

A SOLDIER'S SON

FADE IN

BLUE SKY. A RED FRISBEE SPINS SLOWLY THROUGH THE AIR

FADE TO DARK

SOUND OF HELICOPTER

EXT. CHOPPER FLYING OVER JUNGLE, MOUNTAINS, VIETNAM - NIGHT

A Marine Huey gunship fights through pounding rain. Lightning flashes, wind blows. Chopper fires rockets and machine guns with red tracers toward flashes in the jungle.

INT. CHOPPER - NIGHT

Door Gunner fires a mounted M-60 machine gun. Four Marines are dressed for combat holding rifles, shirtsleeves rolled up, bush covers on. Flashes light up their faces. Jaws tight, faces covered with green camouflage paint and beads of sweat. The CREW CHIEF stumbles toward them from the cockpit, arms braced against the side of the walls. He's wearing a flight helmet with the visor flipped up. He has to shout.

CREW CHIEF

The General's chopper went down.
Your guys are getting their ass
kicked!

MIKE KELLY is the young squad leader, cocky, strong, powerfully built, wearing a .45 shoulder holster. He has a tattoo of a Marine Corps Bulldog on his right forearm.

MIKE

(shouting)
I can't hear you!

CREW CHIEF

(shouting)
Your fire base is being overrun!
There's no place to land. We have
to turn back.

MIKE

(shouting, thumping chest)
Are you crazy? We're recon baby!
We'll jump outta this piece ah
shit.

Mike reaches across aisle, bumps fists with PJ. PJ chews tobacco and spits. He is short, stocky, confident and Mike's best buddy. The other two Marines are STONER and PADRE, both are scared shitless.

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MIKE (CONT' D)
Stoner. Padre. Wake the fuck up!

He laughs, the others look stunned.

MIKE (CONT' D)
Grab your socks and cocks and let's
roll!

Chopper takes a big hit, engine misfires, door gunner shot through the head, falls out the door, hanging by his safety harness. Chopper starts spinning.

CREW CHIEF
Jesus! We're going down!

Panic, desperation as bodies fly. Mike, knocked flat, one hand holding hard to the web seat. Stoner, frantically grasps at Mike's hand, shirt, legs, is ripped out the door.

EXT. JUNGLE - NIGHT

Chopper breaks through trees.

SOUND OF THUNDER

Parachute flares drift and burn, rain, flashes of lightning.

EXT. JUNGLE CRASH SITE - NIGHT

Chopper has crashed in thick mountainous jungle, broken in half, rotors in the trees, fuselage busted up, resting a few feet from the ground.

Stoner is dead, hanging in a tree. From the nose of the chopper the glass bubble is cracked by pilot's head shooting through the window. Copilot is strapped in, dead, face destroyed. Door Gunner still hanging out the door.

SOUND OF WHISTLE (O. S.)

EXT. JUNGLE NEARBY - NIGHT

A small group of enemy soldiers talk. One blows a whistle, another points. They look for the chopper.

EXT. CRASH SCENE - NIGHT

Mike in a tangle of jungle. Bush cover gone, rifle missing, backpack intact. He slowly attempts to stand, his face cut, scraped, bloody. A small branch has pierced his hand.

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He takes his K-bar, strapped to his leg, trims the branch and with great effort pulls the branch from his hand. He takes a battle dressing from his pocket, tears it open with his teeth, wraps hand. Feels for his .45.

Mike sees Gunner swing from harness, Stoner in the tree, PJ pulling himself out the chopper door. He limps to PJ and helps him out. PJ clenches his arm. Mike sees bone tearing through PJ's arm, searches PJ's pockets.

MIKE
(whispering)
Where's your battle dressing?

PJ
I forgot the motherfucker.

WHISTLE BLOWS (O. S.)

Mike and PJ alert. Mike looks inside chopper, sees Padre and crew chief, lifeless. He grabs a rifle, slings it over his shoulder, puts an arm around PJ and they limp off into the jungle.

MIKE
Shit! The radio.

Mike sets PJ down against a tree, frantically hurries back toward the chopper, climbs inside.

INT. CHOPPER - NIGHT

Mike rolls the crew chief off Padre, lifts Padre to a sitting position, pulls off the radio backpack. As he sets him down a flash of lightning lights their faces. Padre's eyes open, lock on Mike.

PADRE
Help me.

