

SONORAN SAINTS

EPISODE ONE

"BEST LAID PLANS"

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EPISODE ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. DESERT WILDLANDS - MORNING

A chilly dawn in a rocky landscape on the southern edge of the Sonoran desert. The dots of mesquite trees and sparse shrubs provide bare signs of life in this thirsty climate.

We hear an approach of a running "herd," faintly at first and then slowly growing in volume.

OUT FROM A GROUP OF BOULDERS into the OPEN DESERT -

MATTHIAS, an exquisitely groomed 4 year-old German Shepherd, bursts forth, running at full speed and exuberance. A moment later, the terrain is filling with boys, aged 12-18 who have also emerged from behind the rock formations.

All are dressed in uniform khaki work-out shorts and T-shirts silk-screened with the logo of their school:

JEAN BAPTISTE de LYON - Each has a canteen on his belt.

Matthias as trailblazer, knows exactly where he's going; the group follows him. Once most are out in the-

OPEN DESERT, we see about sixty runners. All are at different stages of physical fitness. Many of the more able will slow or stop to assist others.

But some are individually focused and self-absorbed. One is PAUL KISH(17), tall, determined-looking and darkly grim.

Kish sees a smaller boy ten paces ahead. He spurts forward and comes up fast to the right to pass him. Kish 'accidentally' hip checks the boy - spiraling him towards a patch of cholla cacti. The boy's YELP fades quickly - Kish doesn't look back.

MATTHIAS PERIODICALLY SLOWS to look behind and evaluate the situation. He'll sometimes wait for the mass to catch up.

NEAR THE HEAD OF THE HERD - on opposite sides two adults run, turning often to observe the progress of the entire group.

SERGEANT RANDOLPH GREER(37) tries appearing more physically imposing than he is by beginning each word and command low down from his diaphragm. It helps offset self-doubt for his lack of height and combat experience.

GREER

Keep it up, men! Let's go, move it!

ON THE OPPOSITE FLANK -

SERGEANT FIRST CLASS ROBIN AYELET(34), an athletic brunette, doesn't need words to motivate. Faster cadets naturally compete to follow most closely on 'her six.'

Her battle scars and *don't-even-think-about-it* demeanor say she has nothing to prove or fear (late-night dorm chatter speculates she must be former *Sayeret Matkal*).

STILL WITHIN THE OVERGROWTH -

and bringing up the rear is RYAN STULTZ(17). His massive frame and height suggests a future NFL linebacker - that is, IF his coordination ever improves. A lot. He pants and struggles to keep moving.

Several paces behind Ryan (and hobbit-sized by visual comparison) -

JACOB TANNOR(13) runs with TOMMY FIACETTI(14). Both are intelligent above their ages; yet their slight frames make them appear even younger. Jacob is one long pace out-

INTO THE CLEARING when he sees Tommy stagger and hit the ground, gasping for air.

He hesitates - then reverses direction to help.

AHEAD, IN THE OPEN DESERT - Greer sees Jacob appear and then retreat. He stops and searches the faces of the boys running towards and past him.

WITHIN THE OVERGROWTH - Jacob finds that Tommy has struggled his way over to

A SMALL NATURAL POOL of clear water by a cliff side. As Jacob gets there, Tommy pulls his immersed head out - and continues to douse himself.

Seeing Jacob approach, Tommy gestures 'no.' Jacob kneels alongside.

JACOB
No man left behind, Tommy.

TOMMY
(shaking his head)
Go.

JACOB
Not without you.

Tommy shrugs and closes his eyes, still panting.

TOMMY
I just -- I need a minute.

JACOB
Okay, just breathe. Take it sl--

RYAN (O.S.)
MAKE A HOLE!

Seemingly out of nowhere, Ryan barrels past them and belly flops into the pool, sending up a geyser.

AHEAD, IN THE OPEN DESERT - Greer spots a certain boy approach and sprint by.

GREER
Tannor! Halt.

EASTON TANNOR(17), Jacob's older brother, stops with a pained look - before turning to face Greer, who motions him over.

EASTON
Yes, Sergeant?

Greer directs his attention to Jacob's last seen position.

GREER
Your assistance is required.

BY THE NATURAL POOL - In wonder, Jacob and Tommy stare silently at Ryan - who sits waist-high in the water, a blank expression on his face.

Instantly (like a cat deciding he must be SOMEWHERE ELSE), Ryan scrambles from the pool and runs to the-

COPSE EXIT. As the merciless sun hits him full force:

RYAN
Oh sweet Jesus.

AHEAD, IN THE OPEN DESERT, GREER faces EASTON.

EASTON
What, Jacob again?
(his guard slips)
Ahh...!

A SHORT DISTANCE AWAY, Paul Kish empties his shoe of small stones, "doing his own thing" - yet is within earshot.

GREER
For someone with such big
ambitions...

Easton snaps to attention, his face alert.

GREER (CONT'D)
Constant reminders should NOT be
necessary.

EASTON
No, Sergeant.

Easton turns and starts to trot back.

GREER
Don't forget, Mr. Tannor..!

ON EASTON'S ANNOYED FACE as he departs - he mockingly mouths
along with Greer's sentence, shouted to his back.

GREER (CONT'D)
There's no "I" in *squadron*!

EASTON
(muttering)
Fuck this.

GREER
And surely not in brothers, either.

ON PAUL KISH - his shoe-clearing done, he laces back up. He
watches Easton go, his inner wheels turning. Greer sees.

GREER (CONT'D)
Mr. Kish! Do you require
assistance?

Kish's eyes are blank. He turns and runs off.

We follow him a few dozen yards until, unseen by anyone, he
veers off from the group and disappears into the morning.

EXT. SCHOOL COURTYARD - MOMENTS LATER

ESTABLISHING SHOT -- Clustered around the main entrance and
courtyard of the military academy, *JEAN BAPTISTE de LYON*, are
administrative and classroom buildings. Across the campus, we
can make out its ornate chapel, dorms, drill fields and gym.

The center of the courtyard is dominated by the sight of -

A rippling STARS AND STRIPES atop a tall flagpole. It's flanked on both sides by two slightly shorter poles. One flies the STATE FLAG of California, the other a flag displaying the crossed forearms of the FRANCISCAN ORDER.

INT. BROTHER ZACHARY'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

BROTHER ZACHARY FELTON, barely-greying, distinguished, early fifties, wears the formal attire of a Franciscan Brother.

Presiding over *Jean Baptiste de Lyon*; he sees himself as a caring-but-stern father to 200 boys. A spiritual or natural one? He aims to be both.

His office décor includes various photos, diplomas, iconic religious symbols, medals and the school's proud history - including group shots of past graduating classes.

Moving round his desk, he's engaged in an intense speaker-phone conversation with an unseen PASTOR MASON. His face shows stress but his voice maintains control and dignity.

BROTHER ZACH

Thanks, yes. It's good to hear from you too - finally. After, oh - seven or-was-it eight messages this week alone..?

PASTOR MASON (O.S.)

My apologies, Brother. It's been hectic here. Never a moment to breathe. I'm sure you...

(expecting a response)

I want you to know, I do often overhear... words of admiration for all the good work you do there.

BROTHER ZACH

We sent you the academy's annual budget request four months ago. Why no response?

INT. CLERGY OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

PASTOR MASON, forties & dressed in clerical garb, has his feet planted on a desk with a wireless keyboard on his lap.

Punching keys, he stares at his monitor - which displays a chaotic (nearly-muted) *shooter* game, FORTNITE. He blasts away an opponent and intently focuses on searching for the next.

PASTOR MASON
As far as I know, it's still under
review.

A door opens behind Pastor Mason; BISHOP FREDERICK silently enters the room. He takes in the scene of Mason's activities.

Dressed in his formal vestments, Bishop Frederick carries a wad of folded sweats under one arm and a packed bowling bag in his hand.

BROTHER ZACH (O.S.)
Allocation decisions have never
taken this long. Tell me, DO WE
HAVE the full support of His
Eminence - or not?

PASTOR MASON
Is there any reason you wouldn't?

INT. BROTHER ZACHARY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Brother Zach glares at the speakerphone with annoyance. His fist clenches & he chokes off a war-cry.

BROTHER ZACH
(fighting for calm)
I insist on speaking with Bishop
Frederick myself.

INT. CLERGY OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

BROTHER ZACH (O.S.)
When is he available?

The bishop comes up behind Mason.

PASTOR MASON
Oh, that's hard to say.

BROTHER ZACH (O.S.)
(dryly)
Of **course** it is.

PASTOR MASON
(missing the sarcasm)
I'm not privy to his comings and
goings. Especially now with - all
that hectic, uh - how busy we are.

BROTHER ZACH (O.S.)
 Then exactly who IS privy - and how
 do I reach this person or deity?

The Bishop steps forward. At the instant the pastor sees him, the bowling bag swings in a slicing arc against Mason's outstretched shins.

