

SODAMAN

MEGA
SODA CORP



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FADE IN:

EXT. KENTUCKY BACK ROAD - MORNING - MAY 1965

A long stretch of rural dirt road.

Wind moves through tall grass.

Dust devils wander across the road like brief spirits.

PAUL TURNER (17) emerges through the drifting dust - barefoot,
sun-burned, deliberate.

He carries a wooden crate filled with mismatched glass bottles of
homemade soda.

Handwritten labels:

PEP

PEPSI

POP

ZEST

IS PEP

ZIP

BAM

A small squirrel rides his shoulder, cracking a black walnut with
quiet precision.

Paul wears faded yellow overalls, torn at the knees, held by brightly
colored suspenders he snaps absently as he walks.

He stops.

Listens.

A faint rumble rolls beyond the hills.

Not thunder.

The sound fades.....then returns.

He keeps walking.

A battered 1960 pickup rattles up beside him, muffler roaring.

The DRIVER leans out over the noise.

DRIVER

You sellin' those?

PAUL

No.

DRIVER

Then why make 'em?

Paul studies the man – unperturbed.

PAUL

People get thirsty.

He offers a bottle.

The driver doesn't take it.

DRIVER

You makin' money?

PAUL

No.

DRIVER

Then what's the point?

Paul grips the bottle tighter. A small muscle flexes in his forearm.

PAUL

Most things don't need one.

A beat.

PAUL

You drink it. Then you decide what it's worth.

The driver finally takes the bottle. Turns it in his hand.

HANDWRITTEN LABEL: PEPSI

He flips it upside down.

Still reads.

The driver looks back at Paul — unsettled.

DRIVER

You ain't gonna get far thinkin' like that.

PAUL

Maybe I ain't goin' far.

The driver studies him, unsure what he's encountered.

He hands the bottle back and drives off.

Paul tries to re-snap his cloth suspenders. It slips.

He smirks at himself.

A discarded newspaper tumbles past Paul's feet:

U.S. TROOPS DEPLOYED TO VIETNAM

It flips:

KENTUCKY DERBY WINNER CROWNED: LUCKY DIABLO.

Paul doesn't chase it.

He keeps walking.

He turns the bottle in his hand.

PEP.

He lifts another.

IS PEP.

He studies the symmetry.

A faint whisper to himself:

PAUL

Pepsi is pep... forward. Backward...the
same.

A flicker of a smile.

He continues down the road toward a wide field of young green growth.

EXT. BARREN FIELD - DAY

Paul straps up a HORSE and begins plowing dry earth.

Paul leans into the plow, a rhythmic, ancient struggle against the hard Kentucky clay, making furrows.

The squirrel, PEPSI, perched on his shoulder eating some seeds and dropping others into the furrows.

Paul rests by a broken chestnut rail fence.

He leans on the fence, wincing. The fence collapses.

Paul gets up, pulls wire from the fence and repairs it.

In a faded 1949 Chevy flatbed, there are seedlings.

Beside the Chevy are hand-painted signs with words and pictures.

PRODUCE FOR SALE.

CORN

TOMATOES

CUCUMBERS

SQUASH

BLUEBERRIES

STRAWBERRIES

Wind echoes, twisting the leaves in the trees and making the grasses bend and re-bend, back and forth.

PEACE.

Then—

A mechanical ROAR tears the silence.

A YELLOW MUSTANG Convertible barrels down the road... DRUNK TEENS in graduation caps hang out of the convertible, howling at the sky.

ONE TEEN
Hey....there's Paul.

One teenager grabs a soda out of a cooler in the Mustang.

ONE TEEN
Hot! Huh?

The Mustang fishtails past Paul and the garden.

Laughter dissolves into the distance.

The road quiets – then – like lightning
a RED-WHITE-BLUE CAN arcs through the air.

No warning.

It SLAMS into Paul's right rib.

A hollow aluminum THUD.

Air leaves his lungs.

He doubles slightly – not dramatic, just stunned.

Dust settles around his bare feet.

The can hits the dirt, hissing.

The horse shifts uneasily.

The squirrel freezes and then scurries away.

Paul presses his ribs.

No blood.

Only frayed threads on his red-and-blue brightly colored suspenders.

From far down the road: teen laughter fading.

Paul bends down slowly. Picks up the soda can.

He shakes the can slightly, he turns it in his hand.

Perfect. Uncrushed.

He studies it – as if it struck him on purpose.

The wind lifts dust across the field.

Paul exhales.

Not in anger. Not in pain.

Something harder to name.

He throws the can into his truck – not violent, not playful – a clean spiral.

Silence returns.

The quiet feels different now.

Paul stands in a deep furrow. He touches his side again. The skin is hot. He looks at the various handmade bottles inadvertently spelling "PEPSI... IS PEP" in his wheelbarrow, then back at the road.

Paul rests by sitting on the ground.

Then he gets up, gently strokes the horse's face, wipes his face, and goes back to work.

Paul pushes an old wooden wheelbarrow to a pile of split firewood, baskets of various vegetables, and buckets full of blueberries and strawberries from the garden.

The squirrel scampers about here and there.

Paul fills the wheelbarrow with a bundle of split firewood, the baskets of various vegetables and buckets of berries, and pushes the wheelbarrow.

Paul travels along a bumpy path toward his parent's home.

INT. FAMILY FARMHOUSE - NIGHT

Cramped around an oak-stained wooden table are too many children:

There's ROBERT (15) PETER (12) MARY ANN (14) KATHY (9) KAREN (7) and SUZY (5).

Mary Ann is in a wheelchair.

SUZY (5) wipes window film from the window and announces:

SUZY

Here comes Paul and his pet squirrel, Pepsi!

Paul enters. Feeds the fire. Ash floats.

MARY JEAN (40s) SHAKES a cast-iron skillet filled with SIZZLING fried chicken on the wood stove.

HARRY (50s) sits at the head of the table.

Harry scans the newspaper.

TOBACCO PRICES HOLD STEADY.

FARM PRODUCE UP SLIGHTLY.

Harry puts down the newspaper and indicates he is ready to eat.

Harry with a fork in right hand.

THUD. THUD.

HARRY

Me eat.

Mary Jean takes the skillet from the wood stove and SLAPS a couple of chicken breasts on Harry's plate. Grease splatters.

Then Mary Jean feeds the children some chicken, but mostly bread and vegetables from the garden.

She waves a hand to indicate a response, and children respond GIGGLING:

CHILDREN

We eat.

Silence. Only Chewing.

HARRY

You look like you swallowed a nail.

Paul slowly pulls an ENVELOPE from his coat pocket.

Places it on the table.

No one moves.

HARRY

What's that?

PAUL

University of Kentucky.

A beat.

HARRY

Why they writin' you?

PAUL

I applied.

That lands like a slap.

Silence thickens.

A beat.

SUZY

Is that college?

No one answers her.

Harry grabs the letter and opens the envelope. Reads.

HARRY

(reading)

Accepted.

He lowers the acceptance letter...

HARRY

You been plannin' this?

PAUL

Yes sir.

HARRY

Behind my back?

PAUL

I didn't think you'd approve.

Harry stands.

Chair scrapes hard against the wooden floor.

HARRY

Approve? You think this is a church picnic?

Mary Jean rises slightly.

MARY JEAN

Harry!

HARRY

You got land. You got food. What do you need
a building full of strangers for?

Paul finally looks at him – steady.

PAUL

Because I want to know why soil works.

HARRY

It works 'cause you work it.

Pause. Paul looks at his hands.

Then.

PAUL

That's not the same thing.

Silence.

SUZY (PLEADING)

I wanna make blueberry soda with Paul!

Harry snorts.

HARRY

Ain't no future in that.

Paul chews. Calm.

PAUL

I think there's more to it than we've been told.

Harry stops eating.

Everyone senses something is wrong.

Harry studies his son – like he doesn't recognize him.

HARRY

College fills a man's head with things that don't feed him.

PAUL

Maybe feeding isn't the only point.

Harry steps closer.

HARRY

You think you're smarter than this land?

PAUL

No.

A beat.

Silence.

Mary Jean's eyes flick between them.

Harry folds the letter slowly. Hands it back to Paul.

Harry notices the soil packed under Paul's fingernails.

A beat.

Paul is emphatic.

PAUL
I'll show you.

Harry turns. Sits. Eats. Scans the newspaper.

CIVIL RIGHTS MARCHES ON.

Harry picks up his fork and pounds it on the table.

THUD.

Everyone gets up and leaves.

INT. FAMILY FARMHOUSE - DAY MORNING.

Paul yells upstairs.

PAUL
Everybody up!! Wake up Suzy.

Paul sits at the table. Quiet chatter.

Harry is reading the newspaper.

Mary Jean is cooking pancakes on an iron griddle that holds a dozen pancakes.

Some of the children are coming to the table and sitting down.

Mary Jean starts flipping the pancakes to the seated children.

A BLUR of pancakes flying.

Suzy hops downstairs half asleep.

Pancakes WIZZ over her head as she enters the dining room.

Paul catches a misguided pancake and flips it to MARY ANN, a sibling without a pancake and in a wheelchair.

Paul catches another pancake and perfectly tosses it onto Suzy's plate.

PAUL

Let's do the blueberry soda.

SUZY

Yeah....

MONTAGE:

Paul takes Suzy by the hand and goes to his wheelbarrow.

He pulls out a quart bucket of blueberries, places it on a working kitchen table in their kitchen, and places the contents into a metal gallon pot.

Paul mashes the blueberries into small pieces.

Suzy takes a turn mashing.

He pours a quart of lightly fermented apple cider into the pot.

Suzy sprinkles some cinnamon and sea salt.

Paul winks to Suzy a "secret ingredient" look.

The blueberries and cider are brought to a boil on the wood stove.

Lets cool.

Strains the contents into a separate pot.

Paul adds spritzer water to the pot.

Both taste with spoons and approve.

