVERNMENT OFFICES

Another institutional brick building, with a big American
flag, and bushes lining the sidewalks underneath the windows.

INT. MONTICELLO, NY - GOVERNMENT OFFICES - HALLWAY

Arty trudges along, an "accordion" folder tucked under his
arm, full of papers. Two greying men in serious grey suits--
Draft Board Members 1 and 2--pass Arty but turn back.

ARTY
Room Thirty-Two-B... Thirty
Two... B...

Member 1 points out Arty, Member 2 nods, and they hurry to
catch up with him. Arty pauses.

MEMBER 1
Finkelstein? Arty Finkelstein?

ARTY
Who's asking, if you don't mind?

MEMBER 1
Not at all. My name is Stevens,
this is Peterson--

Arty sticks his hand out and Member 2 shakes it with both hands, grimacing.

MEMBER 2
I'm so, so sorry.

ARTY
For...

MEMBER 1
Your hardship case came up, must be a year ago. Tried to keep you out.

MEMBER 2
Didn't matter. Woda--

Member 1 looks around and put a finger to his lips.

MEMBER 1
Shh!

MEMBER 2
(quieter)
Edward Woda, he's head of the draft board--

ARTY
(i c i l y)
--I know who he is.

MEMBER 2
He made some threats and pushed you through. Never seen him so mad. What are you doing here?

ARTY
Trying to stay out of the Army. Out of the Reserves, anyway.

The Draft Board Members brighten, sighing with relief.

MEMBER 1
Well, we can certainly put in a good word for you.

Up the hall, someone opens a door--the Members and Arty cringe, but it's just a secretary wheeling a file cart.

MEMBER 2
A nice, quiet word.

CUT TO:

EXT. LIBERTY APARTMENT

Arty opens the mailbox--bills, but also a large envelope. Arty rips into it and peers inside--he grins from ear to ear.

INT. LIBERTY APARTMENT

A couple of bangs from a hammer, then Arty steps back, Edie right beside him. She clasps her hands together in delight.

In a scrollwork frame is an official government document:

GENERAL DISCHARGE

Under Honorable Conditions

from the Armed Forces of the United States of America

Arty sets aside the hammer and wipes his hands showily. Edie hugs him, putting her head on his shoulder.

Arty frowns, and glances at his watch--he kisses Edie on the cheek, and snags a name tag off the bulletin board. He heads out the door, waving as Edie sighs and waves back.

CUT TO:

EXT. MOUNTAIN HIGHWAY

The sun goes down, beyond the forested hills.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY APARTMENT - NIGHT

Arty steps inside, taking off his name tag and sticking it back on the bulletin board. He grabs another name tag.

ARTY
Mom, I'm home! Just for a second,
though! Mom?

He walks toward the kitchen to check, pinning on the new tag.

INT. LIBERTY APARTMENT - KITCHEN

Edie's set up some dishes to wash, but hasn't made much of a dent. She's sitting at the table, pale and sweaty.

ARTY

Aw, mom, you're overdoing it again.

Edie shakes her head violently.

EDIE

Everything just sort of caught up with me, Arty.

She leans forward toward him.

EDIE (CONT'D)

I could have lost you!

She tears up, then begins to shake, sobbing. She covers her eyes and Arty holds her as she cries against him.

EDIE (CONT'D)

I could have.

ARTY

Shh, mom, it's all right, it was a nightmare, but now it's over.

She breaks loose from him, and pounds a fist on the table.

EDIE

No.

Not pale now. Blood flowing into her cheeks. She seems to harden, gritting her teeth, muscles bunching in her arms.

Arty takes a step back.

ARTY

Mom, don't. Not again.

EDIE

A curse on that man Woda.

Arty winces.

EDIE (CONT'D)

A curse on him, for what he did to you. For what he did to us.

Arty waves her off.

ARTY

Mom, you're not like other moms, your curses work--

CUT TO:

INT. WELFARE OFFICE - FLASHBACK

Edie's seated in front of a desk. Behind the desk, a LARGE BLACK WOMAN at a typewriter looks down her nose at Edie.

EDIE

If there were any other way, I
wouldn't go on welfare.

The Large Black Woman snorts, hitting a key for punctuation.

LARGE BLACK WOMAN

Well, you could go ahead and die.

EDIE

Excuse me?

LARGE BLACK WOMAN

Some people go to work--you just
hang around and suck our blood.
Better for everybody if you just
shriveled up and died.

Edie sets her jaw, gripping the armrests hard enough to leave marks. She becomes PRESENT like she did in the kitchen.

EDIE

A curse on you for thinking that.

The Large Black Woman looks back coolly, unperturbed.

CUT TO:

EXT. LIBERTY STREETS - INTERSECTION

The Large Black Woman, in her smallish car, stops at a red light. She drums her fingers impatiently on the steering wheel, retrieves a lipstick and touches hers up.

Green light--she puts down the lipstick and moves ahead.

A semi-truck, horn blaring, comes in from the side and OBLITERATES the car.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY APARTMENT - KITCHEN

Arty rakes his fingers down his cheeks.

ARTY

You have a way of willing these things to happen. Are you sure?