INT. KELLY FAMILY HOUSE BEDROOM - NIGHT (PRESENT DAY)

Mike Kelly, now fifty-six, sits up in bed, eyes wide, more angry than terrified. He is still strong like an aged athlete. The room is dark. Next to him is his wife, CLAIRE, mid-fifties, the years have been kind to her. She loves Mike but is weary from dealing with Mike's pain.

The moon shines through the French doors and lights Mike's face. The clock on his dresser reads almost 3:00 a.m. He lies back, sweating, breathing hard.

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3:30 a.m. He punches his pillow, lies on his side, eyes wide, facing the clock. Claire reaches out, touches the side of his face. Touches his head. Mike's eyes close.

INT. BEDROOM - DAWN

ALARM CLOCK SOUNDS

TITLES ROLL

Mike shuts off alarm, turns lamp on on the nightstand. His bulldog tattoo has faded, caught in the light.

Claire stirs.

On the nightstand is a manuscript titled, "The Sharecropper's Wife," a novel by Mike Kelly. He gets up wearing only boxers, his knees crack and he rubs his back. He moves like a broken down cowboy toward the bathroom door.

INT. BATHROOM - DAWN

Mike flips on the light, splashes his face and takes several kinds of medicine. A baseball glove's on the counter.

INT. BEDROOM - DAWN

Mike sits on bed, turns on TV with remote.

TV ANNOUNCER (O.S.)

This morning another US helicopter was shot down outside Baghdad. The crew of four is missing. Today marks the sixth month of the war.

TV shows footage of mangled wreckage.

CLAIRE

Mike. I'm trying to sleep.

Mike shuts off TV. Slips on Hawaiian shirt, shorts, exits room.

INT. HALLWAY KELLY FAMILY HOME, SAME TIME - DAWN

Mike KNOCKS on JAKE'S door.

MIKE

Jake. Let's roll.

Mike KNOCKS again.

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MIKE (CONT' D)

Jake, it's time to hit.

JAKE (O. S.)

Leave me alone. I'm tired.

Mike opens the door, flips on the light.

MIKE

Come on, pal!

INT. JAKE'S BEDROOM - DAY

Typical teenage room, clothes on the floor, bed a mess, posters of hot babes and baseball players. A cardboard cut out of Superman. On the wall above his desk is a picture of Jake as a small boy holding his father's hand, standing at the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC.

Jake's still in bed.

JAKE

You didn't even tell me about this.

MIKE

I forgot. Quit being a puss. You want to be all-state?

JAKE

No.

Mike pulls the covers off.

MIKE

Let's go. I'm not spending sixty bucks for you to lie in bed.

Jake gets out of bed, wearing boxers and a wife-beater. He's handsome and ripped.

JAKE

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

EXT. BIRD'S-EYE VIEW OF KELLY FAMILY LAKESIDE HOME - MORNING

EXT. KELLY FAMILY HOME DRIVEWAY - MORNING

Basketball hoop on the front of the garage. SUV with "Veterans for Bush" bumper sticker is parked in driveway. Mike and Jake walk to the truck. Jake carries his baseball bag. Mike carries a can of diet cola. Jake throws an arm around his dad and playfully wrestles him toward the car.

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JAKE
You're limping, old man. You're getting soft.

MIKE
You'll think I'm getting soft when I rip off your arm and beat you over the head with it.

JAKE
Keep dreaming, old timer.

Jake punches his dad in the arm and runs around to the other side of the car, laughing.

JAKE (CONT' D)
I'm too fast for ya, Pops.

Mike smiles.

INT. /EXT. MIKE'S SUV/FREEWAY - DAY

Mike drives, Jake lies back in his seat and closes his eyes.

EXT. GRAND SLAM SPORTS BUILDING - DAY

Their SUV pulls up to a tired warehouse with a faded baseball player drawn on the front of the building. Baseball memorabilia lines a picture window along with a hand-painted sign: "For private baseball lessons call Randy"

INT. GRAND SLAM SPORTS - DAY

More baseball memorabilia. Batting nets hang from the ceiling, a couple pitching screens, a few scattered chairs.

The room is empty except for Mike, Jake and RANDY. Randy looks like a coach, trim, baseball hat. He's friendly but professional. Jake is in full catchers gear, squatting.

RANDY
OK Jake. Bases are juiced. You can't let anything by.