Pastor Mason YELPS as his feet fly above the desk and land roughly on the floor.

The bishop glares at him and the offending shoes - then turns his attention to the speakerphone.

BISHOP FREDERICK
 Brother Zachary.

BROTHER ZACH (O.S.)
 Your Eminence, how are--

BISHOP FREDERICK
 (brusque)
 Many of the long-time regular donors we've counted on have lately been coming down with - the jitters. Safe to say, it has cut into their *will-to-tithe*.

INT. BROTHER ZACHARY'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

BROTHER ZACH
 I'm not following.

BISHOP FREDERICK (O.S.)
 Well you should - because it's about your recruiting choices.

BROTHER ZACH
 Nothing in our policies have changed since I began here.

BISHOP FREDERICK (O.S.)
 But society has. People have changed. And now, your well-meaning "fostering" of criminal youth is being looked at much more closely.

Brother Zach's eyes now stray to and linger over an open file on his desk. Along with a scattered stack of documents...

BISHOP FREDERICK (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 And not so favorably anymore.

RANDOM PHOTOS show a male at different ages, from fourteen (in cadet uniforms) up to mid-twenties (in Marine fatigues).

He has slowly been *tuning out* the Bishop's words; they DRONE ON in the b.g. Brother Zach picks up and studies a close-up of a young man's face and shoulders - in Marine full dress.

BISHOP FREDERICK (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 In a *twenty-four/seven* news world,
perception grinds truth into dust
 every time.

The name seen in multiple places throughout is "JEREMY CHEN".

BISHOP FREDERICK (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 We can discuss it further this
 Sunday. Expect us at four PM.

That snaps his attention back.

BROTHER ZACH
 (flat)
 Oh. You're paying us a visit. We're
 honored--

BISHOP FREDERICK
 (overlapping)
 For the immediate future, I want
 you to forget about raising boys
 and soldiers. Your obligation is to
 shepherd a flock of SAINTS.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - CONTINUOUS

The amorphous desert seems to blend into the beginning of a traveled path.

Far ahead of the group, Matthias reaches this recognized spot. Panting, he circles slowly, then sits and patiently watches the group in the distance.

EXT. OVERGROWTH - CONTINUOUS

BY THE NATURAL POOL, Jacob has helped Tommy to his feet.

JACOB
 Deep breaths. Slowly.
 TOMMY
 (breathing in, then out) Slowwwwww..... That's good. JACOB (CONT'D)

TOMMY (CONT'D)
 (breathing in, out)
 Sloww...
 (seeing past Jacob)
 ..wwoh shit. Your brother.

Easton approaches fast. Jacob turns, his face falls.

JACOB
 ("delighted")
 Easton, what brings you out here?
 Must be the lovely weather.

EASTON
 That's not how you address a
 senior. Cadet.

JACOB
 Jesus Christ, cut the act bro.
 There's nobody here to impress with-

EASTON
 (overlapping)
 I hadda double-time it back because
 you *dick-farts* can't keep up.

JACOB
 We're moving.

TOMMY
 It's my fault. Jacob just--

EASTON
 (ignoring Tommy)
 What's gonna be next, me checking
 for '*monsters under your bed*' at
 lights-out?

Jacob "studies" his brother, contemptuously salutes then
 turns away and faces Tommy.

JACOB
 Think you can make it?

Tommy nods, they turn and attempt to head for the opening.

EASTON
 You were not dismissed!

Easton detaches his canteen. Jacob pivots back smartly and
 snaps to attention.

JACOB

Thank you for the ex-fil rescue,
Senior Cadet! May we continue the
drill?

Tommy is frozen. Easton glares at his brother, unsure. He shakes his canteen, realizes it's empty -- then steps forward and snatches Jacob's canteen off his belt.

EASTON

You'll wait.

As he unscrews the top, his attention goes to Tommy for the first time. After a beat, he glares at Jacob with disgust.

EASTON (CONT'D)

I'm so sick of you embarrassing our
family.

Easton brings the canteen to his mouth, glances at Tommy again for a beat - then closes it without drinking.

EASTON (CONT'D)

And me.

Far off in the open desert, a loud police WHISTLE is blown.

EASTON (CONT'D)

Get moving. Double time.

The boys head for the treeline.

TOMMY

(aside, to Jacob)
What's a dick-fart?

ON EASTON - glancing at Jacob's canteen in his hand.

EASTON

Think fast, Cadet!

Easton chucks it at Jacob, who ducks before it hits his head. The boy retrieves it, he and Tommy continue out of the grove.

TOMMY

(growing fainter)
Like, is that even possible?

INT. BROTHER ZACHARY'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Brother Zachary at his desk is focused on his laptop screen.

BROTHER ZACH
 (sorrowfully)
 I prayed it was a mistake.

Using keyboard and mouse, he COPIES, PASTES and EMAILS the content he was viewing. Outside his door, we dimly hear...

COMPUTER VOICE (O.S.)
You've got mail.

He closes the laptop, stands and moves to his large office window. He looks out, focusing on nothing. But his eyes often dart upward. He's inwardly wrestling.

There's a KNOCK at his door.

BROTHER ZACH
 Come in, Sharon.

The door opens and SHARON ADAMS(51) enters. Officious, statuesque and methodically-attractive, she carries herself with dignity. The better we know her, the more we'll suspect *her face on a portrait is decaying in some closet somewhere.*

Sharon feels it's just her *cross-to-bear* that Brother Zach believes HE is the one in charge.

She stands, uncomfortably watching his pain. Brother Z's administrative assistant does not *do empathy* all that well.

SHARON
 I'm deeply sorry, Sir.

BROTHER ZACH
 Thank you.

SHARON
 I'll get it all rolling. I just need to know the date.

BROTHER ZACH
 Yes, as soon as I decide. You still have the original to-do list?

SHARON
 You told me to burn it. Literally. You said we'd never need it again.

BROTHER ZACH
 That's right -- I did. Oh, my...

He switches gears to open his laptop.

BROTHER ZACH (CONT'D)
I'll put together another one.

SHARON
Brother Zachary...
(tapping her temple)
It's all up here.

BROTHER ZACH
Oh. Everything? From - was it *nine*
years ago?

SHARON
Back then I figured we *would* have
further use for it.

Brother Zach moves again to the window and gazes out -

ACROSS THE MAIN COURTYARD at the three flags which ripple in
the hot, dry breeze.

BROTHER ZACH
(suddenly recalling)
Of course, first things first. Get
a hold of Daniel. Ask him to--

SHARON
No!

Her sudden forcefulness causes Brother Z to go silent.

SHARON (CONT'D)
Forgive me, Brother Zachary. Anyone
except him. Daniel Cesta does NOT
deserve that honor!

BROTHER ZACH
(long beat)
Not today, Sharon. Really, any
other time. Just...

EXT. OPEN DESERT - CONTINUOUS

In the distance, the piercing WHISTLE that Sgt. Robin Ayelet
now blows a second time has Matthias excitedly BARKING.

SGT. ROBIN
Form up! Bring it in!

The chaotic bunch of *on-the-cusp manhood* quickly form into a
precise rank and file of five-across.

FROM HIGH ABOVE - we see the group double-time it 60 yards across the open desert toward the beginning of the dirt road where a happily BARKING Matthias leaps excitedly. Sergeant Ayelet heads the group while Sergeant Greer moves alongside.

Behind the platoon, two small figures struggle to catch up.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - CONTINUOUS

As the last few columns put their feet on the road and slow to a march, Jacob and Tommy catch up and join.

EXT. SCHOOL COURTYARD - MOMENTS LATER

The area is deserted except for a single figure who stands by the third of three flagpoles.

DANIEL CESTA(31) is thin and unkempt. The flip-flops on his feet touch the ends of frayed pajama bottoms. Above a stained undershirt, his hair reaches the bottoms of his ears.

Somberly, he secures a rope around the pole's cleat. He then shuffles toward the farthest pole, where we see:

An **M1 World War II Japanese Arisaka rifle** leans against it - next to a steaming, lidless travel-cup of coffee, sitting on the ground. He retrieves both.

Casually sipping, he strides back from the center pole, *silently* counting paces. He stops.

He moves to set the cup on the ground several feet away, returning to the exact spot, his back still to the flagpoles.

Daniel holds the Arisaka at his right side. He lets a moment pass; we see his entire physical demeanor transform.

He takes a deep breath and does a perfect "About Face" and remains at 'Attention.'

He opens the rifle stock, inspects the empty chamber, then closes it with a RESOUNDING METAL-TO-WOOD CLICK.

With the Arisaka back at his side, the rifle gradually comes ALIVE: spinning like a propellor, flying from and returning to his hands, attacking the ground before taking new flight.

It and Daniel become one in a precise dance -- as he executes a perfect 15-count *Manual of Arms* and *Queen Ann's Salute*.

AERIAL SHOT of all three poles, with their FLAGS NOW FLYING AT HALF-STAFF.