They both pour the liquid contents into various bottles with the handmade labels.

Finally, bottles are put in a basket.

END MONTAGE:

EXT. BARREN FIELD WITH SPROUTING GREENS - DAY

Paul carries the homemade soda bottles in the basket to the greening field.

He starts weeding the garden and rests after a few rows.

Harry shows up and yells:

HARRY

Hey,...weeding to get a good crop don't
happen by itself!

PAUL

Ya, ya.

HARRY

And get all them weeds out by the roots or
they'll just grow back again.

PAUL

Understood.

Harry turns to walk away and then turns to Paul.

HARRY

You never mind what I said at the dinner
table. Between you and me, your mom and I
will support you in whatever you want to do.

Paul gets up and gives an appreciative nod to his dad.

HARRY

Go to college son. See what you might be
missing.

EXT. BARREN FIELD - DAWN

Suitcase at Paul's feet.

Mist over the soil.

Harry stands ten feet away. Arms folded.

Mary Jean hugs Paul - tight, shaking.

MARY JEAN

You write.

PAUL

I will.

She presses folded cash into his hand.

Harry doesn't step forward.

PAUL

I'm not runnin'.

HARRY

You better not be.

A beat.

Paul extends his hand.

Long hesitation.

Harry takes it.

Firm. Hard.

HARRY

Don't come back ashamed.

PAUL

I won't.

Paul turns.

Walks down the same dirt road he had entered.

Paul doesn't look back.

Halfway down —

He does.

Harry is no longer there.

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY — DAY

Massive brick buildings.

Students everywhere. A sea of bell bottoms, tie-dye shirts, and Military fatigues. Noise. Laughter. And a rainbow over the campus fountain.

Paul stands alone with a single suitcase. He looks like a splinter on a wooden floor. He is dressed in clean but torn, hippie-looking, mismatched clothes.

Outside soda machines clanking.

A student slams coins in. Nothing happens.

Another student KICKS the vending machine.

CANS DROP. Some in the machine slot, some on the ground.

Paul kicks one up in the air and tosses it like a perfect spiral to an upper classman.

Upperclassmen LAUGH opening soda cans.

FIZZ. Fizz. The can is so shaken up, it SPRAYS.

FIRST COLLEGE STUDENT

Want one?

Paul NODS no.

PAUL

Brought my own.

A chuckle from a college student.

FIRST COLLEGE STUDENT

Hey guys, get a load of this. Freshy here brought his own soda!

SECOND COLLEGE STUDENT

Never heard of such a thing. Let's see?

The first college student grabs a soda sticking out of Paul's jacket. They struggle.

Paul pulls the soda bottle back.

PAUL

Hey man, that's mine.

The first college student pulls a bottle out of Paul's hand. The handwritten label is leaking ink.

FIRST COLLEGE STUDENT

This guy got a soda bottle that reads....

First college student tries to read it, turns it around and around blurred label reads:

FIRST COLLEGE STUDENT

Is Pep.

The first college student shows the bottle around to other students.

Students look at the bottle.

SECOND COLLEGE STUDENT

What's it taste like? What's in it?

PAUL

Drink it and find out.

SECOND COLLEGE STUDENT

I ain't drinking anything without a proper label with ingredients on it.

The student tosses the bottle back to Paul.

FIRST COLLEGE STUDENT

Here's your soda.... man.

Students leave LAUGHING.

He touches his handwritten bottle in his coat pocket.

Handmade vs machine-made.

Paul steps forward. WALKS with head down.

Enters the building.

No music. Just sound swallowing him.

Cut to:

INT. LECTURE HALL BIOLOGY - DAY

About a hundred students.

Paul sits in the back.

Professor writes on board:

"GERM THEORY vs CELL THEORY"

PROFESSOR DARWIN

Pasteur says germs attack the body. Béchamp
says an unhealthy body invites them.

Paul leans forward.

Alive.

He's exactly where he's supposed to be.

Paul writes both names.

Across the room – SARAH underlines both confidently.

Paul underlines BÉCHAMP.

They glance up.

Recognition.

No smile.

PROFESSOR DARWIN

Dismissed.

Students walk out. Paul and Sarah mingle into the crowd, fairly far apart.

One student spirals a can of Pepsi to Paul.

STUDENT

Hey, catch! Here's a soda, man!

Paul grabs it and walks to his dorm.

INT. DORM ROOM - NIGHT

Paul is lying on his bunk.

FLASH CUT:

Mustang laughter. Soda spraying. "Here's a soda, man!"

Back to the dorm.

He raises the can of Pepsi to his lips.

Stops.

His hand trembles.

Outside: students laughing.

Inside: helicopter blades from the TV.

He looks at the logo on the Pepsi can. Perfect. Certain. Decided.

He whispers to the can:

PAUL

You deciding... or am I?

He pours the soda down the sink.

The fizz is loud, then dies.

He crushes the can slowly.

Sets it upright on the desk.

Like a small silver monument.

Goes back to his chair.

War footage continues on the TV: SONG: "WAR.....Absolutely Nothin"
by Edwin Starrs, 1969 classic.

Helicopter blades THRUM in the background on the TV.

He doesn't turn off the TV.

INT. ECONOMICS LECTURE HALL - NIGHT

ECONOMICS PROFESSOR RICHARD WARNER
Should money be public or private?

Paul writes: Public and underlines it.

Classmate Sarah writes: public?, private? And underlines both with a questioning look.

Sarah looks up, catches a glance from Paul.

SARAH
Must study.

Paul and Sarah walk out mingling with all the other students. This time just a little bit closer to each other.

INT. CAMPUS VENDING AREA - NIGHT

Students shake a soda machine violently.

Cans spill.

Laughter.

One rolls to Paul's foot. Paul kicks it up to his feet like a professional soccer player.

He reads the ingredients.

STUDENT
You want one?

PAUL
No.

STUDENT
Why not?

PAUL
It's already decided.

He sets the can on the floor.

Walks away.

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

Paul and Sarah sit at separate tables in a huge room with thousands of books on shelves, books and magazines on tables, and students studying at the tables and others wandering around.

Stacks of science books, biology books, economic books: Biology by Helena Curtis, Capitalism, Economics by Paul Samuelson.

Paul and Sarah look up at the same time.

Locked eye contact.

She passes him a book: SEX AND THE SINGLE GIRL, by Helen Gurley Brown, without speaking.

He nods. Looks at the cover....looks up.

Intellectual and physical electricity.

She leaves first.

He waits – then follows.

EXT. CAMPUS LAWN --DAY

Sarah is walking deliberately fast.

Paul has to do a slight jog to keep up.

Sarah turns around, slows down, and Paul asks:

PAUL

You get all that public.... private....
money stuff?

SARAH

I'm interested.....You?

PAUL

A bit over my head. I'm Paul.

SARAH

I'm Sarah....I've got a class to catch.

PAUL

Okay. Before you go, very quickly, did you go to Henry Clay High School?

SARAH

Yeah, WHY?

PAUL

Just wondering. I went too.

Sarah raises her eyebrows, gives a casual nod, turns around and walks off quickly.

Paul is left in the "dust".

EXT. CAMPUS LAWN - DAY (PROTEST MONTAGE)

On one side are the protestors and on the other side of the main street are the R.O.T.C. Cadets.

— Protestors waving protest flyers: END THE WAR, OUT OF VIETNAM.

— R.O.T.C. College Cadets drills nearby.

Paul watches both sides - the protestors and the cadets drilling.

Unsettled.

EXT. CAMPUS STREET - DAY

Police push protestors back.

Sarah stands firm.

PAUL

Sarah, move.

SARAH

If we move, nothing moves.

Police grab her.

Paul freezes.

She is dragged toward a police wagon.

SARAH (TO PAUL)
Don't watch. Decide.

Doors slam.

The wagon pulls away.

Paul stands alone in the dispersing crowd.

INT. CAMPUS CAFETERIA - DAY

Students are mingling and eating at the campus dining hall.

Paul is sitting down with a few friends. Sarah walks in.

Their eyes meet, a real connection.

Sarah sits with some of her friends and she and Paul exchange occasional glances. Paul walks over to Sarah's table.

Sarah says to her friends as Paul listens:

SARAH
My brother didn't come back from Da Nang.
They sent a medal and a bill for the coffin.

Sarah's Friend:

SARAH'S FRIEND
Outrageous.

Paul sits unable to speak.

He notices a bruise on her wrist from handcuffs.

He gently touches it.

She doesn't pull away.

No speeches.

Just:

SARAH
They fingerprinted us like criminals.

PAUL
Did it change anything?

SARAH
Yes.

A beat.

SARAH
I'm less afraid.

Paul absorbs this.

This is intimacy without romance.

EXT. UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY - GRADUATION DAY (1969)

Large buildings and a large green courtyard.

Students are gathering for graduation ceremonies.

One student, with a transistor radio to his ears, blurts out:

ONE GRADUATE
Majestic Prince won the Kentucky Derby.

The Crowd erupts: Lots of cheering.

Blue caps are waved.

SARAH at the podium.

PEPSI cups are lined up behind the faculty.

SARAH points to the cups and says:

SARAH
This must mean we belong...

A beat.

SARAH
Belong where?

Murmur.

SARAH

To a system that feeds us sugar and sends us
to war?

She hurls her diploma.

The graduates stand and hurl their blue caps.

Diplomas fall. Caps scatter. Graduates and parents clap.

Paul remains seated.

Sarah's diploma smashes into the Pepsi cups.

Soda splashes across the white tablecloth.

Gasps.

Paul does not clap.

Paul watches the blue-brown soda drip, drip, drip SLOWLY onto a white
tablecloth and down like a leaky dripping faucet....a beat....one
drop hits a Dean's white shoe.

Both Paul's and the Dean's eyes meet.

A "shit happens look" on both faces.

Sarah meets Paul's eyes.

EXT. CAMPUS LAWN - LATER

Families converge.

Sarah approaches Paul.

