

FADE IN:

The SOUNDS OF WAR: MACHINE-GUN BLASTS, SCREAMS, ROCKETS, TANK TRACKS, HELICOPTERS, and EXPLOSIONS are heard over a BLACK SCREEN. The sounds MORPH into...

INT. VA HOSPITAL - MORNING

...the steady HUM of a BLINKING fluorescent bulb, located above the Veterans Affairs Benefits Approval office. There is only one MAN in the waiting room, a 30ish guy wearing an Army hooded sweatshirt and jeans, a bottle of water in his hand.

Entering the waiting area is VA administrator MISS EVANS, a no-nonsense, no-mercy bureaucrat.

MISS EVANS

Chris Risner!

CHRIS RISNER jolts violently awake at the sound of his name, nearly spilling his water.

CHRIS

Yes.

MISS EVANS

Come on.

He follows her down the hallway to a simple office and sits down. Chris scans the abundance of PHOTOS of Miss Evans's SON situated on the desk and bookshelves. She opens a FILE and looks it over quickly.

MISS EVANS

So, let's see...you're asking for more counseling, Mr. Risner?

He nods his head "yes".

MISS EVANS

I don't understand. You successfully completed the four counseling sessions you were approved for.

CHRIS

I think I need to talk to someone more. I've been having a lot of problems...

MISS EVANS

Have you been taking your anti-depressants?

CHRIS

I don't believe in pills. I mean, I think they do more harm to your body...

MISS EVANS

Well, right there's the problem! If you don't follow your treatment plan, how do you expect to get better?

Chris dips his head in defeat. It's hard to fight for anything anymore.

CHRIS

Listen, I'm really asking, or hoping, to get screened for PTSD. I know some others who feel like I do and that's what the doctors told them.

MISS EVANS

So now you've diagnosed yourself with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Chris keeps looking at the floor. Miss Evans glances up from the file and looks him over good for the first time. Her expression softens just a bit.

MISS EVANS

Listen honey - just between you and me - you can thank that Man in the White House for making this so difficult.

She leans back in her chair.

MISS EVANS

This year's VA budget...

(she SIGHS)

We can only afford screening about half you guys coming back from Iraq.

Chris looks at her intently.

CHRIS

It's just, you know, I really find myself drifting sometimes.

He sits up on the edge of his chair and takes a drink of water.

CHRIS
Like yesterday, on my way back from seeing my family, there was this school bus pulled over on the side of the road, right?

She nods in agreement.

CHRIS
Well, I almost hit a car head-on trying to get away from it.

MISS EVANS
Why?

CHRIS
I thought it mighta been an IED.

MISS EVANS
IED?

CHRIS
Roadside bomb.

MISS EVANS
Oh...

CHRIS
I saw them use a bus like that once before. It killed our First Sergeant.

He pauses for a second or two, remembering the man's face.

CHRIS
He was my 11th grade History teacher, can you believe that?

MISS EVANS
I'm sorry.

Chris just shakes his head back and forth.

CHRIS
It's like, you know, my paranoia, that was so bad over there...it hasn't gone away. I see faces downtown, people in windows, I can't stand crowds...

MISS EVANS
You need to adhere to your prescriptions.
(MORE)

MISS EVANS (cont'd)
 Until you do that, I can't justify
 ordering a screening yet. I'm
 sorry, Mr. Risner. Take your meds.

He remains expressionless.

MISS EVANS
 Does your employer have benefits?
 You might want to check out that
 route. I'm sorry.

He seems to accept that.

CHRIS
 Well, thanks for listening for
 awhile anyway.

She looks at him queerly, not expecting a thank you, as he gets up and heads out the door.

INT. CHRIS'S HOUSE/BATHROOM - AFTERNOON

CLOSE-UP on a MILITARY TATTOO inked on Chris's right bicep, as he shaves in the bathroom mirror. He is slow and methodical in his work. MELANCHOLY MUSIC plays softly in the bedroom.

The phone RINGS, causing him to drop the razor. He checks caller ID and answers his cell phone. It is his estranged wife, RAQUEL.

CHRIS
 Hi, baby. How are the kids?

RAQUEL (V.O.)
 They're fine. They miss you.

CHRIS
 Really? What about you?

Silence.

RAQUEL (V.O.)
 Did you go to the VA?

CHRIS
 Yeah. No help.

RAQUEL (V.O.)
 Did you tell them you weren't
 taking your prescriptions?

CHRIS
 Yes.

RAQUEL (V. 0.)
Did you tell them you were smoking
pot instead?

CHRIS
Raquel, we've talked about this a
thousand times. You know it's the
only thing that really helps me
relax.

He closes a BAGGIE of WEED that is now seen laid out on the
sink counter and puts it in a drawer.

RAQUEL (V. 0.)
I don't want our kids around it!
What would you tell them if you get
arrested some day coming back from
Jacob's?
(beat)
They think you're a hero, for God's
sake.

Chris bites the emotion back.

CHRIS
When will you come home, baby? I
need ya'll here...

RAQUEL (V. 0.)
Throw away that shit and start
taking the prescriptions. I'll
start thinking about it then.

CHRIS
Those pills make me feel even
worse, but...
(beat)
...I miss you. I missed you so much
over there, I promised myself we'd
never be apart again.

Silence again.

RAQUEL (V. 0.)
Chris, I love you and there's
nothing more I want than to be
together again. But, you have to
get some help.
(beat)
You're not the same person you
were.

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