EDIE

Sure as I've ever been. I hope, and I pray, and I ask, that Woda feels the pain and suffering he brought down on us.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY APARTMENT – EDIE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Edie tosses and turns, mumbling in her sleep, clutching a pillow to the top of her head.

EDIE

Arty--put on your helmet, Arty--

EXT. MOUNTAIN HIGHWAY - NIGHT

A lone headlight picks its way across the tree-lined landscape, headed for a tunnel entrance.

INT. MOUNTAIN HIGHWAY TUNNEL - NIGHT

A motorcycle dashes along, its rider only seen from behind, in the glare of the tunnel floodlights as they strobe past.

A tanker truck coming the other way begins to weave, its bleary-eyed driver nodding off.

It clips the side of the tunnel and the driver jerks awake, yanking at the wheel as the truck slides across both lanes.

The motorcycle rider swerves but the bike goes sideways--he slams against the truck in an explosion of chrome and limbs.

CUT TO:

INT. WODA'S HOUSE - BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

In a king-size bed, Woda is sleeping peacefully. His wife, 50s and plain, is rolled onto her side, facing away from him.

The phone rings--an ornate, frilly thing Woda probably didn't pick out. He squints, rolls over, and picks it up.

WODA
 (i nto phone)
 Christ, i t' s early. Somebody
 better be d--

An i ndi sti nct voice comes from the phone. Woda' s squi nt
 turns i nto attenti on, then concern, then abject fear. Hi s
 wi fe wakes, and puts a questi oni ng hand on hi s shoul der.

WODA (CONT' D)
 (i nto phone)
 Al an? Why? Yes, he ri des a--
 They' re sure?

Woda seems to crumbl e, sobbi ng. Coveri ng hi s face, he l ets
 the receiver drop, and i t clatters to the floor.

CUT TO:

INT. LIBERTY APARTMENT – KITCHEN – MORNING

Arty, standi ng i n hi s pajamas, sets a full coffee mug on the
 table. He unrol ls the morni ng paper and l ays i t fl at.

Something on the paper catches hi s eye and he l eans over the
 table, braci ng hi msel f wi th both arms, sloshi ng coffee.

There' s a photo of a mangl ed motorcycle and tanker truck--the
 biker' s boots stick out from under a sheet. The headline:
 "SON OF LOCAL DRAFT BOARD MEMBER KILLED".

Arty grabs the paper, and stumbles out of the ki tchen.

ARTY
 Mom? Mom!

INT. LIBERTY APARTMENT

Edi e i s closi ng her bedroom door, stretchi ng and yawni ng.
 Arty rushes up, tappi ng the paper.

ARTY
 (i ci l y)
 Look. Your ai m i s a l i ttle off.

Edi e l eans i n to read, and wi nces.

EDI E
 Oh, Arty. I woul dn' t have wi shed
 thi s on hi m. Anythi ng but thi s.

ARTY

What did you want, then?

EDIE

I don't know. I guess I wanted the universe to push back a little.

(a beat)

Maybe next time he sends someone else's son off to war, he sees his own son's face. God willing.

CUT TO:

EXT. CEMETERY

Woda, his wife, and relations sit grave-side in the rain as a Preacher intones old words over a coffin. Woda looks like he's been kicked in the gut, except it doesn't go away.

EXT. CEMETERY - ROAD

Woda and his wife, stumbling and unseeing, climb into the dark blue Lincoln Continental, and Woda starts it up. It hits a pothole in the road, splattering the car with mud.

CUT TO:

EXT. LIBERTY CAR WASH - MORNING

Arty, drenched, is washing Woda's car with a sponge and a bucket full of soapy water. Woda is nowhere to be seen.

ARTY

(sing-song, to himself)

If I didn't need the money, I'd slash your tires...

A beat-up VW mini-bus with huge peace sign and flower decals pulls up. It's hard to make out the color under the mud.

The driver, SALLY, honks and leans out to wave. Flower in her hair, fringed jacket, woven headband, the works.

Arty looks up.

ARTY (CONT'D)

Hey, Sally! I'd wash your car but it would spoil the effect.

SALLY
No time. Headed to a concert over
in Bethel.

She digs under the seat and hands Arty a crumpled flyer. Arty
wipes his hands and takes it. The logo is familiar--a hand
clutching a guitar neck, a bird perched next to it.

ARTY
Why is it called Woodstock if it
isn't in Woodstock?

SALLY
Beats me. Might be fun, there are
a couple of good bands.

Arty jerks a thumb back over his shoulder.

ARTY
Sorry. Got work to do.

SALLY
Always more work, right?

PASSENGER
Come on, radio says the roads are
backing up.

SALLY
Later, Arty. Remember to live a
little!

She puts the van in gear and pulls away. Arty waves, turns
back to the car, and plunges his sponge back into the bucket.

FADE TO:

WHITE TEXT ON BLACK:

With Arty's help, Edie lived another five years.

In 1973, the Case-Church Amendment, passed by Congress,
withdrew U.S. forces from Vietnam. Two years later, Saigon
fell, and the war was over.

Arty moved to California, where he lives and works...

...and works...

...and works.

THE END