SARAH

You stayed seated.

PAUL

You threw it hard.

A beat.

SARAH

You agree with me?

PAUL

I don't like being told what my life is for.

That lands.

SARAH

Then don't let them.

Helicopter overhead.

SARAH

You thinking about the draft?

He doesn't answer.

She understands.

INT. VICTOR'S APARTMENT - NIGHT (DECEMBER 1, 1969)

The room is blue with cigarette smoke and heavy with the scent of cheap beer. A small black-and-white TV hums on a milk crate.

Paul (20) sits on the floor, leaning against the wall, eyes fixed on the screen. VICTOR (20) is pacing, a frantic energy vibrating off him.

ON THE SCREEN:

REP. ALEXANDER PIRNIE reaches into a giant glass jar filled with 366 blue plastic capsules.

VICTOR

(Voice tight)

If I get a low number, Paul... I'm going to Canada. I mean it. I'm not dying for a "red" line on a map.

PAUL

(Quietly)

You're not going anywhere, Vic. You're too lucky.

ON THE SCREEN:

The first capsule is opened.

"September 14th... 001."

Victor freezes. That's not his birthday. He exhales a breath he's been holding for a lifetime.

ON THE SCREEN:

The numbers keep coming.

"April 24th... 002."

"December 30th... 003."

Paul watches the jar. To him, the capsules look like the soda bubbles from Sarah's graduation splash – chaotic, sugar-coated, and about to explode.

VICTOR (Whispering)

Come on, June... stay in the jar... stay in
the damn jar...

ON THE SCREEN:

The Congressman draws another capsule. Opens it.

THE CONGRESSMAN

"JUNE...

Victor's eyes widen.

THE CONGRESSMAN

8th... 366."

Victor lets out a primal scream of joy. He collapses onto his bed, totally relieved.

VICTOR

I'm safe Paul. I'm the luckiest man in
Kentucky.

Victor grabs Paul, shaking him. Paul doesn't smile. He's looking at the TV.

PAUL

They haven't called October yet.

ON THE SCREEN:

"October 5th... 024."

Paul exits, stoic.

EXT. CAMPUS STREET - NIGHT

Celebration erupts.

Men cheer. Others collapse in relief. Others collapse in despair. A girl sobs into her hands.

Paul walks to her. Offering a hand.

She hugs him.

Dark. Quiet.

Distant shouting echoes.

He inhales. She exhales.

His eyes water — not crying — just pressure.

She leaves.

He straightens.

Wipes his face.

Walks back toward the noise.

INT. VICTOR'S APARTMENT ROOM - NIGHT

Paul walks in.

The room goes silent.

The laughter dies in Victor's throat.

Paul whispers:

PAUL

I guess I'm not avoiding the draft after all.

Paul stands up. He doesn't look at Victor. He looks at the glass jar on TV. Paul walks out.

EXT. CAMPUS - NIGHT

Men celebrate.

Others, men and women, weep.

Paul walks alone.

He stops at a trash can.

A discarded Pepsi bottle.

He studies his reflection in it.

PAUL

That doesn't belong in me.

He drops it back in.

Students mingle around the vending machine.

Students shake the vending machine.

Cans fall.

Paul and Sarah are there, and they watch.

SARAH

Machines only give when you kick them.

PAUL

So do systems.

They share a look...a half-goodbye look.

INT. RECRUITING OFFICE - DAY

An office size room with Army, Navy, and Airforce posters. ASA (Army Security Agency) poster. Behind two very similar desks sit two

similar dressed Marines. Paul sits in front of the one closest to the door.

FIRST RECRUITING OFFICER

So, you got a draft notice and your four year college deferment is up. WHATAHYA WANNA DO?

PAUL

What do I need to do to avoid Vietnam?

The first recruiting officer stands up, picks up a paper from under the ASA poster, and grabs a pen and puts it on the table so Paul can sign easily.

FIRST RECRUITING OFFICER

That's easy son. Just sign here for ASA. GUARANTEES you go to Germany.

Paul reads the contract.

PAUL

True?

SECOND RECRUITING OFFICER

True as true can be.

Paul signs the contract, making a loud scratch.

EXT. TRAIN PLATFORM - DUSK

A narrow rural station platform. Muted announcements echo unintelligibly. A freight train idles somewhere beyond sight.

Wind moves litter along the concrete.

Paul stands with a duffel bag.

His boots are new. They look wrong on him.

Sarah approaches from the far end of the platform.

She is out of breath but trying not to show it.

They stand facing each other.

Not touching.

A long beat.

A distant metal CLANK.

SARAH

You cut your hair.

PAUL

They did.

She nods.

Another beat.

Wind lifts a strand of her hair across her face. She doesn't move it.

SARAH

Germany, huh?

PAUL

That's what they said.

He doesn't sound convinced.

SARAH

My uncle went there after the war. Said the
soil was black like coffee.

PAUL

Good growing soil.

Silence.

A paper cup tumbles along the platform.

SARAH

You always wanted to see how things grow
somewhere else.

PAUL

I wanted to understand why they grow at all.

She studies him.

SARAH
Did you figure it out?

PAUL
Not yet.

A beat.

PAUL
You?

SARAH
No.

A faint smile passes between them.

It disappears as quickly as it came.

An announcement crackles overhead. Unintelligible.

A freight coupling SLAMS somewhere down the track.

They both turn toward the sound – then back to each other.

SARAH
They released the protest arrests.

PAUL
I heard.

SARAH
Charges dropped.

PAUL
That's good.

SARAH
It hasn't changed anything.

He nods.

She notices his hand absentmindedly touching his ribs.

SARAH
Still there?

PAUL

Sometimes.

A beat.

SARAH

You ever think maybe nothing's random?

PAUL

I think we tell ourselves that so we can
sleep.

Wind gusts.

The platform lights flicker on.

Evening settling.

She steps closer.

Not an embrace.

Just closer.

SARAH

If they send you somewhere else...

He waits.

SARAH

...don't let them decide who you are.

He absorbs this.

PAUL

I don't think they can.

She reaches into her coat pocket and removes something small.

A folded scrap of paper.

She places it in his hand.

SARAH

In case you forget what you need to know.

He doesn't open it.

He already knows it matters.

Paul reaches into his pocket for his clean neatly folded red handkerchief and hands it to her to remember him by.

A TRAIN HORN sounds in the distance.

Wind surges down the platform.

Dust lifts.

For a brief second, it swirls between them.

Echo of the dust devil from long ago.

SARAH

Write when you can.

PAUL

I will.

They both know he may not.

A final beat.

She steps forward and presses her forehead lightly to his.

Not a kiss.

Breath shared.

Stillness.

Then she steps back.

The train lights appear in the distance.

Growing.

SARAH

Go see.

PAUL

Go change things.

She shakes her head slightly: half negatively, half positively.

The train roars into the station.

Wind whips.

Noise engulfs the platform.

Paul steps onto the train.

He turns once.

Sarah stands in the wind.

Unmoving.

The doors close.

The train begins to move.

She does not wave.

He does not either.

As the train pulls away, wind sweeps dust down the platform.

Sarah remains standing in the settling air.

The dust falls. Sarah picks up the rolling paper cup. A drop of soda syrup from the cup drops and glistens on her fingers.

She wipes the soda on the red handkerchief Paul gave her.

Turns.

Walks into the deepening dusk.

INT. TRAIN - NIGHT

Paul stares ahead.

His hand touches his side.

Many of the men are excited about going to Vietnam, to kill.

VOICES ON TRAIN

Going to Vietnam, kill those commie
rats....yeah...fight...we're right!

Others on the bus are just stone silent.

Paul is quiet. He knows he is NOT GOING to Vietnam.

EXT. BOOT CAMP FORT DIX NEW JERSEY -- DAY

QUICK MONTAGE OF:

Soldiers running in cadence with rifles and backpacks.

DRILL SERGEANT

Left..right...left ..right.. This gun is for
fightin' and the other gun is for fun.

Some soldiers falling out of a run.

ALL soldiers run into the assignment building.

INT. MILITARY TRANSPORT ASSIGNMENT TERMINAL - NIGHT

Fluorescent lights hum.

A cavernous concrete holding area.

Rows of young soldiers sit on duffel bags.

Cigarette smoke hangs in layers.

A wall clock ticks loudly.

Paul sits with his duffel between his boots.

On his chest and upper arm insignia: ASA

A soldier beside him flips through a Stars and Stripes newspaper.

Headlines: TET OFFENSIVE AFTERMATH / PARIS PEACE TALKS STALLED

Paul studies a transport board:

FRANKFURT, RAMSTEIN, STUTTGART, SAIGON, DA NANG, CAM RANH BAY.

He only reads the German names.

A CLERK behind plexiglass calls names rapidly.

CLERK

Donovan! Frankfurt!... Harris! Ramstein!
Lopez! Da Nang.

Men rise. Move. Disappear through metal doors.

The line shortens.

Paul steps forward.

Hands over his orders.

The clerk stamps them without looking up.

STAMP.

The clerk slides the orders back to Paul.

Paul glances down.

The page reads:

REASSIGNMENT: VIETNAM THEATER REPORT TO DA NANG

He waits. Paul is certain this is an error.

PAUL

I was told Germany.

The clerk finally looks up.

Not unkind. Just finished.

CLERK

Orders change.

A beat.

CLERK

Next.

Someone behind Paul nudges forward.

The line moves.

Paul does not.

A soldier beside him mutters:

SOLDIER
Germany filled up.

He laughs once.

It dies quickly.

Paul steps aside.

Noise continues.

Names called.

Boots moving.

Paper shuffling.

A forklift beeps in reverse somewhere.

He looks again at the word: DA NANG.

He thumbs across the ink as if it might smear.

It doesn't.

Overhead speakers crackle:

BOARDING FOR PACIFIC TRANSPORT NOW OPEN.

Paul lifts his duffel bag.

Walks toward the PACIFIC door. Does not look back.