Below and in the b.g., we can make out Daniel shuffling away, grasping the Arisaka casually while sipping his coffee.

EXT. OVERGROWTH - MOMENTS LATER

Near the copse exit, Easton sits on a rock, lost in thought. He stands to leave - but a familiar 'aroma' reaches him. He heads toward it.

IN A ROCKY-BUT-SHELTERED CLEARING - Kish sits, taking a deep hit from a buddah, relaxed, in no hurry to be anywhere.

EASTON APPEARS, his face registers shock, more at Kish's serene attitude than the infraction itself.

KISH

Hey there, 'Senor' Cadet, welcome to the *Cuddle Cove*. First time, right?

A nearby formation of rocks serves as a store/shelf/display with assorted banned paraphernalia.

EASTON

You'll be busted AWOL if you don't move now.

KISH

(like Easton never spoke)
Feel free to browse. Ten percent discount for new customers.

Kish selects a vape pen and a beat-up light-green cellphone. He holds it up for Easton to see.

KISH (CONT'D)

In need of any supplies?

EASTON

(scoffs)
Like I'd ever use a campus mule.

KISH

Well if you're here for the cuddling, my 'comfort employees' don't come in before three-thirty.

EASTON

(is this a *punking*?)
We keep telling you, Kish. You're not funny. Like, at all.

KISH

(pause, then sighs)

Yes, I'm aware. It's just a persona I'm trying out - you know, to hone my business skills. Alas, it's not me - is it?

Easton doesn't answer, but instead looks over Kish's displayed wares. There are several enigmatic electronics devices in addition to cannabis products. And at least a dozen cellphones.

EASTON

So it's true. Every base has a *Milo Minderbinder*.

KISH

Well done! "Catch 22" - Mister C's lit class. I'm impressed that you're honing some *sharp-witted* skills.

EASTON

(flatly)

I live for your approval.

As Easton turns back, Kish has put the vape pen and cellphone in a zip-lock bag. He's wrapping duct tape all over it.

EASTON (CONT'D)

Woh, I didn't say I want anything!

KISH

Relax, Captain America. Will you just deliver this to your comrade-in-arms, Bruce Govich?

EASTON

Bruce...

KISH

Tell him I'll collect later.

(saluting)

Senior Cadet.

EXT. ACADEMY MAIN GATE - MOMENTS LATER

Down the drive, this morning's dawn runners march past the visitor parking lots to the school courtyard.

A few at a time see it: the flags flying at half-staff. The word very quickly spreads. All it takes is a lifted gaze.

ON THE GROUP - Shocked reactions ripple through the ranks. Sergeants Robin Ayelet and Greer also appear shocked.

EXT. SCHOOL COURTYARD - CONTINUOUS

As the last of the marchers enter the courtyard, A COMMAND is shouted by Greer. The boys break lock-step and walk freely. They nervously converse, stealing glances upward.

FROM HIS OFFICE OVERLOOKING - Brother Zach sees many dozen oh-so-*small* military cadets milling around flags in mourning.

EXT. SCHOOL COURTYARD - MOMENTS LATER

Row by row, upon reaching a central point, the boys scatter in five different directions (rushing to various dorms, showers - and the battle for hot water).

OUTSIDE A ROW OF CLASSROOMS: Daniel leans on a handrail. He now sports shoes, slacks and a button-down shirt.

He catches sight of Sergeant Robin entering the yard to continue overseeing the arrival; Matthias at her side. The dog strides unleashed, calmly in perfect heel position; *he knows rules*. Daniel leaves the walkway and heads for them.

DANIEL

Well... you're back late today.

Robin and Matthias turn to see Daniel.

In a flash, the dog shoots to him and leaps, his forepaws planted on Daniel's chest. Matthias lovingly WHIMPERS; so does Daniel - stroking his face and ears roughly.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

I was starting to worry.

Robin walks up. She wears a STAR OF DAVID around her neck.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

(to Matthias)

Thought maybe some coyotes were dumb enough to mess with you.

Despite his pain, Daniel smiles at Robin. She is friendly, if a bit aloof.

SGT. ROBIN

Matthias, down! We've been over this too many times.

Daniel eases the excited dog back on all fours.

DANIEL
(good-naturedly)
I don't think he has capacity for
that level of cognitive work.

SGT. ROBIN
Huh. That's his impression of you.

Daniel mimes how wounded he is. Robin gestures at the flags.

SGT. ROBIN (CONT'D)
Daniel, what this about?

INT. ACADEMY CHAPEL - MOMENTS LATER

The ornate hall is large enough to seat several hundred. It's currently occupied by Brother Zach and MICHAEL CAMERON(47), who converse in low tones on opposite sides of an aisle in the first row. Sharon sits nearby, taking notes.

Cameron, a born-again Christian and *rehabilitated ne'er-do well*, wears an uncomfortable-for-the-climate jacket and slacks with a buttoned-up white shirt and too-wide tie. The crucifix pin on his lapel is somewhat larger and shinier than seems necessary, as if it also is *trying too hard*.

BROTHER ZACH
No "wages of sin" or the Lord's
"larger plan" for each one of us.
(is he getting through?)
Dial back the fire and brimstone.

CAMERON
My zeal is my single best quality.
Respectfully, I find it troubling
to be constantly--

The front doors open. Sergeant Robin, Daniel and Matthias enter and approach. Matthias BARKS happily (rescuing Brother Zach from Cameron) and runs down the aisle to greet him.

BROTHER ZACH
(affectionately)
Matthias. How was your run?

As Brother Zach strokes the dog, he turns back to Cameron, his demeanor serious again.

BROTHER ZACH (CONT'D)
(weary)
Michael, I intended no criticism.

Matthias leaps to the altar.

CAMERON

"When Jesus saw their faith, he
said, *Friend, your sins are
forgiven.*"

SHARON

Amen!

Matthias circles a few times before the main pedestal - then
lies down beneath it.

BROTHER ZACH

(distracted)

Amen...

Sgt. Robin and Daniel reach them. Their looks are questioning
and troubled. Brother Zachary looks up slowly.

BROTHER ZACH (CONT'D)

One of our own sons - has fallen.

INT. STUDENT DORM HALLWAY - MORNING

Cadets mill about in various states of readiness for morning
classes. Some are in towels, right from the shower. Others
are already in uniform with books, rushing for the exits.

There is NOISE and VOICES, yet it's more subdued than
expected from most typical dormitory environments.

THE CAMERA moves down the hallway through the throng, giving
us views into THE ROOMS themselves - which are austere and
contain only the bare necessities for a religious/military
high school education.

BY EACH STAIRCASE - is a row of wired telephones.

Paul Kish dials a number, stress obvious on his face, As it
DRONES, he sticks a finger in his other ear to block the
surrounding DIN. There's a pick-up CLICK.

MONICA

(recorded message)

Hi. You have the right person-

KISH

(overlapping)

Damn it...

MONICA

-but she's currently in the wrong place, ha ha. Leave your message and remember to be happy today.

The message BEEPS.

KISH

(forcing casual)

It's me, Monica. I have a break at four and I'll wait by the phone.

(debating, finally)

I know you're at home then. Call!

INT. ACADEMY CHAPEL - MOMENTS LATER

As earlier, Brother Zachary, Sharon Adams, Michael Cameron, Sergeant Robin and Daniel remain.

Sergeant Greer is now present too.

BROTHER ZACH

Your doubts about endorsing this plan are well-deserved. I get it...

No one appears to want to answer.

SGT. ROBIN

We are in crisis. Doubts or not, I'm confident we can give Corporal Chen a proper memorial.

(beat)

To take strategic benefit at the same time does not make it *de facto* unethical.

Brother Z sees the sour look on Cameron's face getting worse.

DANIEL

(whispers)

"De facto." I taught you that.

SGT. ROBIN

You didn't. It's the same in Hebrew.

CAMERON

Sergeant Ayelet - so you agree to making public, the story of this young man's youthful degenerate ways?

(beat)

(MORE)

CAMERON (CONT'D)

I fail to see how that translates
to a *proper* memorial.

SHARON

Michael, please don't overreact.

CAMERON

(blindsided by Sharon)
What? How am I--

SHARON

Your secrets are safe with us.

Cameron turns colors. Greer reads the situation and jumps in.

GREER

(to Brother Z)
Sir, if I may. I feel you're
consulting the wrong people.

BROTHER ZACH

No, Sergeant Greer, I do value
everyone's input before I decide.

GREER

No, what I mean is... it won't be
you who decides.
(beat)
We here can talk strategy and
devise all the battle plans we
want, but...

Brother Zach nods his understanding.

BROTHER ZACH

But the master sergeant is the only
one who's gonna make this call.

Brother Zach ascends the pulpit, towards Matthias. The
silence is unsettling. He reaches the dog and sits with him.

