

FADE IN:

A DARKLY LIT STUDIO

We dolly-in on TIM O'BRIEN (43), a nervous, earnest man who's dressed in a blue plaid suit. Dim light hits him like a ghost. He's zoning out on the mustard rug floor. He looks lost. Lonely.

Suddenly the lights blast on, and a WOMAN'S VOICE rings out. Tim snaps back into the present and puts on a false smile.

WOMAN'S VOICE/INTERVIEWER

And we are back from commercial break!

The audience, who is down in front of Tim, hoots and claps. The woman's voice belongs to an INTERVIEWER at the host's desk beside Tim.

INTERVIEWER

I hate to be that interviewer that praises all your stuff like I'm trying too hard to promote it. But I'm being legitimate when I say that your work is like poetry, Tim. Honestly.

The crowd claps once more, someone whistling like a kettle.

TIM

(to audience, with a smile)

Tell me how you really feel.

The audience laughs.

Tim is a quiet man. A shy man. An introvert. There's this charm to his not timidness, but observant, coy passivity. Like he thought of a cute joke only he knows the punchline to. He's endearing.

INTERVIEWER

I'm truthfully a fan of yours. I can safely say that. I loved If I Die in a Combat Zone, and Going After Cacciato was also great. So I guess my question is, what do you have planned next?

TIM

I mean, I have a past in the Vietnam War. That's fairly clear in most of my work. So... Well, I've had this idea for a while to make a memoir.

INTERVIEWER

Of the war?

TIM

Yes, of the war. You know, revisit it. It's been about 20 years now. And that, you know, is a very long time. I feel somewhat able to conjure up the facts and my truths. I have yet to try, but yes. That's my plan for my new book. It's not completely decided yet.

INTERVIEWER

Well, I wish you luck, on this book, and any future books to come.

TIM

I thank you.

INT. O'BRIEN HOUSE, TIM'S OFFICE -- DAY

Tim sits at his cluttered desk, in front of his computer, an early model PC -- blocky and loud. He types on the keyboard. The text comes on the screen, neon green in front of black.

He's working on a title.

Memoir of Me

He cringes and deletes "Me."

Memoir of|

The marker blinks there for a moment. Then he types:

Memoir of a Veteran

He considers it. Then he deletes the whole thing. He types in:

Vietnam: My Story

Then he deletes that. He types:

Being in Hell

Considers it. Adds:

Being in Hell: My Story

He deletes: "My Story."

Being in Hell|

He sits back in his chair, hand over his mouth. Contemplating. Then he reaches for his keyboard and deletes that.

Then he types:

Vietnam Memoir  
(Working Title)

He presses "enter" twice. The marker blinks beneath the title. Story's ready to begin. He starts typing:

When I was in the war|

EXT. O'BRIEN HOUSE -- DAY/NIGHT

We dissolve from day to night.

INT. TIM'S OFFICE -- NIGHT

He stands, leaning over his desk, reading over his work. He rubs his palm over his brow, hard.

There's a deep, horrible, frustrated pain in his eyes. They're glistening. If we could feel what he was feeling, we'd feel razor blades in our throats.

He sits down, scrolls up to the title once more, and changes it to:

this is fucking torture.|  
(Working Title)

INT. KITCHEN -- NIGHT

Tim does the dishes while his wife, MEREDITH, chops onions. He's low on energy and seems depressed.

MEREDITH

You know, I've never really cried chopping onions. I'm not sure what all the fuss is about.

TIM

Oh.

MEREDITH

I mean, it's kind of a running joke, right? Onions make you cry? I've just never been a victim, I guess.

TIM

Lucky you.

MEREDITH

I guess. How's your book coming?

TIM

That's a loaded question.

MEREDITH

Well, I mean, I'm just asking for a status update.

TIM

Just not sure why you're concerned.

Meredith head perks.

MEREDITH

That was rude.

TIM

Sorry.

MEREDITH

You're forgiven. You good?

TIM

The book's just stressing me out is all.

Meredith frowns. Continues chopping onions.

MEREDITH

Are you writing about the harder stuff?

TIM

That's the thing. I haven't even really gotten to the worst of it yet.

MEREDITH

Wanna talk about it?

TIM

Not really, Mary.

MEREDITH

You shouldn't keep your thoughts all pent up. God gave you a wife for a reason, to vent all your baggage and be heard. You oughta use me, husband.

TIM

All right, I don't mean this in a rude way, but please get off my back. It would be much appreciated, and my day would run smoother.

MEREDITH

That was rude. Don't talk to me that way.

TIM

Just please leave me alone.

MEREDITH

Please apologize.

Tim hangs his head in shame.

TIM

I'm sorry.

MEREDITH

It's okay. I understand.

TIM

This book, man...

MEREDITH

Maybe it's doing you more harm than good, Tim.

TIM

Oh, I'm not gonna stop writing it.

MEREDITH

At least tell me how it's helping you.

Tim thinks about it.

TIM

It's... I mean...

MEREDITH

If you don't have an immediate answer for something, you're probably looking for false ones.

Tim chuckles through his nose.

TIM

Good quote.

MEREDITH

It's the truth.

TIM

I wanna write about it. Get it outta me. That, I know. I just don't know how to express it realistically without it being ... a real bad time.

MEREDITH

You're an excellent storyteller. I know you'll figure out a way.

DOLLY-IN -- TIM'S SIDE PROFILE

He has a realization we can't figure out yet.

INT. TIM AND MEREDITH'S ROOM -- NIGHT

The room is dark, lights all out. Meredith's asleep beside Tim. He's sitting upright in bed, unable to sleep. He looks ahead of him. Zoning out.

BLINKS

One "blink" consists of a quick insert shot, coming in and out swiftly, like a blip. There are multiple blinks, coming every couple seconds. Less than a millisecond each. You'd have to pause the screen to see them surely and individually; but it's about the implication and the color rather than the content itself.

(The human mind will fill in the rest.)

- FIRST BLINK: Red sludge. Skin, flesh, cartilage.
- SECOND BLINK: A face covered in blood. Horrified expression. Dead eyes. Unmoving.
- THIRD BLINK: A hand, fingers curled and locked in place by rigor mortis. Ghostly white and dead. Splattered with blood.
- FOURTH BLINK: Corpse in a chair. Throat slit. Expression gazing ahead. Mouth gaping, eyes horrified and wide. Horror movie shot.

BLINKS OVER.

Tim holds his head in his hands, grunting. It's clear this isn't the first time this has happened to him. And it's starting to take a toll.

INT. GROCERY STORE -- DAY

Tim walks through an aisle, pushing a cart, browsing. He reaches the end of the aisle and finds himself in the butcher shop.

INSERT SHOTS -- KNIVES AND MEAT

Blades. Slicing. Flesh. Skin. Cartilage. Butchering. Red.

TIM'S FACE

He blinks and looks away. Then he continues on his way, pushing the cart ahead of him.

**END OF SAMPLE**