Paul along with running soldiers merge into a line boarding a huge transport plane.

CUT TO.

Paul is on his way to Vietnam.

EXT. DA NANG, VIETNAM - NIGHT

A sprawling compound alive with activity.

Soldiers departing the plane.

Combat boots stepping into mud.

An MP guides soldiers to two cafes.

DA NANG MP

You guys here.....you guys there. Get
something to drink.....on the house.

Paul and his group jog into the cafe.

They sit...waiter comes over.

A quiet, unsettling cultural moment.

A Vietnamese WAITER sets down drinks.

A soldier leaving for home stares at Paul.

CAFE SOLDIER

First night?...Stay awake.

He drinks Pepsi.

Does not smile.

PAUL

Thanks...anything else?

CAFE SOLDIER

You'll see. Right now you think this is
about freedom....think again...this place
runs on contracts.

Cafe Soldier rises, throws an early period, almost rusty looking
Pepsi soda against the cafe wall, the soda splashes the MP coming in,
and the cafe soldier runs to the plane that Paul came in on.

DA NANG MP

What the hell was that?

PAUL

Soda, sir.

INT. HELICOPTER - DAY

Paul is alone in a helicopter with the pilot.

PILOT

Intel?

PAUL

Yeah.

PILOT

They send you alone.

A beat.

PILOT

I fly them in alive...and out in pieces.

Paul's teeth begin to chatter.

EXT. ARMY SECURITY COMPOUND - VIETNAM - DAY

SUPER: MARCH 1971. ASA COMPOUND. DMZ.

The humidity is suffocating. Diesel fumes. Red mud.

Distant THUMPS echo beyond the wire.

MARINES crouch behind low berms, firing rockets toward unseen Viet Cong positions.

RETURN FIRE answers — dirt geysers, metal shrieks.

Hundreds of antennas stab from the compound like needles.

INT. ASA INTELLIGENCE BUNKER - DAY

Dim. Overcrowded. Maps everywhere.

A MASSIVE MAP OF SOUTH VIETNAM dominates the wall.

Thousands of PUSH PINS:

Red.

Blue.

White.

Some bent.

Some are falling out.

Paul watches the map.

Beside him, a row of RADIO OPERATORS – "KNOBBERS" – twist dials, headphones clamped tight.

Static. Bursts of Vietnamese. Numbers. Silence.

A CAPTAIN (40s), unshaven, bored.

CAPTAIN

Paul. What do you have for me today?

Paul checks a printout, hesitates.

PAUL

Not much today.

The Captain grunts, unsatisfied.

He moves behind his desk.

Lights a cigarette.

Opens PLAYBOY.

Pretends to read.

Lingers on the centerfold.

CAPTAIN

(shrugging)

Quiet's good, right?

He glances around the bunker.

Maps. Radios. Men pretending not to listen.

CAPTAIN

You know what would make this place perfect?

Paul doesn't answer.

CAPTAIN

Coffee.

Paul is already moving.

EXT. COMPOUND - MOMENTS LATER

Paul crosses the mud toward the mess hall.

A HELICOPTER roars overhead.

Men flinch. Then relax.

Paul doesn't look up.

INT. MESS HALL - DAY

Loud. Sweaty. Chaos.

Paul pours burnt coffee into a tin mug.

Someone bumps him.

Coffee sloshes.

PAUL

Sorry.

The man doesn't notice.

INT. COMPOUND - CONTINUOUS

Paul returns. Hands the coffee to the Captain.

PAUL

You good?

CAPTAIN

Never felt better.

The Captain takes a sip.

Winces. Drinks again.

They stand at the map now.

Paul moves push pins carefully.

Measures distance with a ruler.

CAPTAIN

What are we looking at?

PAUL

Possible radio chatter last night. Low frequency. Could be VC, could be nothing.

CAPTAIN

Nothing doesn't get medals.

Paul adjusts two pins.

Triangulates.

PAUL

Coordinates line up here.

He points – jungle near the DMZ.

No name.

Just green.

CAPTAIN

You confident?

Paul pauses.

Listens to the static.

PAUL

Confident enough.

The Captain nods.

That's all it takes.

Paul sits at the radio. He reads the coordinates.

PAUL

Yankee Delta, this is Foxtrot X-ray. We have
indications of enemy presence at
coordinates... Queen Yankee 6743 9757 Bravo
3659 0875 Echo.

Precise.

Flat.

AIRPLANE PILOT (V.O.)
Copy that, Foxtrot X-ray.

Paul waits.

AIRPLANE PILOT (V.O.)
Bombs away.

EXT. JUNGLE - DAY

A distant section of jungle ERUPTS.

Fire.

Smoke.

Then silence.

INT. ASA INTELLIGENCE BUNKER - DAY

No cheering. No reaction.

The Captain exhales smoke.

CAPTAIN
That's one for the good guys.

He glances at Paul.

Paul takes a moment to look at the pins on the map.

CAPTAIN
Anything else?

Paul checks the ticker machine.

It CHATTERS.

Spits out paper.

Paul tears it off.

Hands it to the Captain.

PAUL

From headquarters.

The Captain reads.

Frowns.

He pulls a RED-FLAG PUSH PIN.

Writes something small on a scrap of paper.

Pins it near the DMZ.

Captain shouts:

CAPTAIN

EVERYBODY OUT!!

A beat.

CAPTAIN

INCOMING!

The bunker ERUPTS into motion.

Men scramble.

Helmets.

Weapons.

Paul hesitates — looking at the map.

At the pins.

At the place they just erased.

Then —

BOOM.

INCOMING.

EXT. COMPOUND - CONTINUOUS

Paul emerges from the half-buried bunker.

Shells WHISTLE overhead.

Men dive for cover.

Paul runs -

- and disappears into the secure UNDERGROUND bunker.

INT. SECURE DEEP UNDERGROUND BUNKER - DAY

A BLAST DOOR slams shut.

Silence.

This bunker is different.

BUNKS line one wall - rumpled, unmade.

A SMALL BAR stocked with bottles of near beer and Johnnie Walker.

SOFAS and mismatched CHAIRS.

The air is thick with SWEET SMOKE.

A few SOLDIERS lounge.

One rolls a joint.

Another nurses a drink.

Paul enters, helmet under his arm.

PAUL

You guys are lucky.

No one looks up.

PAUL

The drug dogs from First Diamond - they
couldn't get clearance to come on this
compound.

A beat.

ONE CORPORAL
How do you know that?

Paul shrugs, pours himself a drink.

PAUL
Soldiers talk.

He sits on the sofa.

Another soldier exhales smoke.

SECOND SOLDIER
That's what they said last month.

ONE SOLDIER
We're ASA. We got immunity.

Paul doesn't respond.

ONE CORPORAL
You hear what happened last night?

Paul shakes his head.

ONE CORPORAL
They fragged that second lieutenant. The one
that kept ordering perimeter searches.

A quiet beat.

PAUL
Yeah. I heard.

ONE CORPORAL
Guy was nuts.

Paul takes a sip.

PAUL
Or scared.

SECOND SOLDIER
Thought he was John Wayne.

No one laughs.

Paul gestures around the bunker.

PAUL

Look at this place.

Radios. Sensors. Maps. High Frequency radio receivers.

He taps his helmet.

PAUL

A mouse couldn't get into this compound
without us knowing.

The soldiers exchange looks.

SECOND SOLDIER

You really believe that?

Paul hesitates before answering.

PAUL

I know it.

SECOND SOLDIER

(smiling, lazy)

Man...the guys running this place are half
drunk. The others half stoned.

He lifts his joint.

SECOND SOLDIER

Enemy could drive a caravan right through
here and nobody would blink.

Paul stiffens.

PAUL

That's not true.

SECOND SOLDIER

You're saying that sober?

Paul leans forward.

PAUL

I'm saying we're a team. And teams don't survive on paranoia.

A beat.

ONE CORPORAL

Or on pretending everything's fine.

Paul stands.

Silence.

Somewhere above them –

A distant THUMP.

Not close.

Not far.

The men pause.

Listen.

Nothing else follows.

Paul forces a smile.

PAUL

See?

No one answers.

Paul sits back down.

The smoke hangs.

The bunker feels suddenly smaller.

Paul looks around at the bunks....then at the bottles....

Then at the men.

For the first time, he doesn't look certain. Paul gets up to leave.

He stands. Slings his M-16.

ONE CORPORAL
Paul...hang in there.

PAUL
I should be back at HQ.

ONE CORPORAL
After a bombing? That's when we hang.

The Corporal offers a joint.

Paul waves it off.

PAUL
Can't handle that stuff.

ONE CORPORAL
(smiling)
What you afraid of?

Paul considers that. Just a second.

PAUL
Right now? I'm pretending to be a model
soldier. Follow orders, do my job, get home
alive.

ONE CORPORAL
Anybody waiting for you back home?

PAUL
Not really. Maybe, perhaps...you know!

The Corporal snorts.

ONE CORPORAL
Maybe's a dangerous word.

Paul pauses at the door.

ONE CORPORAL
You go to Vietnam...you come back speaking a
language nobody else knows. Your old
friends? They've moved on.

A beat.

ONE CORPORAL
You broke the chain, man.

Paul doesn't argue.

That's what scares him.

Suddenly —

BOOM.

INCOMING.

The bunker SHUDDERS.

Paul dives —

The ENTRANCE ERUPTS.

Dust. Smoke. Debris.

Men shout.

Someone SCREAMS.

Paul scrambles up.

A SOLDIER is down, clutching his leg.

PAUL
Medic! MEDIC!

Paul kneels.

The Corporal—bleeding, calm, — grabs Paul's sleeve.

ONE CORPORAL
Hey...

Paul leans in.

ONE CORPORAL
Don't freak out. This isn't the end of the
world.

Medics rush in.

Stretcher.

They lift him.

The Corporal locks eyes with Paul as the soldier is carried out.