BROTHER ZACH (CONT'D)

Thank you for the too-obvious
reminder.

Daniel is a little lost - but feels able to cut the tension.

DANIEL

It does seem like the play we have
to make. I'm in complete accord
with Sergeant Ayelet.

CAMERON
 (sarcastic)
 Oh, there's a shock.

SGT. ROBIN
 (whispers to him)
 Keep up, Dan.

THE CHAPEL DOOR opens. Sunlight shines in - then is quickly obscured by the man *filling* the doorway. It is SERGEANT MAJOR FRANK HADLEY(63). His solid frame blocks out a lot of light.

Brother Z's voice, ECHOING FROM THE INTERIOR:

BROTHER ZACH
 In any case, there is SO much to be done.

ON HADLEY - who clutches A FOLDER in a tight fist as he stalks down the aisle toward the group. His voice echoes off the chapel walls.

HADLEY
 There always is. But first, I got something to say.

All eyes are on Hadley - except for Brother Zach, who remains lost in thought, petting Matthias. He looks up, listlessly.

BROTHER ZACH
 (flat)
 Oh, hello Frank. We were just talking about you.

HADLEY
 (closer now)
 I saw the budget proposal for next semester. What is this crap?!

Brother Zach shakes his head and chuckles darkly.

CAMERON
 Master Sergeant. Remember where you are.

HADLEY
 Not in the mood, Cameron.

CAMERON
 Then leave your bad mood outside the Lord's house.

HADLEY
Shouldn't you be out somewhere,
looking for a witch to drown?

CAMERON
(fumbling for - *anything*)
You -- you'd like that, huh?

HADLEY
(to Brother Z)
Are you kidding me with this?

GREER
Master Sergeant, we're not
discussing department budgets now.

HADLEY
We damn well should be.
(to Brother Z)
With my division getting thirty-
five percent less than last year?

GREER
Sarge! There's very important news--

HADLEY
(overlapping)
More important than this?

For the first time, Hadley picks up on the general mood of
all. Nobody moves, then...

SHARON
(reading)
"Chen, Jeremy. Graduated ten years
ago. Fifty-third in his class, two-
point-two GPA. Six years later, he
enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps--"

HADLEY
(overlapping)
--U.S. Marine Corps. He went for
the leathernecks, right. I never
imagined a day of service in his
future...
(knows it'll be bad)
Let me hear it.

Again, no one appears eager to respond. Sharon looks
around...

SHARON

(reading)

"July Eighth, during the evacuation from Bagram Airfield. Convoy T-16 reached the outskirts of Parwan Province. At Zero-Three-Forty-Two, the lead Humvee took fire from multiple RPG's--

HADLEY

Is the kid alive or not?!

INT. PAUL KISH'S DORM ROOM - EVENING

Kish sits at his desk, surrounded by electronic components. He's connecting pieces - among them, we can make out tiny parts for hidden VIDEO and AUDIO recording.

Kish's gaze comes to the cellphone off to one corner. He pauses and mulls over a thought.

KISH

(shrugs & mutters)

Let 'em trace me if they want.

He picks it up, finger-stabs it.

KISH (CONT'D)

(singing off-key)

"Nothing really matters, anyone can see. Nothing really..."

He catches his reflection in a mirror. As his call faintly RINGS, he goes silent - and studies himself with an eerily blank expression.

INT. MONICA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Monica is stretched out above her blankets, fully clothed. Dead-to-the-world, she has mercifully entered the void of the *emotionally wiped out*.

Her cellphone, lying nearby, RINGS rudely.

Every part of her being resists getting dragged from the blissful darkness. The PHONE is relentless. Her hand, guided by reflex only, fumbles for it.

INT. PAUL KISH'S DORM ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The phone-speaker transmits the RINGING on the other end. Kish's mind races, forming the message he expects to leave. When the undreamed-of happens...

MONICA (O.S.)
(severely groggy)
Hello?

So shocked to hear her *live* voice, Kish only stammers out a vowel or two.

MONICA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Hello! Who is this?

KISH
(GOOD times)
Heeey... Monica. It's me.

INT. MONICA'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The unmistakable voice is like a shot of hot adrenaline. Her mind screams '*general-quarters!*' She grasps at consciousness.

KISH (O.S.)
(WHY no response?)
It's Paul.

Monica glares fear and silent impotent fury at the phone-clutching *traitorous hand* which allowed Kish into her room.

MONICA
I'm sleeping...
(a futile appeal to
empathy))
I was asleep.

KISH (O.S.)
I've been so concerned about you.

MONICA
Yah, thank you. It's very hard
right now.

KISH
Sure, I know that.
(too soon)
I only left about a million
messages.

EXT. CITY STREET - MOMENTS LATER

Outside a bustling VIDEO ARCADE, adolescents and teens congregate.

Two 10 year-old girls, JENNY & BIANCA, ride up on bicycles. Jenny's ride is brand new, shining pink and **a size-too-big for her**, obviously chosen as something she'll grow into.

Both get off. Bianca parks hers in a multiple-bike stand. Jenny is a few steps behind.

BIANCA is *locking up* her well-worn ride - when she sees Jenny shove her shiny, NEW FLORESCENT PINK BICYCLE's front wheel into the stand and turn to run for the arcade.

Bianca catches up.

BIANCA
Jenny, wait!

JENNY
(annoyed)
What?! There's already a line for
Demon Core Junior! Come on!

BIANCA
Your bike! You didn't lock it
again.

Jenny rolls her eyes but moves to comply.

BIANCA (CONT'D)
How many times do I have--

JENNY
Yes, Mommy...

INT. MONICA'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

INTERCUT with PAUL KISH'S DORM ROOM (continue phone conversation: Kish and Monica)

KISH
Now is NOT the time to make any
kind of big decision. You can't
think straight.

MONICA
(controlled)
Three months ago.
(MORE)

MONICA (CONT'D)

I told you nearly three months ago -
I even wrote down the date. I said,
*Paul I can't be your girlfriend any
more.*

KISH

You *can't be* - or *don't want to be*?

MONICA

It doesn't matter!

KISH

(dripping w/understanding)
Of course it does, Mon. See, right
there. That's a perfect example...

MONICA

Example of WHAT?

KISH

You're in so much grief now, your
thinking is... it's warped.

MONICA

Something really IS wrong with you.

KISH

(reassuring)
You don't mean 'wrong.'

MONICA

I do!

KISH

You mean - 'unique.' See, I -- I
understand these things better than
most people. There's a stockpile of
shining clarity up here...

(to his head)

I know it's overwhelming to most
people...

(oops!)

Even to someone as sharp as you.

IN HER ROOM - Monica tries to still her trembling.

KISH (CONT'D)

Damn it, Mon. I have to go. Class
in ten minutes.

MONICA

(flat)

You don't want to be late. Go.

KISH
I can't wait to see you this
Sunday.

INT. ACADEMY CHAPEL - MORNING

Michael Cameron's words fade in - as we PAN across the congregation.

CAMERON (O.S.)
Faith, based on human decency and a
loving God, is the only answer to
intolerant fanatics of death -

The chapel is filled with civilians, cadets, and clergy.

ON THE STAGE/CHANSEL - Brother Zachary (w/Matthias alert at his side), Hadley and others are seated behind the altar. Among them we recognize Pastor Mason, sitting beside Bishop Frederick in the ornate, larger throne.

MICHAEL CAMERON at the SMALLER LECTERN -

CAMERON (CONT'D)
- who hide their evil within the
trappings of religion.

Downstage are photos of Jeremy Chen, both current and from earlier years at DeLyon. Also displayed on a glass platform are his rifle, helmet and several medals.

Prominent in their midst are his well-worn COMBAT BOOTS.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
Preserve your faith in the Lord and
He will never abandon you.

AMONG THE CONGREGATION

Daniel looks round, scanning the crowd. Several seats and one row behind he notices Robin. She catches his glance. They exchange a somber but quick look.

ON THE STAGE/CHANSEL - Hadley moves to the LECTERN. He peers to his left - at the much higher raised pulpit.

He makes his way over to climb the several stairs, putting him high above everyone.

The Bishop loudly clears his throat in disapproval, ignored by Hadley. Brother Zach looks down to inspect a hangnail.

AMONG THE CONGREGATION - The silence is broken by a short, low-but-audible SOB FROM THE WOMAN sitting beside Robin, who puts an arm around her shoulder. The voice evokes--

A REACTION FROM Brother Zach. He looks up, alert.

HADLEY takes a moment before beginning.

HADLEY

Lance Corporal Jeremy Chen - was a man who led by example with the best qualities one could aspire to.

The camera pans ACROSS THE FACES OF THE CADETS in the pews.

HADLEY (CONT'D)

Jeremy Chen, the boy... was a screw up. Hard-headed, disrespectful. The traditions and values we protect -- all signs warned us they would never be learned *by this dangerous, broken kid* who came to us - courtesy of the Escondido Juvenile Correction facility.

