

Letters To Mother

By

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Based upon the original idea by
Chad Foster

Work In Progress

FADE IN:

BLACK SCREEN.

Titles read:

THE LETTERS

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

A dirt-track weaves in and out of the beautiful countryside on a fine summers day.

The peaceful serenity is interrupted by the faint noise of an engine in the distance.

The noise slowly gets louder as the FORD MERCURY, driven by THOMAS WILLIS, forties, smartly dressed in a gray suit, with his wife MICHELLE WILLIS, similar age and equally well presented by his side, moves into view.

INT. FORD MERCURY - CONTINUOUS

The couple chat idly whilst appreciating the stark, desolate scenery.

MICHELLE

It's kinda beautiful around here,
don't you think?

Thomas nods in agreement, then takes a quick drink from his hip-flask placed in his lap.

MICHELLE

We could retire to somewhere around
here...

Thomas splutters his drink, and raises his eyebrows.

THOMAS

Steady on there, we've got a while
to go before we even contemplate
retirement!

Michelle chuckles to herself briefly.

MICHELLE

I know, I know... I'm allowed to
dream though!

THOMAS

Yes, you are, but I know you too well. Better than you know, in fact! You'd love it for the first couple of months... Then, you'd be bored.

MICHELLE

I would not!

THOMAS

Yeah you would. You'd miss your friends, and more importantly, you'd be pining for the mammoth shopping expeditions...

Michelle's expression drops a little - she knows what he says is true. She turns her head to look out of the side window.

A few moments silence, then...

MICHELLE

Wow! Thomas pull over!

THOMAS

What have you...

He is abruptly interrupted by Michelle.

MICHELLE

Please! Pull over, look!

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

The car slowly grinds to a halt. In the distance stands a grand, imposing wooden covered bridge.

Michelle exits the car before it has even stopped, with an old 'film' camera in her hands.

She excitedly fidgets, waiting for her husband to exit the vehicle.

He takes another drink from his flask, then gets out of the car.

MICHELLE

Look, isn't it great? I love the architecture around here.

An almost forced response from Thomas -

THOMAS

Yeah, yeah it's nice, 'chelle.

MICHELLE

Nice? It's the best one yet. We don't get scenery like this in the city. Come on!

Michelle heads down the road towards the mouth of the bridge, almost running. Thomas steadily follows.

EXT. COVERED BRIDGE - CONTINUOUS

The stately covered bridge stands proudly over a stream with overgrown banks.

Michelle repeatedly clicks and winds the camera, taking photographs from every conceivable angle.

She turns to her husband and points her finger to the side of the bridge.

MICHELLE

I'm gonna go into that field, and get some pictures from the side. Okay?

THOMAS

Yeah, knock yourself out. I'm gonna wait in the car.

MICHELLE

You sure?

THOMAS

Yes, Michelle. Take your time.

Michelle climbs over the short fence and into the field, as Thomas smiles to himself then heads back towards the car.

INT./EXT. FORD MERCURY - DAY

Thomas climbs into the driving seat. He reaches down under his seat, producing a silver cigarette case and a book of matches. His gaze is fixed on his wife in the distance.

He places a cigarette in his mouth and strikes a match, all the time observing Michelle through the windscreen.

He takes a long drag on his cigarette with a look of pleasure on his face, and exits the car. He leans on the hood, continuously watching his wife.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

A sudden gust of wind catches Michelle's hair. She stops taking photographs, and squints her eyes to avoid the dust in the air.

She is distracted for a second as something blowing around her catches her eye.

She reaches down for what seems to be a piece of paper, but it rapidly blows into the air, and out of her reach.

EXT. FORD MERCURY - CONTINUOUS

Thomas becomes aware of the sudden breeze, and is alarmed to see his wife jumping around in the field in the distance.

THOMAS

What the hell?

He throws his cigarette onto the floor, crushing it with his feet as he passes, heading towards Michelle. He takes a mint from his jacket pocket, and quickly pops it in his mouth.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

As Thomas nears his wife, the wind dies down. She suddenly pounces on the object as it lands near her feet, trapping it under her shoe.

She picks it up, and examines each side of the yellowish-white envelope.

MICHELLE

Thomas, look at this.

Thomas approaches, and takes the envelope from Michelle. He examines it.

THOMAS

Is this what you were leaping about for? I wondered what you were doing, I thought you were having a seizure!

MICHELLE

Yes. Look at it. It looks old.

THOMAS

It certainly does. It's definitely got a few years under it's belt.

He looks again at the envelope in his hands.

THOMAS (cont'd)
Nice handwriting! 'To Mother'- I
wonder why it was blowing around?
Maybe somebody threw it out?

MICHELLE
Maybe... Do you think we should
open it?

Thomas looks again at the envelope with its neatly opened edge. He squeezes the sides together to take a glimpse at the letter inside.

THOMAS
It's already open...

MICHELLE
I know that! I meant do you think
we should read it?

THOMAS
I don't know, Michelle. It's not
really our business, is it?

Michelle looks slightly deflated at the response.

Suddenly, the breeze picks up again, blowing another envelope gracefully around the couple's feet.