ONE CORPORAL

(smiling)

See? Still breathing.

PAUL

Keep breathing brother.

Other soldiers depart, unscathed.

Paul stands alone in the dust.

The smoke clears.

For a moment –

Nothing feels solid.

Paul follows the medics out.

EXT. COMPOUND – NIGHT

Humidity hangs heavy.

Insects scream in the darkness.

Distant artillery rumbles like faraway thunder.

A single bare bulb swings outside a sandbag bunker.

Paul sits on an ammo crate.

Helmet beside him.

Rifle across his knees.

Mud drying on his boots.

Men nearby play cards in low voices.

Someone coughs.

Someone laughs too loudly.

Someone retches in the dark.

Paul removes his shirt.

His ribs are faintly scarred.

He presses the spot where the Pepsi can struck him years ago.

He exhales.

From his breast pocket, he removes the folded paper.

Worn now.

Softened at the creases.

He studies it for a long moment.

As if opening it will change something permanent.

Artillery thuds in the distance.

A helicopter passes overhead.

Wind from the rotors ripples the dust.

Echo of the dust devil.

He unfolds the paper.

Inside, in Sarah's handwriting:

"Observe. Then decide."

He reads it again.

The jungle hum surrounds him.

A flare rises in the distance, turning the clouds green-white.

Men shout somewhere beyond the wire.

Paul looks out into the darkness.

Listening.

Breathing.

Not reacting.

Observing.

A young private nearby whispers:

PRIVATE

You think they're out there?

Paul listens.

Night insects.

Wind in the wire.

His own breath.

PAUL

They're always out there.

A beat.

PAUL

So are we.

The private studies him.

Unsure what that means.

Paul folds the note carefully.

Places it back in his pocket.

Picks up his helmet.

Sets it on his head.

He looks into the dark tree line.

Still.

Present.

Awake.

INT./EXT. ASA SECURITY GUARD SHACK - DAY

Rain mist drifts through compound floodlights.

Distant artillery thumps beyond the wire.

Paul scans the perimeter.

Mud everywhere.

A single fluorescent bulb BUZZES overhead.

Weapons racks line one wall.

A PEPSI-COLA MACHINE hums steadily.

NEAL stands behind the counter - large, pale, exhausted.

A sloppy soldier hangs a grenade launcher carelessly on a rack.

The rack tilts.

No one notices.

The soldier exits.

Paul enters, removes his helmet and flak jacket.

Sets his M-16 on the counter.

Peers out at chaos beyond the wire.

PAUL

Some scare, huh?

Neal doesn't answer.

Instead -

He kicks the Pepsi machine.

CLANK.

A can drops.

He slides it across to Paul.

NEAL

Soda man?

Paul studies the can.

PAUL

Never have.

NEAL

Never?

PAUL

Never will.

Neal stares, genuinely baffled.

Then:

NEAL

Strange world.

He kicks the machine again.

Another can drops.

He opens his.

FIZZ.

Too loud in the small room.

Silence.

Neal drinks.

His hand trembles slightly.

He sets the can down.

Watches the foam settle.

NEAL

You intel boys. . .

Paul senses the shift.

NEAL

You know things the rest of us don't.

PAUL

That's the idea.

Neal nods slowly.

As if confirming something to himself.

NEAL

They briefed us last month.

Paul says nothing.

The fluorescent bulb BUZZES.

NEAL (QUIET)

If the wire goes...if they breach.

He gestures vaguely toward the perimeter.

NEAL

...nothing sensitive leaves this compound.

Paul watches him carefully now.

PAUL

That makes sense.

Neal studies Paul.

Searching.

NEAL

Assets can't fall into enemy hands.

A long beat. It lands.

Paul's gaze drifts to Neal's .45.

Then back to Neal.

PAUL

We're not assets.

Neal doesn't answer.

He wipes condensation from the can with his thumb.

NEAL

Orders are orders.

Silence.

Distant artillery.

The Pepsi machine hum grows louder in the quiet.

Paul's breathing slows.

Understanding arrives before confirmation.

PAUL

You'd do it?

Neal doesn't look at him.

A beat.

NEAL

Same as what you're doing.

Paul absorbs that.

No anger. No shock...yet.

Just the collapse of certainty.

Outside — a distant POP.

Men shouting.

Neal picks up his can.

Raises it slightly.

NEAL

To getting home.

Paul lifts his unopened can.

They tap aluminum.

A small hollow sound.

Neal turns away.

Paul quietly opens the soda can and pours the soda into the mud outside the door.

It foams white. Then disappears.

The grenade launcher shifts on its rack.

Tilts.

Neal watches the mud absorb the soda.

A beat.

PAUL

I'm outta here!

Paul exits the guard shack, seething mad.

The fluorescent bulb flickers.

The grenade launcher slips.

CLATTERS.

Neal lunges.

His finger accidentally pulls the trigger.

CLICK – THE GRENADE LAUNCHER DISCHARGES A GRENADE

It rockets through the shack –

SLAMS into the CASE OF PEPSI.

Cans EXPLODE outward.

Inside and Outside the shack.

Shards rain down.

Soldiers scramble.

One can spins alone. Perfect. Silent.

A PEPSI CAN Crushed, Hissing, SLAMS INTO PAUL'S SIDE. The LOGO embosses into Paul's flesh.

Paul twists, screams –

PAUL
AAAAHHH – !

He collapses into the mud.

A SIZZLING SOUND comes from the crushed can against his body in the mud. The Red. The White. The Blue. Burned into Skin.

PEPSI CANS litter the compound. Soldiers slowly rise.

They stare. CLOSE CALL FACES.

Some rush toward Paul, and lift him onto a stretcher.

MEDIC (O.S)
What the hell hit him?

SLOPPY SOLDIER
A soda, man!

A SIREN WAILS.

Paul clutches the Pepsi can embedded in his body as he's carried away.

INT. HOSPITAL CLINIC-DAY

Doctors clinical.

Bandage removed briefly.

Doctor shakes head.

It is clinical. Unexplained. Unprocessed.

He doesn't look at it.

DOCTOR

Good thing only the soda flatlined.

CUT TO

INT. TRANSPORT PLANE - DAY

Paul sits. Bandaged. Silent.

Hand rests near scar.

No speech.

Vietnam fades beneath clouds.

EXT. AIRPORT LOS ANGELES - DAY -

Passengers reunited.

Children running.

Laughter.

Paul stands still.

Announcement blares overhead, slightly muffled.

Paul flinches. A beat. Paul regains composure.

Life continues at full volume.

He is not in sync with the culture yet.

A child laughs at a live statue performance that tips his hat to the child.

Paul smiles a small smile and continues walking toward the bus terminal.

INT BUS - TRAVELING- DAY/NIGHT

Cornfields pass.

Church steeples.

On a roadside soda billboard, sunrise rays ripple.

His reflection overlays the glass of the bus window.

He looks like a stranger.

EXT. BUS STOP - LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY - DAY

Greyhound exhales.

Paul steps down. Medals are on his fatigue uniform. Limp. Flashbulbs.

REPORTER

You saved lives.

Paul looks at his shoes.

He doesn't answer.

Crowd Chants:

CROWD

Make peace...not war.

He doesn't react.

LOCAL MAN

Heard you saved men over there.

Paul nods politely.

He doesn't confirm.

He doesn't deny.

Paul spots family coming to greet him.

He moves through the crowd like they're weather.

Sarah grabs his arm.

He lets her.

Sarah lets go of his arm as Family nears.

Harry stands back and Mary Jean gives Paul a hug, as various family members pat Paul on the back.

MARY JEAN

This way.

Paul and Sarah part.

INT. PARENT'S '69 CHEVY STATION WAGON - DAY (1971)

Rain smears the windshield. The rhythmic THWACK-THWACK of the wipers is the only sound.

Paul sits in the backseat, slumped against the vinyl. His face is gaunt. When he exhales, we see it: TWO FRONT TEETH ARE GONE, replaced by a dark, jagged gap – a souvenir of stress and the impact of the blast.

Harry (50s) drives in a "Kingly" in silence, gripping the wheel like a turret. Mary Jean (50s) sits in the passenger seat, staring straight ahead, her knuckles white on her purse.

Paul touches his side. The "corporate shard" is there, the skin is grown around it; a hard knot of scar tissue beneath his cheap flannel shirt.

PAUL

(Voice thin, whistling through the gap)

No one spat at me.

Harry's eyes flick to the rearview mirror. Cold. Military.

PAUL

Landing back in the United States... I waited for the spit. For the shouting. But there was just... nothing. No one said a word.

MARY JEAN

(Softly, not turning around)

We're just glad you're home, Paul.

PAUL

I'm not home, Mom. I'm your son, but I'm lost... I'm numb... I can't feel love.

He looks out the window. Numb. They pass soda billboards.

PAUL

I've been betrayed by a comrade...the
military. And now I'm sitting in a car that
smells like French fries and floor wax.

Siblings laugh, holding hands over their mouths and kibbitsing:

CHILDREN

(all at once)

That's funny...We were hungry waiting for
you...and we were cleaning the floor when
the call came that you were home.

HARRY

(Voice like gravel)

You're alive, Paul. You fulfilled
your mission. The rest of it...
you bury it. Like I buried mine.

PAUL

(Gnawing his gums)

You can't bury a fire, Dad. You just turn
yourself into the furnace.

INT. PAUL'S PARENT'S HOME - NIGHT

The family sits around the table, crossing themselves. The eight
siblings stare at Paul's missing teeth.

Harry pounds the table with his fork. THUD.

HARRY

ME... EAT. ME... EAT.

The children respond, but the unison is ragged. Uncertain.

CHILDREN

WE... EAT...WE... EAT.

Paul doesn't join in.

He picks up a piece of bread, tries to bite, and winces.

The physical act of eating "Ordinary" food is now a combat maneuver.

Paul looks at empty space.

PAUL

(To himself)

I'm going to find Sarah.