ACROSS THE CONGREGATION - some adults look uncomfortable.

HADLEY (CONT'D)

He was already a *serious offender* by the time Brother Zachary Felton met him and thankfully had the insight to recognize a spark of potential. Essentially HE *rescued* the troubled soul of the boy who would become the man we honor today.

(beat)

Truth be told, I didn't agree. What I saw was a damaged, selfish child who was all about finding short-cuts. He had NO use for the word "thorough."

HADLEY'S eyes stray from his notes. Gazing across the several FLAGS aligning the stage, an unplanned thought lands:

HADLEY (CONT'D)

(off-script, recalling)

To Jeremy, there just *had* to be a way around - well, everything...

(beat)

I remember his senior year, the kid racked up another footlocker-full of demerits.

(MORE)

HADLEY (CONT'D)
 And he bragged he'd be THE cadet,
 the only one to ever locate the
original battle banner -

FROM THE SEATS BEHIND HADLEY - Michael Cameron scowls.

CAMERON
 (muttering)
 What is he doing?

HADLEY (CONT'D)
 That flag was a work of
 pride, designed by the *first*
graduating class of this
 academy.

HADLEY (CONT'D)
 He believed a rumor, likely from
 before my time, that any cadet who
 could locate and fly it - would get
 a full pardon from all infractions.
 And believe me, this boy searched.
 (sensing he has strayed)
 Of course, by then the battle
 banner no longer existed. The
 Diocese ordered it destroyed, oh
 some - decades ago.
 (faux innocence)
 I don't recall why.

Bishop Frederick shoots a glare of angry shock in Brother
 Zach's direction. He pretends not to catch it.

HADLEY (CONT'D)
 So - Cadet Chen ended up expiating
 his full penalty of extra duty and
 detention. With no further issues.
 (getting back on-book)
 When he left us, I confess that I
 wondered whether we had failed him.

Paul Kish sits in the furthest rows, in sight of the
 entrance. He often turns to look toward the doors.

HADLEY (CONT'D)
 But years later - and contrary to
 all expectations, Jeremy Chen
 enlisted in the United States
 Marines. He did come to understand
 loyalty, duty. He *saved lives*.

ANGLE ON SUZANNE - her silent tears are flowing freely and at
 moments, she unconsciously nods to Hadley's words.

HADLEY (CONT'D)
 With shells falling, he pulled a
 wounded comrade to safety. He ran
 back into the line of fire three
 more times to get others out.

ON KISH - Hadley's words are *background noise* to his focus on the chapel doors. He gets more stressed by the moment.

HADLEY (CONT'D)
 Families' loved ones are ALIVE --
 thanks to Lance Corporal Chen. For
 that and more, he will forever be
 remembered. And we honor him.
 (beat)
 Whatever it was that turned him
 around -- and why he made the
choice to serve his country.

Kish's fidgeting is becoming visible even from the altar.

HADLEY (CONT'D)
 I am sure of this - the core of
 integrity he had inside, dormant
 but waiting to come alive and grow
 when he was ready - THAT was
 planted here. On this campus.

Hadley pauses to stare across the congregation.

HADLEY (CONT'D)
 Every moment each one of you gets
 to make a new decision. About who
 you're going to be - *what you're*
willing to stand up for.

Seeing one chapel door swinging slightly open, Kish *rises in his seat*. The door remains open - only OUTSIDE VOICES enter.

HADLEY (CONT'D)
 Yesterday's decisions are old news.

Kish sags back into his seat.

HADLEY (CONT'D)
 The chance is still there to choose
 a better direction. And with that..

ON KISH - the chapel doors open and Kish swings eagerly around. An anonymous ADULT COUPLE come in quietly. Kish, his hope dashed, curses emphatically under his breath.

HADLEY (CONT'D)
 You begin to build a legacy *you'll*
be proud to leave behind - when
 your time comes.

EXT. ACADEMY CHAPEL - LATER

Cadets disperse, family members and other guests mill about and chat somberly. Some head for the parking lot.

ANGLE ON SERGEANT ROBIN AYELET and SUZANNE CHEN.

SUZANNE

My brother is furious with me for coming to this.

SGT. ROBIN

I understand his family feeling the way they do. I'm glad you came.

SOME DISTANCE AWAY - Kish watches them conversing.

SUZANNE

Your Sergeant - Hadley... Does he believe all those things he said?

SGT. ROBIN

Every word.

IN THE BACKGROUND - Amidst the chapel crowd dispersing, we can make out the figures of BISHOP FREDERICK and PASTOR MASON in conversation.

IN THE NARTHAX by THE MAIN DOORS - Brother Zach responds with farewells to those who stop to greet him. On leash, Matthias sits tall "at ease" by his side.

Suzanne Chen appears before Brother Zach. He's caught by surprise - yet does his best to keep the same demeanor.

BROTHER ZACH

Oh hello, Ms. Stanton. I didn't realize...

Matthias begins to WHINE and react. His tail moves.

SUZANNE

It's just Chen. I changed it back.

Brother Zach nods and smiles as he corrects himself.

BROTHER ZACH

Ms. Chen... Huh, that feels different. How are you?

Now happily excited, Matthias has trouble staying seated. He emits EMOTIONAL SOUNDS and a well-controlled BARK. His tail whips back and forth.

SUZANNE
 (to Matthias)
 Oh, Matthias, of course I didn't
 forget you.

She kneels to give him a double-handed face-cuddle.

SUZANNE (CONT'D)
 Brother Zachary, I want to thank
 you for such a moving--

TEN FEET AWAY, Hadley notices their conversation. Though none of the words reach him, he is visibly aware of a sudden new tension in Brother Zach's body language. He catches Suzanne's light touch to Zach's arm.

EXT. ACADEMY SIDEWALK - CONTINUOUS

Daniel spots Robin in the crowd - starts to head for her. Jacob suddenly appears, blocking his path.

JACOB
 Mister Cesta?

DANIEL
 Yes, Jacob...

JACOB
 Can I ask you something?

Daniel watches Robin move out of sight.

DANIEL
 Of course.

JACOB
 What did Sergeant Hadley mean
 by... "when your time comes?"

EXT. ACADEMY SIDEWALK - MOMENTS LATER

ANOTHER SIDEWALK - fairly empty.

Brother Zach and Hadley approach the administration building. Matthias as usual walks in perfect 'heel' position.

HADLEY
 What's your plan for blowing off
 some steam?

BROTHER ZACH

I intend to pray that we have no more of these -- not for the rest of eternity.

HADLEY

I copy - but that's not exactly R&R. It's what you do.

Brother Zach waves that away. Hadley knows when to leave it.

BROTHER ZACH

(beat)

Frank, you know even after all this time, your eloquence -- it still surprises me. I do forget at times.

HADLEY

Aww, that's cause you see all us old soldiers as illiterate-

BROTHER ZACH

No!

HADLEY

-mouth-breathing dog-faces.

BROTHER ZACH

I do not!

HADLEY

Ha! Easy there, Monsignor. I'm just yanking your rosary beads.

BROTHER ZACH

Cute. That's cute. Okay then, so why don't you - define "expiated."

HADLEY

Define - what?

BROTHER ZACH

You said Jeremy "*expiated* his full penalty." What does that mean?

HADLEY

Huh? I, oh, well, it means...

He sees Brother Zach grinning.

HADLEY (CONT'D)

Ohhh, Cesta! That wise-ass, I'll strangle him with his own hair.

BROTHER ZACH
 (innocently)
 Why, what's the problem here?

Hadley scoffs and goes silent.

BROTHER ZACH (CONT'D)
 Master Sergeant, I'm just pulling
 your... dog tags.

Hadley lets out a low GROWL. Bro-Z chuckles.

BROTHER ZACH (CONT'D)
 (as if praising a child)
 Daniel taught you a very fine word -
 which you used correctly.

HADLEY
 I don't need that hippie to teach
 me anything--

Brother Zach's phone PEALS CHURCH BELLS, a text notification.
 He checks it - and his face goes serious again.

BROTHER ZACH
 This is it. Our clerical guests
 wish to sit down tomorrow evening.
 (beat)
 When they are surely going to fling
 more *papal bull* at us.

HADLEY
 Ha! Cameron would burn you at the
 stake for a crack like that.

BROTHER ZACH
 That is true. Guess I'm just
blowing off steam.

EXT. ACADEMY GUEST PARKING LOT - MOMENTS LATER

Several people walk to their vehicles, cars pull away.
 Suzanne crosses the lot, reaches her car and opens the door.

Paul Kish appears at the front of the car. Some feeling
 causes Suzanne to stand behind her door.

KISH
 Hey, Miss.

SUZANNE
 Yes?

KISH
I know who you are.

SUZANNE
(in no mood for this)
It's possible, if you watch the news.

KISH
We don't get to watch news. We're not even allowed any internet.

SUZANNE
Oh? Well that's...