Thomas stamps his foot down, trapping the envelope. He scoots down and picks it up.

THOMAS (cont'd)
Look, another one. 'To Mother',
same address.

Michelle peers over his shoulder.

MICHELLE
Different handwriting though, isn't
it?

He compares it to the other envelope.

THOMAS
You're right. How strange.

MICHELLE
Come on, let's read them.

THOMAS

No, Michelle. It's not right. You wouldn't want some random individual to be reading your personal mail, would you?

MICHELLE

In all fairness, I wouldn't leave my mail blowing about in a field.

She snatches the envelopes from Thomas' hand, and laughs triumphantly.

MICHELLE (cont'd)

Ha-ha. You lose!

She carefully removes the aged paper from the envelope and begins reading it to herself, an intrigued look on her face.

Thomas looks on, impatiently.

THOMAS

'Chelle?

No response.

THOMAS (cont'd)

Michelle!

She raises her eyes to meet his gaze, and answers stubbornly-

MICHELLE

What?

THOMAS

Are you gonna share this experience or what? Read it out!

Michelle responds with a distinctly acidic sarcastic tone-

MICHELLE

Oh, no. it's *wrong*, remember.

THOMAS

If it's good enough for the goose,
it's good enough for the gander.
That's what they say, isn't it?

MICHELLE

That's what I love about you; you always stick to your principals.

THOMAS

Okay, I admit it, I'm intrigued. They're too old to be containing anything sensitive or confidential anyway. Don't things go into the public domain after a certain amount of time anyhow?

Michelle snaps her reply-

MICHELLE

Yeah, whatever. You convince yourself! You stand there on your hypocritical moral high-ground, and let me finish reading it.

THOMAS

Read it out... Now. Or...

Michelle answers with a giggle-

MICHELLE

Or what?

THOMAS

It's a long walk back to the city, you know!

He laughs.

MICHELLE

Pig!

THOMAS

Oink oink. Just read the damn thing, already.

She laughs, then clears her throat- as if addressing a crowd.

MICHELLE

'Dear Mother, I hope you are well. Sorry I've not been able to write you sooner. I will have trouble putting into words how I am feeling right now. The first few days at boot camp were unlike anything you could ever have imagined, and there is no way I could have ever prepared myself for the experience. It's difficult to describe just how hard it is to adjust, and I can only hope that I

MICHELLE
 get around to an institutionalized
 way of thinking sooner rather than
 later...'

THOMAS
 My God. Poor kid...

Michelle shushes him, and continues-

MICHELLE
 '... The training is intense, dear
 Mother, I have muscles aching that
 I didn't even know I had! The
 drills are relentless and I have to
 admit that the officers are not a
 kindly bunch. I suppose there is no
 need for *kind* in war. I have seen a
 few familiar faces in camp, so at
 least I am not alone here. I was
 relieved to see Stuart here- an old
 school friend. I was quite happy to
 find he was sleeping in the same
 tent as I (along with ten
 others!). I don't think relieved is
 the right word, but you know what I
 mean. Anyway, dearest Mother, I
 send you my best wishes, and
 promise to write you again soon.
 Your Friend, Charlie Henry.'

Thomas exhales loudly.

THOMAS
 Wow. It's heart breaking. Read the
 other one.

MICHELLE
 Okay, just a second.

She carefully folds the letter and places it back in the
 envelope, placing it in her pocket. She removes the letter
 from the second envelope.

MICHELLE (cont'd)
 You're right. It is from a
 different person... Another
 soldier...

THOMAS
 I thought as much.

MICHELLE

'Dearest Mother, No drills today, so I have the chance to write this letter. It is raining quite heavily, but the sound of the raindrops on the canvas above me is a much needed distraction from the far away booms of the guns that we hear periodically. I expect we will move to the front any time soon, and will man the trenches in shifts. I can only imagine how deafening the noise will be up close! Our thoughts have changed so much over the past weeks, and we have begun to almost envy the other soldiers that were sent to the front line before us. Until next time, dearest Mother. Yours
Frederick Davis.'

Suddenly the wind picks up again, and Michelle struggles to replace the letter in the envelope.

THOMAS

My God. Look!

Thomas points towards yet another envelope dancing around in the breeze in the distance, near the roadside. He runs towards it, almost taking a dive to secure it in his possession.

THOMAS (cont'd)

(shouts)

Michelle, we'll read it in the car.
This wind is getting too much!

Michelle paces across the field towards the car.

INT. FORD MERCURY - CONTINUOUS

Thomas takes a hurried sip from his hip-flask as Michelle nears the car. She fights to open the door in the gale.

She eventually sits in the passenger seat and adjusts her hair.

THOMAS

You done?

She laughs -

MICHELLE

I'm done!

Thomas opens the third letter and quickly scans through it.

THOMAS

It's addressed to 'Mother' again.
Another soldier. This is so
bizarre.

MICHELLE

Can you read it?

THOMAS

Yeah. The handwriting is pretty
hard to read, but then again, I've
had to battle through far worse
examples than this when I'm grading
assignments. The ink has ran a
little...

MICHELLE

You want me to read it?