Randy tosses a ball to the side and Jake makes a great effort and blocks it.

RANDY (CONT' D)
That's it, Jake. Way to slide into the ball. Perfect!

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Mike sits in a green plastic chair outside the netting, drinking his diet cola with an anxious look. Jake misses the next block. Mike's up at the net.

MIKE

Jesus, Jake, keep that chin tucked.

Jake shoots Mike a hard look. Mike shrugs.

RANDY

Let's hit.

Jake pulls off gear, picks up bat, walks to the plate.

Mike grabs a bat. Makes a stance.

MIKE

Son. Why don't you spread out and try...

JAKE

Dad!

Mike paces. Randy stands behind a pitching screen and throws pitches as Jake takes his cuts.

RANDY

Nice. Little more hip and throw the hands. You gotta trust your hands.

Jake racks the ball. Every pitch is a line drive.

EXT. GRAND SLAM BUILDING - DAY

Mike and Jake walk to the SUV, Randy hurries to catch them.

RANDY

He looked good. Real good. Say Mike, my wife just read your book and...

Mike takes the book and signs.

MIKE

No problem. Glad to.

RANDY

To Sherry. Two R's and a Y.

Jake hops in SUV, visibly pissed.

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MIKE

I'll get Jake down here this weekend and we'll work him real hard.

INT. SUV - DAY

Mike and Jake drive home. Jake is upset.

MIKE

You looked great, but I'm telling you if you widen your stance...

JAKE

(punches dashboard)
Stop it! I'm sick of you running my life.

MIKE

(firing back)
I'm not trying to run your life. But if you don't bust ass you'll never play in college.

JAKE

Like I care.

MIKE

Don't give me that crap. I'm just trying to help.

JAKE

I'm eighteen. I don't need your help.

Jake is silent, arms crossed, head turned, staring out the side window, shaking his head.

EXT. KELLY HOUSE - DAY

The SUV pulls up, Jake jumps out, grabs his gear, slams the door and rushes in the kitchen door, slamming it on his way. Mike follows.

INT. KELLY HOUSE BEDROOM - DAY

The room is big with high ceilings and tall windows and French doors looking out on the lake. Mike puts on his tie, Claire is in leotards on the floor doing yoga. Classical music plays on the stereo, Mike turns it off.

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CLAIRE

Hey!

Mike looks at Claire who is now on her hands and knees.

MIKE

Downward dog, right?

Claire ignores him. Mike turns on TV, flips channels to war in Iraq, sits on the bed.

TV ANNOUNCER

More bloodshed in Iraq. Elements of the Third Marines attacked insurgents barricaded ...

Claire gets up and shuts off the TV.

MIKE

Claire, this is important.

CLAIRE

I know. I know. If we don't stop Islamic terrorists, they'll be over here. Will you give it a rest? They'll still be blowing things up when you get to work.

Mike gives her a look, picks up newspaper on bed, reads. Claire resumes stretches.

CLAIRE (CONT'D)

Heard the door slamming. You giving Jake advice again?

MIKE

If he worked harder he could play in college.

CLAIRE

Let it go. Let it be his dream. Did you talk to Glen about taking a vacation. Mike!

Mike looks up from newspaper.

MIKE

I forgot.

Claire frowns, does back stretches.

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CLAIRE

I'm going to see Mom this morning.
And talk to hospice. I'll put a
roast in the crock pot.

Mike stands, slips on coat, looks in mirror. He has a look of success.

CLAIRE (CONT' D)

Then I've got a luncheon with the
school board. Then my first belly
dancing class.

MIKE

I'm going to like that.

Mike does a little movement with his arms and hips, sliding to put an arm around Claire. This pleases her.

CLAIRE

You're thinking hula, big dog.

She pokes his stomach.

CLAIRE (CONT' D)

It's all in the belly.

MIKE

(smiling)
Right.

Claire fixes Mike's tie.

CLAIRE

Remember, I set another appointment
for you at the VA today. You've got
to go. You can't just write about
it.

MIKE

I know. I'll go. I will. I promise.

He kisses her and slaps her rump.

INT. KELLY KITCHEN - DAY

Jake sits down at table. Jake's friends LITTLE B, GRIFF and MEGS are also sitting at the table eating cereal. Claire's pouring OJ, Mike's at the sink, briefcase in hand, drinking a diet cola.

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