KISH
But I heard you're a reporter or something. On channel eight.

SUZANNE
You heard. Who from?

KISH
Oh, I'm a friend of Monica's.

SUZANNE
(uneasy)
You know my niece?

KISH
Right. I'm sorry about her brother. That really sucks.

SUZANNE
Thank you.

KISH
She wasn't here today.

SUZANNE
No. She uh...

KISH
(facade slipping)
Why not?

SUZANNE
It's complicated - a family matter. I'm sorry, but I have to go now.

KISH
(grabbing composure back)
Oh, that's cool, I get it.
(w/a step forward)
(MORE)

KISH (CONT'D)

Hey, I'm interested in breaking into the news biz myself. If I find a good story, can I get it - uh, *may I* send it to you?

Suzanne hesitates, then digs into her purse and takes out a business card. Remaining 'protected' behind the door, she extends her hand, holding the card by the corner.

SUZANNE

That's my e-mail. The phone number is the station switchboard.

Kish comes forward and takes it.

KISH

Thanks. How generous.

Suzanne enters the car quickly, starts the engine and opens the window slightly. As she pulls out...

SUZANNE

I didn't get your name.

KISH

Easton Tannor. Nice to meet you.

Suzanne fakes a smile and waves as she drives away.

INT. ACADEMY CHAPEL - AFTERNOON

JACOB awkwardly kneels before the altar, he closes his eyes. His lips haltingly move, stopping and restarting. His eyes keep fluttering open. He grimaces in annoyance.

IN THE BACK - a door opens and Brother Zach looks in.

MOMENTS LATER

Jacob appears to be getting the hang of it. But then we realize that tears are tracing down both cheeks.

His body shudders and he emits a single heavy SOB. 'Giving up', he puts his head in his arms.

Silently, Brother Zachary kneels four feet away. He remains unmoving and patient during another few moments of SOBBING.

BROTHER ZACH

Would you like to speak about it?

(beat)

You are safe in this place. God hears and He knows your troubles.

A seeming eternity of SNIFFLING & silence. Then... Brother Zachary is surprised to hear Jacob CHUCKLING darkly.

JACOB

One of those things *might* be true - either one. But not both - not together.

BROTHER ZACH

I'm afraid I don't understand.

JACOB

If God does know me, then I'm for sure not safe here - or anywhere.

BROTHER ZACH

Jacob, why do you believe that?

JACOB

Can you keep me safe from Him?
Please - will you convince Him not to send me to Hell?

We see understanding slowly dawn on Brother Zach's face.

BROTHER ZACH

God has no reason to do that, I promise.

Jacob gives Brother Zach a long, incisive look.

JACOB

If you're not lying, then you're wrong.

BROTHER ZACH

Jacob, you are now and will always be - one of his beloved children.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - EVENING

CLOSE ON - the door as it opens. Cadet Ryan Stultz enters. He fumbles to balance a large tray with two full coffee pots, cups and a platter of cookies. Voices fade in:

PASTOR MASON (O.S.)

To the contrary, Brother Zachary.
This is nothing new.

BISHOP FREDERICK (O.S.)

Every hierarchy in history has been concerned with its public image.

Ryan manages to balance the tray and pull the door closed behind him.

BROTHER ZACH (O.S.)

So this is about -- much *more* than just the few tarnished histories of boys we accept at this academy.

PULL BACK TO REVEAL - Brother Zach, Hadley next to Daniel and Cameron seated at the large table. A few seats away are Pastor Mason and Bishop Frederick. Each one has a water glass; there are two full pitchers as well.

HADLEY

Military academy. Unless you forgot that part...

PASTOR MASON

Come now, Sergeant--

HADLEY

Cause it sounds to me like you'd be happy for us to forget it.

Cameron shoots an angry glance at Hadley; who sees & ignores. Behind him Ryan puts the tray on a side table.

BISHOP FREDERICK

(a flash of his fangs)

That's grossly simplistic.

During the following, Ryan fills individual plates with cookies, cups with coffee and distributes them all around. His actions are largely ignored.

PASTOR MASON

(small chuckle)

Which, it turns out, is not our call to make anyway.

Bishop Frederick shoots an angry glance at Mason - who is oblivious to what he's just revealed.

BROTHER ZACH

(hiding his annoyance)

Your Eminence, what exactly will ease the reluctance of our donors?

BISHOP FREDERICK

They need reassurance that their generosity goes toward focusing your students on their relationship with God.

BROTHER ZACH

That vow was taken by me years ago -
 (with an *edge*)
 -and remains fulfilled.
 Consistently - unless you have some
 current reason to doubt me...?

BISHOP FREDERICK

No, no. We're only interested in --
 preemptive preparation.

There's an air of "wtf?" Hadley loudly CRACKS his knuckles.

PASTOR MASON

Major cultural and technological
 shifts have every traditional
 organization under a microscope.

PASTOR MASON (CONT'D)

No doubt you're aware of
 this. Social media, cameras
 in every hand, instant
 communication--

HADLEY

(elbows Daniel,
 whispers)
 I don't speak this dialect of
Horseshit. I may need you to
 translate.

Cameron is annoyed by Hadley's 'aside.' Daniel pretends he
 didn't catch the insult - by taking it as a serious request.

DANIEL

(whispers back)
 Friar Tuck says, ***keep a low profile***
- or we're taking your milk money.

BISHOP FREDERICK

It's the fault of the *damn*
internet!
 (kisses his crucifix)
 Everything is everywhere. And boys
 will be boys - too young and naive
 to believe the waiting *Lake of Fire*
 is a FACT.

CAMERON

Amen to that, Your Eminence!

HADLEY

(mutters)
 Suck up.

Ryan, having finished his serving, returns to the side table
 and tray behind Cameron, where he stands at attention.

Throughout the following: Ryan takes advantage of high stakes
 emotional moments to sneak cookies into his mouth - and chew.

BISHOP FREDERICK
 (to Pastor Mason)
 Maybe I should have hired that
 publicist nephew of yours.

PASTOR MASON
 (making a note)
 I'll make the call.

BISHOP FREDERICK
 (ex officio again)
 It took this long to conclude our
 research, in which we--

HADLEY
 (muttering)
 Incoming...

BISHOP FREDERICK
 --*dialogued* with every regular
 donor we could reach.

Brother Zach takes a moment to process all this. Even Cameron
 can't keep from blurting:

CAMERON
 What exactly is happening here?

The Bishop nods to Pastor Mason - who opens a folder.

PASTOR MASON
 (paging through notes)
 "Ninety-one percent oppose the
 practice of allotting grant funds
 for the tuition of anyone with a
 juvenile criminal record."

DANIEL
 Isn't *forgiveness* a major theme of
 your New Testament *quadrilogy*?

Hadley chuckles, mouths the word "quadrilogy" - and gives
 Daniel a "Let's see how THEY like it" grin.

BROTHER ZACH
 That's disrespectful--

Hadley looks ready to crack his knuckles again. Cameron
 shoots him a disapproving look. Hadley is ready to accept the
 challenge, then -- a CRUNCH is heard behind Cameron. He turns
 round to look at Ryan.

Crumbs fall from the boy's full mouth as he quickly crosses
 away from Cameron to grab a water pitcher from the table.

PASTOR MASON
 (barely breaks stride)
 "Respondents expressed unease about
 any children receiving real-world
 combat and weapons training.

Spotting a nearly-empty water glass in front of Hadley, Ryan moves to his side. He picks it up to refill it.

PASTOR MASON (CONT'D)
 Factoring in that some percentage
 are known to have criminal records,
 the combination may encourage an
 appetite for *primitive carnage*."

Hadley leaps to his feet, his right shoulder slamming into Ryan's chin. Mason and Frederick recoil.

HADLEY
 Appetite? Primitive-

Ryan is knocked sideways and the glass flies from his hand straight at the door -- which is opening at that very moment.

HADLEY (CONT'D)
 -Carnage!

Ryan's top-heavy frame hits the floor with a THUD. Just as...

Greer stands in the doorway, his face in the glass's flight path. Barely flinching, his hand comes up and catches it.

HADLEY (CONT'D)
 (to Greer)
 Sergeant. Were you aware that we
 cultivate a love of primitive
 savagery in our cadets?

Conflicted, Brother Zach starts to rise. But seeing that Daniel has leapt to Ryan's side, he keeps his composure.

CAMERON
 You - shall not bear false witness.

Hadley whips around to glare baffled daggers at Cameron.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
 No one said "savagery," Hadley.

Hadley is a lit fuse. Greer instantly reads the room.

GREER
 Certainly not, Master Sergeant. I'm
 entirely unaware.
 (MORE)

GREER (CONT'D)
 (w/"concern")
 Did any cadets attack and butcher
 someone today?

HADLEY
 Beats me. Just do an extra careful
 head-count tonight.