MARY JEAN

First, we are going to feed you.

INT. PARENTS' HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Everyone talks at once.

He listens.

Mary Jean hugs him like she's counting bones.

MARY JEAN

Let me see the man.

PAUL

Still me.

A lie.

Sits down at the lower end of the table.

Chews slowly.

Food tastes unfamiliar.

He drinks water.

Not soda.

Not beer.

Water.

Harry enters.

Paul gets up.

Handshake first.

Then hug.

Too formal. Too late.

INT. VICTOR'S PUB - NIGHT

Banner: WELCOME HOME.

Empty.

Paul in uniform.

Victor wipes glasses.

VICTOR

May Day Protest in D.C.

Paul looks at the empty chairs.

Medals pinned on him suddenly feel theatrical.

He removes them.

Places them on the bar, symbolic of the April 1971 Veteran protest.

Doesn't slam them.

Just sets them down.

Paul heads to the bathroom.

INT. BATHROOM --NIGHT

Paul at first avoids mirrors.

Changes shirt discreetly.

He covers his scar with his hand as in palm healing.

He studies it in the mirror.

He lowers his shirt.

Turns off the light.

Turns on the light.

Turns off the light.

He touches the scar without flinching.

INT. VICTOR'S PUB - LATE NIGHT

Paul drinking. Getting drunk.

Cocaine line. Snorts it into the end of a cigarette. Smokes cigarette.

Victor watching.

VICTOR

You look like a rag.

Paul shrugs.

Not jumping dramatically – reflexive movement.

A glass drops behind him.

Paul ducks before the sound finishes.

He immediately straightens – embarrassed.

No one comments.

VICTOR

You ain't fighting the war anymore, man.
You're fighting yourself.

Paul stares at his reflection in the beer tap.

For the first time – shame.

PAUL

Man...I'm stressed out....I got guilt
feelings and high anxiety. I can't even
think about talking to a woman about love or
sex or whatever.

VICTOR

I've seen Sarah in the Park recently.

Paul leaves.

EXT. PARK - SPRING - DAY

Children play. A dog barks. A tennis ball thumps rhythmically.

Wind moves through budding leaves.

Life continues without asking permission.

Sarah holds a small child she is babysitting on her hip, speaking softly to it.

Paul approaches.

He stops a few feet away.

She turns.

They take each other in.

No rush.

No music.

Just recognition.

Paul shifts his weight slightly – positioning himself with the open park behind him, not the crowd.

He doesn't know he's doing it.

Sarah notices.

PAUL

You look. . . steady.

SARAH

You don't.

No judgment. Just observation.

She sets the child down.

The child runs toward the swings.

They sit.

A small space between them.

Children run past.

Finger guns.

CHILDREN

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Paul flinches.

Not dramatic.

Instant.

His hand goes to his side before he understands why.

He breathes.

Removes his hand.

Stays present.

Hand to scar again.

Breath quickens.

Sarah does not touch him.

She does not interrupt.

She quietly places her palm flat on the bench between them.

Present.

Available.

Not invasive.

Paul notices the bench.

The wood grain.

The warmth from the sun.

He focuses.

Breath catches.

Wind in the leaves.

A dog collar jingles.

Exhale.

His foot relaxes.

His shoulders drop.

He opens his eyes.

He is back.

Still here.

He stops.

Closes eyes.

Breathes deliberately.

Opens eyes.

Sarah speaks gently.

SARAH

You carried what happened alone.

Paul watches children on the swings.

PAUL

I had to.

His foot presses into the dirt – grounding.

His heel twists slowly into the soil.

His breathing quickens.

His eyes track movement in the park.

He is scanning.

A child falls. Cries. Is immediately comforted.

Paul watches the quick repair.

Something lands.

A beat.

A small boy nearby struggles to tie his shoe.

Paul watches.

Waits.

The boy keeps trying.

Finally Paul leans forward.

PAUL

Want a hand?

The boy nods.

Paul kneels.

Ties the shoe slowly.

Carefully.

He double knots it.

The boy runs off without saying thank you.

Paul watches him go.

Something soft returns to his face.

Sarah watches him watching.

Not the wounded soldier.

Paul sits again.

Closer now.

Not consciously.

Wind moves through the trees.

Paul breathes with it.

A beat.

PAUL (quiet)

I thought if I stopped paying attention. . .
something bad would happen.

SARAH

What would happen if you stopped?

He listens.

Nothing happens.

A tennis ball thumps.

A woman laughs.

Wind.

Life continues.

Paul nods slightly.

Wipes the nervousness from his brow.

He understands.

Silence.

But not empty.

Sarah leans back, letting the sun hit her face.

Paul imitates her without realizing.

Sun on his face. Eyes closed.

After a moment:

PAUL

I'm still here.

Not triumphant.

Just true.

Sarah nods.

SARAH
Start there.

MONTAGE:

- Paul doing breathing exercises in the park.
- Studying nutrition books.
- Running at dawn.
- Cooking root vegetables, broccoli, and cauliflower in water.

END MONTAGE

INT. PAUL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT/DAY

Paul is awake at odd hours.

Just awake.

Watching shadows move across the ceiling.

He is CHEWING RICE in a meditative state.

An envelope SLIDES under the door.

Paul picks up the envelope and reads: INVITATION TO SARAH'S BIRTHDAY PARTY.

EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE - BACKYARD - LATE AFTERNOON

The atmosphere is festive. Warm. Alive.

Grills glow. Smoke curls. Laughter floats.

Paper lanterns sway. Tables lined with food.

PAUL arrives early, sleeves rolled up.

SARAH, in charge, radiant, but busy with hosting and directing.

PAUL

I'm early. What can I do to help?

Sarah smiles – genuinely touched.

SARAH

You already are.

She hands him a tray.

They move easily around each other.

Comfort, old rhythms returning.

A car BLASTS MUSIC pulling up.

Door SLAMS.

VICTOR barrels in hoisting a case of PEPSI-COLA on his shoulders.

Paul freezes.

PAUL

Victor?

Victor freezes.

VICTOR

Paul!

Behind Victor – DEBRA DEE, (25)cute blonde, awkward, polite.

A beat.

Victor puts down the case of soda and introduces his wife.

VICTOR

My wife, Debra Dee.

Paul acknowledges.

Music kicks up.

A small stage in the corner.

HIGGINS and TURTLE are setting up – drums, keyboard, bass.

Loose reggae groove. Improvised. Warm.

Victor leans in.

VICTOR

Got friends here. Higgins, Turtle.
They're musicians.

Paul watches them.

VICTOR

Their band's called SLAP PALS, a palindrome.

Paul's eyes light up.

PAUL

Palindrome? No kidding.

Sarah approaches.

PAUL

Why'd you invite me?

Sarah doesn't miss a beat.

SARAH

Social intercourse....talking. People.

Paul skips a beat.

SARAH

That's all.

She steps away.

Paul absorbs it.

Victor waves him over.

VICTOR

Come on.

Paul follows.

Victor slaps hands with HIGGINS – a perfect SLAP-CLAP.

Paul mirrors it instinctively with Higgins.

Perfect.

They laugh.

VICTOR

Paul's got an idea....A commercial idea.

Higgins leans in.

HIGGINS

Yeah, I've been looking at commercials for a while...

Higgins and Turtle sing:

HIGGINS AND TURTLE:

"Pepsi-Cola hits the spot..."

Victor Interjects.

VICTOR

Wrong decade.

Turtle sings:

TURTLE

"See the USA in your Chevrolet."

HIGGINS

Close but no cigar!

Turtle does a Reggae groove...it's lazy and hypnotic.

Sarah rolls her eyes.

Paul starts tapping without realizing.

Paul turns on the radio and, synchronistically, "One Love" by Bob Marley is on.

They dance. Song ends.

Higgins turns dial on radio: "This land is Your land"

They ALL dance.

Music stops.

Paul announces his idea. Taps on bar. Thud, Thud.

PAUL

Everybody. I got an announcement.

HIGGINS

Let's hear it.

Paul takes a breath.

PAUL

A palindrome: PEPSI IS PEP.

HIGGINS

A what?

Turtle ambles over, drumming lightly.

Laid back. Almost stoned.

TURTLE

Whoa. . . That's a palindrome

Paul nods.

PAUL

Pepsi is pep.

TURTLE

Same as SLAP PALS. Mystical stuff.

Palindromes got secrets in 'em.

Paul smiles.

PAUL

I'll bet you ten bucks you don't know one
thing about me.

Turtle SHRUGS.

TURTLE

Yeah, ok, I can't think, you win.

PAUL

Well, for one thing, I've never been to
McDonald's.

The group ERUPTS

VOICES

NO WAY....You're kidding....NEVER?

Paul just smiles.

They drift into a corner.

TURTLE

Say it again!

SARAH

Pepsi is pep.

Silence.

PAUL

That's different.

Paul writes it down on a pad.

Write it backwards... The same Pepsi is pep.

Higgins and Turtle improvise.

HIGGINS

We are going to give you a tune.

Turtle sits at the keyboard.

Left hand POUNDS low C.

Right hand dances: F#, G#, A#, C#, D#...back again.

A loop.

A mirror.

Paul's face lights up.

PAUL

That's it, man. Play that again.

The band plays that again.

The groove builds.

People gather.

Beer. Wine. Soda everywhere.

INTERCUT

— partygoers drinking

— kids — adults — different faces — different places

Paul hums, then sings — soft at first.

Then slower.

Then faster.

Then as a chant

Then as a whisper.

Then as a jingle.

PAUL (SINGING)

♪ Yeah. . . I think I'll drink a Pepsi Yeah,
that's what'll I'll do ♪

He gestures.

PAUL

Psssst. . . gulp gulp gulp. . .

Laughter.

The band joins in.

ALL

♪ Pepsi is pep...Pepsi is pep ♪

The rhythm swells.