Hadley glances at Daniel, helping Ryan to his feet. Ryan is rubbing and painfully working his chin

HADLEY (CONT'D)
 Yeah, and make sure every head's
 attached to a torso.

Brother Zach winces. Greer nods officially.

Brother Zach takes a deep breath and slowly stands, reclaiming authority.

BROTHER ZACH
 Gentlemen, I ask you to appreciate
 the fact that Master Sergeant
 Hadley is as passionate about his
 duty as any one of us.

No one wants to be first to break the uncomfortable silence - so all eyes gratefully follow as Daniel leads Ryan to a seat.

PASTOR MASON
 Are you all right, young man?

HADLEY
 He's fine.
 (to Ryan)
 Walk it off, cadet.

Ryan nods his head and accepts a glass of water from Daniel.

PASTOR MASON
 That's good. *Chin* up, young man.

Ryan glares sideways at him. Daniel covers his eyes and shakes his head.

Hadley fixes a steely glare on the two clergymen. Ryan sees and deftly moves out of the line of fire.

BROTHER ZACH
 (to Hadley)
 I believe you're taking some
 uninformed comments way too
 literally.

HADLEY

('dismissing' Bro Z)

Here's our fact-finding. The world IS filled with monsters. We make sure young men are ready, first - to survive. Second - ready to lead when it behooves them --

(aside to Daniel)

See? I know words.

(back to business)

And third - to make weighty decisions with confidence.

BISHOP FREDERICK

We're not unsympathetic, but even the diocese answers to--

HADLEY

(**not** listening)

And if things escalate to the point where a monster does have to be dealt with...

Brother Zach and Cameron are in shock at Hadley's steam-rolling over a bishop.

HADLEY (CONT'D)

We have made goddamn sure our young men are physically and mentally astute enough to do what's necessary. Not for primitive shits'n'giggles. For loyalty - to those whom we protect.

(dialed back)

Men like Jeremy Chen. Let's talk about him.

Brother Zach shoots Hadley a vexed look. There's a silence - you could hear a grenade-pin drop.

BISHOP FREDERICK

May God keep and reward his soul.

INT. DANIEL'S OFFICE - DAY

The small office is a mass of books, loosely bundled and barely organized papers. Two visitor chairs opposite a desk are piled high with the same.

Daniel moves through the room, haphazardly bundling papers in an attempt to clear space. He manages little more than a transfer of material from one surface to another.

His checking the time on his computer screen - causes him to suddenly increase his pace. BAD MOVE:

He trips over a stack of books on the floor and bangs his shin against the edge of a filing cabinet.

Daniel YELPS in pain--

DANIEL
Son-of-a-bitch! Lousy stinking--

The rest of his litany of *non-diocese-approved CURSES* is muffled as he clamps a hand over his mouth.

He hops/limps to a closet and removes an acoustic guitar.

Daniel hears approaching FOOTSTEPS in the hall. He grabs an entire pile from one of his chairs and heaves it into the closet, slamming the door against it.

Robin appears in the doorway, holding a guitar case.

ROBIN
When will you finally let me put some rubber insulation around that thing? It's winning the war.

DANIEL
(gritting his teeth)
What thing? I don't...

She shrugs and enters, leans her case against a wall, opens it.

ROBIN
Obviously - the Gila monster I just heard taking a big bite from you. Is it still here?

Daniel chuckles and wrestles the filing cabinet an inch further back.

DANIEL
How're you doing with the bar chords?

Robin has the guitar out and sits on the cleared chair.

ROBIN
Not well. But I'm starting to think you don't really care.

DANIEL

You are impugning my reputation as
a great instructor.

ROBIN

Maybe you just love punishment. I'm
obviously tone-deaf, no ability at
all on this thing. Why do you
refuse to give up on me?

COMPUTER

"You've got mail."

A second later, Robin's phone notification RINGS. As she
takes out her phone, Daniel goes to his computer.

ON COMPUTER SCREEN - We see an email - *from Zachary Felton*
addressed to "**all staff and faculty.**"

ROBIN (O.S.)

We knew this was coming.

DANIEL

(reading)

"During this crucial 'blah blah'
etc...

(beat)

...every student, the excellence of
character and behavior which we
know normally takes time and
patience to develop. As we don't.."

Robin appears at Daniel's shoulder.

ROBIN

(overlapping, reading)

"...we don't have the luxury of
that time, I rely on your
individual good judgments to guide
our students any way you feel is
best - so as to yield these
results."

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Jacob and Tommy sit toward the rear, surrounded by nineteen
other more senior cadets, mostly aged 17-18. Both have been
placed ahead in English Lit class. They *stick out* in
appearance next to Easton, Ryan and Paul Kish.

Other older cadet students are BRUCE GOVICH, PHILIP LENZ,
LARRY GRECO, VICTOR SKORDA, ANDREW MAY and MARTY KLENDIG.

Daniel is up front. The emotional energy is high.

DANIEL

Everyone needs a chance to feel and express their individuality.

PHILIP

Mister C, it's not like we don't think you mean it.

VICTOR

Yeah, you're cool. But - here?

BRUCE

At this school? That's NEVER happened.

RYAN

And *you're the ONLY one* who's going to read what we hand in?

DANIEL

Correct.

PHILIP

The brothers won't ever see a word of it? Jeez, they **read our letters home!**

Daniel shakes his head.

ANDREW

What about Mister Cameron?

DANIEL

This is *my* class.

BRUCE

We *can be* - you WANT US to be truthful?

The class is dumbstruck - exchanging amazed looks.

Andrew smacks the back of Larry's head, one seat forward.

ANDREW

Hear that? Even you gotta get real.

LARRY

I'm without sin...

DANIEL

Listen up - one more time.

ANDREW
This'll be a good one.

LARRY
(smiles)
So I have no problem casting a
stone up your ass.

Andrew laughs.

DANIEL
I said LISTEN!
(waiting for quiet)
Larry, no stones. No asses. The
assignment is to write your honest
feelings, honest thoughts about the
ideas presented in this novel:
(holding it up)
CAT'S CRADLE. You will not be
penalized--

A PUERILE LAUGH somewhere.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
- or punished for anything you say.

Long silence - everyone struggles to comprehend.

KISH
(dryly)
Would you swear it on a stack of
bibles?

DANIEL
(if that'll do it)
Sure. Why not?

From the surface of each student desk, we hear RAPID-FIRE
SLAMS as heavy BIBLES appear and get passed forward.

DANIEL'S POV -

The front seat of every row fills up with BIBLES stacked four-
to-five high.

INT. MICHAEL CAMERON'S CLASSROOM - MOMENTS LATER

An image projected on a screen: An artist rendering of the
nine-levels of Hell described in *Dante's Inferno*.

CAMERON
And here is the more familiar
version by Dante.
(MORE)

CAMERON (CONT'D)
"Abandon all hope, you who enter here." Every category of possible offense is met with a fitting type of eternal torment - in its own individual level of Hell.

He pauses to admire the details - he SIGHS longingly.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
 Just so efficient. Oh...!

Another image replaces the first: An artist's vision of an overcrowded chaotic Hell; sinners are being tortured in all manner of gruesome ways.

Cameron holds up a copy of "AENEID."

CAMERON (CONT'D)
 Now, Virgil writes of a hell called the **Tartarus**:
 (reading)
"From hence are heard the groans of ghosts, the pains / Of sounding lashes and of dragging chains."

He uses a long pointer to visually coordinate specific images to the parts of his lecture.

CAMERON (CONT'D)
 From the underworld of Hades, Virgil takes us even lower to the very *bottom of the earth*. The Tartarus has maximum security triple-walls. A castle in the center oversees all - think '*guard tower*'. Think of ETERNITY - stuck among the worst creatures and criminals in the universe.

Cameron dramatically pauses to let the horror sink in.

UNSEEN CADET
 (faintly)
 Bitchin'.

INT. CLASSROOM - MOMENTS LATER

We return to Daniel's Lit class. Each student has an open copy of "CAT'S CRADLE" before him.

TOMMY

(reading)

*"When Bokonon and McCabe took over
this miserable country years ago,
they threw out the priests..."*

Some cadets react with delight. A high-five somewhere.

TOMMY (CONT'D)

*And then Bokonon, cynically and
playfully, invented a new
religion."*

DANIEL

Why? Why did he do that?

(waiting in vain)

Okay... What does Kurt Vonnegut
mean when he talks about truth
being the *"enemy of the people?"*

Ryan shoots up a hand. Daniel nods.

RYAN

Well, what if -- life is so
horrible that facing the truth
about it completely bums you out?

That gets Jacob to look up and listen.

RYAN (CONT'D)

So then what? You just give up?

INT. ACADEMY CHAPEL - CONTINUOUS

Brother Zach is now alone, except for Matthias who sleeps
comfortably on the altar.

WE CONTINUE TO OVERHEAR Daniel and his class.

VICTOR (O.S.)

Sure! Like the buffet owner - when
you show up, big guy.

The class CHUCKLES.

Brother Zach stands before stained-glass votive candles,
sitting atop small, cast iron, ornate holders. He kneels to
pray; makes the sign of the cross.

DANIEL (O.S.)

Maybe, Ryan. Stay with that.

Brother Zach's lips continue silently reciting the "Hail Mary" as his hands move through his Rosary. Throughout...

IMAGES FLASH before him, intruding on his attempts at devotion: We see JEREMY CHEN as a teen cadet.

RYAN (O.S.)

Uh - the next thing you know you're on meds and fighting clinical depression.

BRUCE (O.S.)

Great. Now I'm hella depressed.

Some MUTED LAUGHTER is heard.

NEW IMAGES follow quickly: SUZANNE'S FACE, at first from the recent memorial - and then, years earlier.

DANIEL (O.S.)

Depression sets in when we refuse to accept sadness.

Brother Zach's lips still move silently; his eyes squeeze shut against the pain.

INT. CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

DANIEL

The Buddhists would say, when we refuse to accept *what is*.

PHILIP

Nothing a hundred push-ups can't cure.

BRUCE

You're so full of it.

Philip sticks his bicep in Bruce's face.

PHILIP

See that?

BRUCE

(swatting at it)
Uch! Get away.

PHILIP

Worship it! Love it--

BRUCE

Take longer showers, Dude!

Victor and Philip fist bump.

Daniel ignores the humor, he remains focused on Ryan.

JACOB
 Maybe the truth isn't always such a
 great thing.

A few rows away, Easton rolls his eyes.

DANIEL
 Care to elaborate?

Jacob shakes his head "no", sinks down in his seat.

INT. ROBIN AYELET'S CLASSROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Robin teaches a Physics class.

IN THE BACK - A few students converse, busy with their own
 agendas which include stealthy looks & lecherous comments.

SGT. ROBIN
 Newton's first law. An object
 moving without a force acting on it
 will continue moving.

She smacks the side of a paperback book on her desk. It
 slides two feet, then stops.

SGT. ROBIN (CONT'D)
 So then tell me. What caused this
 sliding object to stop?

A STUDENT
 Was it - friction?

Three students in the back WHISPER - then stifle obvious
 LAUGHTER.

SGT. ROBIN
 That's right. *Friction* is created--

The puerile reaction increases.

SGT. ROBIN (CONT'D)
 --by an interaction of molecules.
 The molecules on the book with
 those on the desk itself.
 (beat)
 Of which type of force is *friction*
 an example?

CLOSE ON THE DISRUPTIVE BOYS - More chuckling: one is happily sketching something human-looking, likely female and sexual.

His neighbor, observing, whispers and gestures something even more *crudely pubescent*.

A few seconds of silence go by. Finally...

ANOTHER STUDENT
Electromagnetic, Sergeant.

SGT. ROBIN
How excellent!

The sketching boy twitches - he turns round to see Robin looming right behind him.

She reaches down and plucks the drawing up (WE get just a glimpse, enough to know the artwork is rated MA).

INT. CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Returning to Daniel's English Lit class.

DANIEL
What does Bokonon do for this society he's creating from the ground up?

Victor looks around then shrugs and raises his hand.

VICTOR
Well, everything stinks there. So he makes up a phony faith - to give the people hope.

Near the back of the room, Marty, unimpressed by everything and doodling in his notebook, mutters half-aloud.

MARTY
Great. More stone-throwing hypocrites.

DANIEL
(sternly)
Give it a rest, Marty.

LARRY
(to Marty)
Dress light for Hell, heretic!

Several cadets laugh and flash Larry a thumbs-up.

BRUCE
 (whispering)
 WHO'S getting stoned?

DANIEL
 (back to ALL)
 How does he make sure the people
 will adopt and follow it?

TOMMY
 He tells his friend, a guy in the
 government - to make it illegal.

TOMMY (CONT'D)
 To make it the very worst crime
 there is.

Larry, following raptly, nods his head.

DANIEL
 He sure does.

TOMMY
 So now everybody wants to be part
 of it! Cause they don't wanna be
 told what to do.

DANIEL
 Or not do.

The class energy is growing, hands are up. More start to
 weigh in.

VICTOR
 Yeah, the leaders warn them they'll
 get hung on a meat hook if they get
 caught praying to this guy!

PHILIP
 That's so cool.

EASTON
 And they shove this one right into
 your spine!

Reactions of excitement and disgust.

RYAN
 Give 'im the *hy-u-o-ook-kuh!*

Ryan holds his sore chin while Larry makes a "reeling in a
 fish" air move.

DANIEL
 That's a gratifying shock.
 (beat)
 Some of you actually read the book.

INT. ROBIN AYELET'S CLASSROOM - MOMENTS LATER

As before, Robin addresses her class. Throughout, there are sporadic MOANS and FAINT CRYING sounds in the background.

SGT. ROBIN
 So here we observe friction in a less obvious application. You can see that combining *just the right amounts* of both lateral force and friction...

The THREE DISRUPTIVE STUDENTS sweat out 'wall sits' - a torturous exercise of pressing the back against a wall, bending knees to 90 degrees and remaining still.

SGT. ROBIN (CONT'D)
 ...is what allows these gentlemen to maintain this inertial static position.

Their knees shake violently, the CRIES become more wretched.

SGT. ROBIN (CONT'D)
 One which, in effect, overcomes gravity.

ON THE CLASSROOM DOOR - likely attracted by CRIES OF PAIN, Hadley sticks his head into the room.

SGT. ROBIN (CONT'D)
 Yes, Master Sergeant. Can we be of assistance?

Hadley quickly sizes up the situation; his face is impassive.

HADLEY
 All good, carry on.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Sharon Adams strides down the hall outside the classrooms. She carries a stack of papers. The students' animated REACTIONS reach her as she walks by Daniel's room.

DANIEL (O.S.)
 So this way, Bokonon gets everyone
 on the island, including its
 leaders, to follow his religion.

She lingers outside his room to listen.

PHILIP (O.S.)
 Even while they're trying to find
 him and stick him on the hook.

ANDREW (O.S.)
 That's messed up.

INT. CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

DANIEL
 But here's the question. Does
 anything ever change to make their
 lives better?
 (beat)
 Think about what Ryan here said.

OUTSIDE - Sharon frowns and listens more closely.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
 If things are wrong -- even
horrible in your life, is telling
 the truth about it always your
 enemy?

BRUCE
 That's what the writer says.

DANIEL
 Sure. But *Cat's Cradle* is a novel.
 Fiction. Page fourteen, Vonnegut
 warns us.
 (reading)
 "All of the true things I am about
 to tell you are shameless lies."
 (looking around)
 "And anyone unable to understand
 how a useful religion can be
 founded on lies will not understand
 this book either."

ANDREW
 Gentlemen...
 (dramatically)
 The man is right. I don't
 understand a single word.

General laughter and enthusiasm.

TOMMY
But what about God?

Everyone quiets down.

ANGLE OUTSIDE THE DOOR - Sharon pays rapt attention.

BACK IN THE CLASSROOM

DANIEL
What about God?

TOMMY
Does just any guy, even if he's kind of famous, get to tell people what God wants? Especially when he knows he's making it all up?

JACOB
So what if the reason is to make some people happier? Does that mean it's the right thing to do?

BRUCE
(smirking)
Why-the-flock not?

Some boys react derisively to the pun.

RYAN
The Devil is called, "The Prince of Lies"

DANIEL
That's one hell of a...

Sharon, her face reddening, appears in the classroom doorway. Even Marty looks up, gulps and sits at attention.

DANIEL (CONT'D)
(recovering)
A great question.
(to her)
Ms. Adams. Is there anything I can--

SHARON
When did questioning God, not to mention welcoming Hell and the Devil - become a part of the English curriculum here?

DANIEL
Ms. Adams, I'm sure you
misconstrued--

SHARON
This is not diocese approved! You
are a rogue teacher!

ANGLE OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM DOOR

Sharon exits and STOMPS down the hall, muttering to herself.

IN THE CLASSROOM

All the students and Daniel are momentarily stunned.

DANIEL
(getting it together)
Ms. Adams can become excitable--

SHARON (O.S.)
NOT diocese approved!

DANIEL
Because she cares.

INT. PAUL KISH'S DORM ROOM - EVENING

Kish rummages in an organizer at the bottom of his closet.

He removes a worn-but-thick folded fabric. Sitting on his bed, he partially unfolds it and brings it to his face.

The fabric has WORDS on it - though we can't make them out.

He stares with wide eyes above it to the framed photo on his desk - in which **he and Monica smile with pure happiness.**

Kish appears to be taking deep breaths to inhale its scent. He unfurls and crumples more of it - fully enveloping his head. He SCREAMS incoherently into it for several seconds.

Removing it, his face is reddened - but his expression is blank, except for a couple of tear streaks.

FADE OUT.