PAUL

♪ Drinking Pepsi makes you happy ♪ ♪
There's real pep in Pepsi ♪
♪ Across the nations,
♪ for all generations!

The crowd CLAPS.

Paul stops – stunned.

Looks around.

At Sarah.

At Victor.

At the band.

Everyone looks at Paul.

PAUL

My God. . .

A quiet realization.

PAUL

This isn't a joke.

Silence. Not awkward----respectful.

Sarah steps in.

SARAH

It's not, so don't treat it as one.

PAUL

Thanks Sarah. Love Ya.

Paul kisses Sarah on the cheek.

PAUL

I think we got it.

A beat.

PAUL

The words... The music.

He smiles – nervous, thrilled, terrified.

PAUL

Now it's real.

The party keeps moving.

Laughter. Clapping. Pepsi cans hissing open.

Paul stands slightly apart now – inside the moment, but already ahead of it.

He looks at the band. At Victor. At Sarah.

Then, almost to himself:

PAUL

I've got something to show the world.

No one reacts.

Because it's not a pitch.

It's a statement.

Sarah clocks it. Just a flicker.

Victor smiles – proud, careless.

Turtle nods, like he's heard this kind of thing before.

The music keeps going.

Paul doesn't move.

The idea doesn't stop.

The groove continues. Laughter. Clapping.

Paul stands slightly apart now – inside the moment, but already ahead of it.

He looks at the band. At Victor. At Sarah.

The idea doesn't stop.

EXT. SARAH'S PARTY - NIGHT (CONTINUOUS)

Music fades into background chatter. Paul is still glowing from the improvisation.

Sarah gently pulls Paul aside, grounding him.

SARAH

Paul. . . you've got something. Enthusiasm.
Conviction.

Paul beams.

SARAH

Put a base under it.

Paul nods, listening.

SARAH

Whatever has a front has a back. Like the
corporate world. It smiles in the
front...and stabs in the back.

She leans in.

SARAH

Remember — Never One Thing.

That lands.

Paul exhales. Calmer now.

PAUL

Gotcha.

A beat. Then, impulsive.

PAUL

I'm going to Boston. Study macrobiotics,
study palindromes....make a great
soda...then (blurting) Wanna get married? I
love ya...always loved ya.

Sarah smiles - but she's not swept away.

SARAH

Hang in there, Paul. Show me that you're serious ...and I'll consider it.

She softens – then gently says:

SARAH

But don't wait forever.

Paul swallows. Stakes planted. Paul walks. Geese fly overhead...honking. Paul turns around:

PAUL

You wanted to go somewhere to talk, right?

SARAH

I did.

PAUL

How about now?

SARAH

Give me...three good reasons.

To Beatles tune:

PAUL

Love...love...love...

Paul pretends to pluck petals from a flower.

PAUL

She loves me. She loves me not. She loves me ...

SARAH

"Do geese see god?"

Paul is taken aback.

A beat.

PAUL

Oh my..... You're good! That's a
palindrome..... and that must mean Y. E. S.

SARAH

Lead on.

PAUL

Sunrise cafe?

SARAH

Did you know that when geese fly, they support each other as a team?

PAUL

Never knew that.

SARAH

Well now you do.

INT. SUNRISE CAFE - NIGHT

60s motif, decorated in bold colors, paisley patterns, bright pinks and purple.

Folk or Motown tunes from a juke box.

Various people come in and out of the Cafe.

A clock starting at midnight when the couple enter, turns quickly as Paul and Sarah talk.

Paul and Sarah are conversing.

PAUL

First time I saw you in high school,... you were leaning up against Miss Banner's homeroom door.

SARAH

Don't remember you. I was waiting for the bell to ring to get out of there.

PAUL

Call it a fixation... or teenage puppy love. It stayed with me.

SARAH

Imagine.

A waitress, Debra Dee, comes up with the menu. Paul and Debra Dee exchange glances. Paul Introduces Debra Dee.

PAUL

Debra Dee, this is Sarah. Sarah, this is
Debra Dee, Victor's wife.

SARAH

Nice to meet you.

Debra Dee stands there, thumping with her foot, needing an order.

Paul and Sarah order.

SARAH

A glass of orange juice and lightly toasted
whole wheat toast.

PAUL

The same.

SARAH

Tell me a little about Vietnam.

PAUL

Now?

SARAH

Yes.

Paul hesitates briefly.

Everyone talks.

He stops chewing.

A refrigerator motor clicks on.

He tracks the sound.

His face flushes red and then white.

No one else notices.

Normal color returns to Paul's face.

He resumes eating.

PAUL

This transition is not easy.

SARAH

I understand. I'm here.

PAUL

The recruiters said I'd never go to Vietnam if I enlisted. What a crock of shit that was. Signed up for four years. Then in boot camp I swore an oath to defend the country from domestic and foreign enemies. That's ok...seemed like the right thing to do. Then O.J.T., learning about radio signals, triangulation, tracking the enemy through sophisticated interpretations of radio operators who would leave their unique signature. I was to study and extrapolate when and where they would come up next and send that information to the Air Force and they would bomb those coordinates. And then the captain and I would pull pins out of the map.

SARAH

Whew....

PAUL

But that's not the worst of it. I would be shot dead if the perimeter I and others were guarding was compromised. That M.P. would have shot me. To protect the intelligence. Not me. Not us. Systems survive by making humans expendable.

SARAH

You still hold that?

PAUL

I do.

SARAH

Oh my....that's horrible....that's
terrible.....

A beat.

SARAH

....But what if that guy, that MP was toying
with you.

A beat. Paul ponders.

PAUL

I dunno.

The food order comes and Debra Dee sets the food down in front of
them.

DEBRA DEE

You guys all right?

PAUL AND SARAH

Yeah.....yeah.

Debra Dee leaves them alone.

Paul to Sarah.

PAUL

Doesn't matter. The damage to me was done.
Hasn't left me. Never will, I imagine.

SARAH

I got an idea. Let's eat and go for a walk.

PAUL

Okay. Yeah.

Paul and Sarah walk hand in hand.

PAUL

Thanks for listening. First time I told
anyone about my experience in 'Nam.

SARAH

You might want to keep a journal.

PAUL

Yuh.

SARAH

Any other thoughts?

PAUL

How about we walk over to my place.

SARAH

Your reason?

PAUL

You know....intercourse...talking,...
otherwise...

Paul and Sarah exchange a knowing affectionate smile.

INT. PAUL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Dark.

Sarah asleep on the couch.

Paul is alone at the table.

A Pepsi can is sitting in front of him.

Unopened.

He stares at it.

Silence.

He touches the scar.

Slow.

He picks up the can.

Opens it.

Fizz.

He lifts it.

Stops.

His hand trembles.

Not from addiction.

From memory.

NEAL (V.O., MEMORY)

"Assets can't fall into enemy hands."

Paul lowers the can.

But instead of pushing it away —

He takes one sip.

Just one.

He sits there.

Eyes close.

It tastes like nothing.

He doesn't spiral.

He doesn't rage.

He just whispers:

PAUL

It's just sugar.

He pours the rest down the sink.

Not as rebellion. As clarity.

That scene deepens him profoundly.

Now he's not reacting.

He's choosing.

Sarah wakes up from sleeping.

SARAH

I'm coming to Boston with you.

INT. KUSHI INSTITUTE - BROOKLINE, MA - DAY

A modest lecture room. Very Plain. A HUGE double blackboard and chalk. Students seated in rows.

MICHIO KUSHI lectures calmly.

MICHIO KUSHI

The evolution of plants and animals happened simultaneously.

Paul listens – absorbed.

MICHIO KUSHI

Grain eating gave primates the ability to stand upright. Food also shapes consciousness.

Michio draws plant and evolution diagrams on a blackboard.

MICHIO KUSHI

Eat a lot of food that stimulates, like salt, eggs, meat, and you'll crave liquids, including soda and alcohol, as well as drugs. You'll also manifest more conflict and violence. Eat more nourishing foods towards the center, grains, vegetables, beans, and become more intuitive...peaceful.

A Song: "IMAGINE" -- JOHN LENNON (instrumental).

Paul writes one word in his notebook: BALANCE, and asks a question;

PAUL

Why is that?

MICHIO KUSHI

Simple, Eat according to the Order of the Universe and you stay healthy, in harmony. No need for healthcare, no need for drugs, no need for medical doctors. Eat out of the Order of the Universe, and you experience ill-health, disharmony. You feed bad bacteria and even cancer cells.

Paul is a bit shocked.

Michio finishes his lecture and begins walking out of the classroom. He takes a cigarette out of a cigarette box and lights it.

Paul follows Michio, and asks:

PAUL

Does that mean all is perfectly ordered; if you're in sync with the order of the universe, or out of sync, results are predictable?

MICHIO

Your homework.

Song: "Never one thing" by May Erlewine

Paul and Michio go their own ways.

PAUL (V.O.)

Never one thing.

Sarah is waiting outside.

SARAH

You are so changed from that evening at the
SUNRISE CAFE.

MONTAGE - FOUR YEARS PASSING

- Paul attending lectures.

– Some repeated. Some confusing.

– Paul frustrated. Paul patient.

Finally: clarity.

Paul closes a notebook. He gets it.

END MONTAGE:

He is reclaiming control of his body.

EXT. ROAD OUTSIDE PARK – DAY

Paul sees a giant PEPSI billboard.

Stops.

Looks at it.

No fantasy morphing.

No portraits whispering.

Just a sign.

PAUL

Pepsi is Pep...backward...forward

He smiles. Not manic. Clear.

This time the idea isn't celebration, nor rebellion.

It's ownership.

EXT. PEPSICO MAIN HEADQUARTERS – WHITE PLAINS – DAY (1988)

Paul's rusted 1949 Chevy rack truck crawls past sculptures and shareholder opulence. It doesn't belong – which is exactly why it matters.

Paul has long hair, wearing a tan jacket, a plaid shirt, blue jeans, and worn Birkenstock sandals.

Pop Culture Sculptures line the roadway.

Focus on Paul's license plate: PAL 121.

A guard shack sits over the curb. A guard salutes the Chevy truck.
The guard signals for Paul to go left.

A LARGE SIGN READS: SHAREHOLDER PARKING.

PAUL turns in.

A Lamborghini RACES past the truck and the gray-haired driver smiles.

The Lamborghini SCREECHES TO A HALT in front of the PEPSICO
headquarters.

Focus on his New York VANITY license plates: PEPSICO.

The driver, CRANE SWAYALL, is CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD of PEPSICO.

He exits his car gracefully in the latest fashion clothes and the
attendants at the MAIN Headquarters OPEN THE DOORS for him.

A Shareholder is impressed by the Chairman of the Board.

ONE SHAREHOLDER

Wow.

Another Shareholder looks unimpressed at Paul and his truck.

ANOTHER SHAREHOLDER

WOW.

Paul is not here to beg. He is here to mirror.

Paul pauses. Hands on the steering wheel. Breathes.

Quiet. Talks to himself.

PAUL

Okay. I didn't plan this. Somewhere along
the way, an idea showed up. So dah man did
this. So dah man did that. That's all this
is.

A beat.

Paul walks toward the side of the building calm and steady. Attendants at the door of the entrance for shareholders are oblivious to Paul.

Paul opens the doors by himself.

INT. PEPSICO HEADQUARTERS, WHITE PLAINS, NY - DAY

Paul stands in a line of shareholders waiting to get into the Shareholders' meeting room: Sign reads: "SHAREHOLDERS MEETING ROOM - FORMAL ATTIRE REQUIRED."

Paul comes up to the receptionist behind a desk of name tags.

RECEPTIONIST

Ah, name?

PAUL

Paul Turner.

The receptionist leafs through an appointment type register.

RECEPTIONIST

No Paul Turner here.

PAUL

I'm here.... I have one share.

RECEPTIONIST

Oh, qualification for the shareholders meeting is 100 shares or more.

PAUL

Ah, how about an exception?

RECEPTIONIST

I would, but look at what you are wearing.

PAUL

Yeah, well, that's what I wear.

RECEPTIONIST

Sorry sir. (pointing to exit)

Paul exits.

EXT. PEPSICO HEADQUARTERS - DAY

Paul now needs to relax from the long drive and the rejection. He walks around the exquisite gardens. Manicured. More POP art.

There's a massive, raw STONE sculpture - untouched, irregular, ancient. The eight foot high rough granite phallic-looking stone is labeled: NEW ENGLAND'S BLARNEY STONE.

Paul stops at the stone.

A WELL-DRESSED WOMAN (60s), elegant, observant, studies it beside him.

WELL-DRESSED WOMAN

That's quite a piece.

PAUL

Shall we kiss it for luck?

She smiles - sharp, amused.

WELL-DRESSED WOMAN

Not today. Thanks.

Paul considers her. Something clicks.

PAUL

You've been photographed more times than this building.

She watches him carefully now.

WELL-DRESSED WOMAN

Have I?

PAUL

You don't look at things. You let them look at you.

A beat.

WELL-DRESSED WOMAN

Would you escort me inside?

PAUL
I don't qualify.

She takes his arm anyway.

WELL-DRESSED WOMAN
I own thousands of shares.

They walk.

Only now —

EXT. PEPSICO HEADQUARTERS SHAREHOLDER ENTRANCE - DAY

WELL-DRESSED WOMAN
I'm Joan Crawford.

Doors open for them by attendants.

INT. PEPSICO SHAREHOLDERS ROOM - DAY

As they approach the entrance to the shareholders room, the
RECEPTIONIST straightens instantly.

The shareholders room doors open for them by attendants.

Ms. Crawford escorts Paul inside.

Paul is impressed by the opulence. A ballroom of money and
entitlement.

PAUL
Holy shit.

She smiles. Keeps moving. Continuing to hold Paul's arm.

A HUGE poster: THE CHOICE OF A NEW GENERATION

Low chatter. Programs flipping. Ice clinking in glasses.

Executives are conversing.

A gavel taps.

CRANE SWAYALL

One final question before we adjourn.

People gather their belongings.

Paul raises his hand.

Not aggressively.

He simply waits.

Crane sees him – an outlier among tailored suits.

CRANE

Yes. . . sir?

Paul stands.

He does not hurry.

He shifts his weight slightly.

Grounds himself.

Song: STAND MY GROUND

A slow breath in.

No theatrics.

PAUL

I served in Vietnam.

The room stills slightly.

Not silence – but attention.

PAUL

I worked in intelligence near the DMZ.

A few heads lift.

A man stops gathering his briefcase.

PAUL

We were told. . . if the perimeter was
breached. . .we, as an intelligence asset,
would be shot first by our own side.

Murmurs. Confused, not hostile.

CRANE

I'm not sure I follow -

PAUL

Top secret clearance. Too valuable to be
captured.

That lands.

No drama. Just a fact.

A beat.

THE ROOM STARTS LISTENING

A woman slowly lowers her pen.

Someone stops mid-sip.

Paul doesn't push.

He waits.

PAUL

I've been thinking about that ever since.

A beat.

PAUL

About systems. . .and what they protect.

No accusation.

Curiosity.

This keeps executives engaged instead of defensive.

PAUL

You sell energy. You sell youth. You sell Pep
...And you do it better than anyone...

A faint smile from someone.

This sounds like a compliment.

Then:

PAUL

You also sell...cancer in a can.

Executives are uneasy.

He is not attacking.

Paul breathes.

Grounded.

PAUL

So I'm asking you something I had to ask
myself.

Silence deepens.

PAUL

When what you produce harms people... Who do
you shoot first?

No emphasis. No accusation. No raised voice.

Just a question.

No one moves.

Ice clinks in a glass.

A chair creaks.

Someone clears their throat.

Crane looks to legal counsel.

Legal does not move.

Silence.

Executives uncomfortable.

He lets them think.

Power accrues to the still person.

Paul opens his shirt.

Slow. Deliberate.

The scar is visible.

Not grotesque. Not performed. Just a fact.

A few people lean forward.

No gasps.

No melodrama.

Just attention.

PAUL

This was called an accident.

A beat.

PAUL

Maybe it was.

He closes his shirt.

He is not exploiting it.

PAUL

I'm not here to blame anyone.

Executives visibly relax.

PAUL

I'm here because systems can change.

They are fully listening.

PAUL

You have the reach to improve what people
drink every day.

A beat.

PAUL

Make it better.

That's the win.

Not applause. Not a check. Not a deal.

Challenge issued.

Silence.

But it's different now.

No murmurs.

No movement.

People are thinking.

A marketing executive writes something down.

Legal is no longer whispering.

Crane studies Paul with new seriousness.

CRANE

Are you proposing a reformulation?

Paul considers.

PAUL

I'm proposing responsibility.

No hostility.

No righteousness.

Just clarity.

OLDER SHAREHOLDER

My wife drinks three cans a day...She's very ill.

He wasn't planning to speak.

Now he is.

This is how rooms shift.

CRANE

We appreciate your perspective, Mr. . . .?

PAUL

Turner.

CRANE

Mr. Turner.

A beat.

CRANE

We will take this under advisement.

This is corporate language for: this may matter, but it's time to adjourn.

He nods.

Sits.

No triumph.

No smile.

No performance.

A nearby shareholder slowly turns a Pepsi can on the table. . .
reading the ingredients.

The well-dressed woman takes Paul by the arm and leads him out.

EXT. PEPSICO BUILDING - DAY

Paul exits with the Well-Dressed woman.

WELL-DRESSED WOMAN

Nice...I'd give my thousand shares to be a
fly on the wall at the meeting the
executives are having now.

Not triumphant.

Just steady.

WELL-DRESSED WOMAN

You did what you came to do?

PAUL

I did.

INT. 1949 CHEVY TRUCK-DAY

Paul sits behind the wheel, adjusts himself.

Paul reaches for a hard covered notebook labeled
SYSTEMS, and opens it.

Looks at "SUGAR/SODA".

Paul CROSSES OUT "SUGAR/SODA".

Paul writes:

"MILITARY"

"FOOD"

"MONEY"

Paul sits behind the wheel, adjusts the seat, and
starts the truck. The truck BACKFIRES, he drives away
unburdened.

The PepsiCo building is no longer a HUGE monolith.
There are people in the windows.

PAUL

Next.

A DOUBLE BEAT.

EXT. FARM - MORNING

Paul tending soil.

Sarah beside him is hanging clothes.

No heavy exposition.

He moves slower.

Calmer.

Scar faint. Touches scar.

Paul reaches into his pocket and pulls out an old Pepsi can tab. A keepsake.

Paul looks at it.

Smiles faintly.

Drops it into the soil.

Covers it up. Plants over it.

Wind moves across the field, not a dust devil.

Just wind.

He plants a seed. Covers it.

He touches his faint scar absentmindedly while working.

Like an old injury.

No longer identity. Just history.

He wipes his brow with a blue handkerchief.

Child laughter nearby.

Circle complete.

Not closed – balanced.

FADE OUT.

SODAMAN BACK COVER

He came home from war—but something didn't come back with him.

Paul Turner was a quiet Kentucky farm boy before Vietnam. When he returns, he is marked—physically and psychologically—by what he's seen. The world he left behind now feels unfamiliar, almost artificial, as if something beneath the surface isn't right.

Drawn to the looming presence of a powerful soda corporation, Paul begins to question the systems shaping everyday life. What starts as a quiet curiosity becomes something deeper—an awakening. With only his conviction and a growing clarity, he confronts a truth most would rather ignore:

When systems harm the people they are meant to serve, who takes responsibility?

As Paul turns away from the machinery of industry and toward something more honest, his journey becomes a quiet act of defiance—one that challenges not just a corporation, but the very structure of the world around him.

A story of awakening, accountability, and the cost of seeing clearly.