Thomas ignores her question, and begins to read aloud. His
voice adds a note of emphasis to the letter -

THOMAS

'To Mother, I have learnt to accept
and indeed embrace my fears. Fear
is a healthy emotion to portray, I
am three-fold times more focused
during this state of mind. We have
all adapted pretty well, and this
way of life seems far more real
than the sedate lives we left
behind. I think back to my home
life, and it feels more like a
fantasy than a reality, and I will
have trouble adjusting back into
the real world when all this is
over, I'll warrant. Everything
about me has changed; my views, my
morals, and more importantly my
waistline! These letters to you are
an inspiration to keep me on track,
and I await your response, and you
are indeed the greatest *marraine de
guerre!* Yours, Terry O'Neill'

Michelle looks puzzled.

MICHELLE
Marraine de guerre?

THOMAS
Godmother of war.

As Michelle looks across the field, she notices a huge flurry of envelopes whirling around in the breeze near the bridge.

MICHELLE
Thomas...

THOMAS
I... I see them. I've got a bag in the trunk, let's go fishing!

EXT. FORD MERCURY - CONTINUOUS

The car doors heave open as Thomas and Michelle fight against the wind. Thomas heads around the back of the car, and removes a large paper bag. He slams the trunk, and they run away towards the field.

EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

They approach the almost whirlwind-like display of letters, they feverishly grab as many as they can, placing them in the bag. After a while, only one remains dancing in the breeze. They both struggle to grasp it.

THOMAS
Are we done?

MICHELLE
Not until I get this last one.

THOMAS
Leave it. We've got a bag full to look at.

MICHELLE
No, Thomas. This is someone's letter... Someone's story... Someone's life. Why should this one be any less important than the others?

THOMAS
It could be a bill! You never know.

MICHELLE

You're right, it could be a Bill...
or a James or a Harry! I'm not
leaving 'til we've got it.

THOMAS

They're all to 'Mother', all the
same address. I wonder who this
Marraine de guerre is? She must
have touched a lot of lives.

Michelle reaches out and successfully grabs the final
letter.

MICHELLE

Gotcha!

EXT. UNIVERSITY BUILDING - DAY

The large ornate University Block is teeming with students,
all heading through the main doors.

INT. CLASSROOM - LATER

A fairly basic room, with twenty or so students seated at
desks. Thomas commands their attention from the front of the
room by flicking the room lights off, then switching on an
overhead projector. The words 'Folklore' appear on the white
wall beside him.

THOMAS

Morning all.

The crowd mutter back an unenthusiastic 'Morning'.

THOMAS (cont'd)

Folklore. Did you all do your
reading up on the subject over the
weekend?

He glances round at the sea of faces.

THOMAS

Well, let's see, hey? What does
folklore mean to you... Jason?

JASON, twenties, looks up from his notes a little startled.

JASON

Old traditions isn't it? When they
say 'according to folklore' it

JASON
means that it's happened once.
Something like that.

Thomas smiles.

THOMAS
Yeah, pretty much, Jason. Thank
you. Folklore is our customs, in a
nutshell. It encompasses everything
like stories, legends, music,
dance, popular beliefs and even
jokes and proverbs. It is a way
that our traditions are passed down
from generation to generation. Can
anyone tell me who first used the
word 'folklore'?

He looks around the room. No responses. He clicks a button
and the projector displays 'William Thoms 1803-1885', along
with a sepia tinted picture.

THOMAS (cont'd)
William John Thoms, was a British
writer who was credited for coining
the term 'folklore' in the 1840's.
He used the word 'folklore' to
replace the other terms used at the
time including 'popular antiques'
and 'popular literature'. So, as
you can gather for yourselves,
folklore covers a diverse range of
subjects.

A number of the students scribble notes into their dog-eared
jotter books.

THOMAS (cont'd)
Let's start from the beginning. Who
can tell me the difference between
Phonemic and Phonetic folklore?

He glances around the sea of faces.

THOMAS (cont'd)
C'mon! Anybody?

ELIZABETH, a pretty, brunette in her early twenties, raises
her hand slowly, a look of unease on her dazzling
complexion.

THOMAS (cont'd)
Yes, Elizabeth...?

ELIZABETH
From what I can remember, Phonemic
sort of means... native?

THOMAS
Top marks, Elizabeth. At least
someone was listening! You're
right- Phonemic does fundamentally
mean Native. Phonemic and Phonetic
are ways of pigeon-holing human
behaviour, if you will. The term
Phonemic is used to categorize ways
from an insider point of view from
certain cultures, so you're correct
with native. So going by this, what
does Phonetic mean...?

Elizabeth again opens her mouth to speak. The look on her
face shows that she knows the answer, but a certain
something is making her uneasy.

ELIZABETH
...From an outsiders point of view?

THOMAS
Can you elaborate?

ELIZABETH
The study of people by people with
no prior knowledge of their ways
and traditions?

THOMAS
Spot on! Cross-cultural analytical,
or, comparative studies. The terms
Phonetic and Phonemic were coined
by a linguist by the name of
Kenneth Pike...

A acne-riddled STUDENT makes a barely audible comment to his
surrounding students.

STUDENT
A cunning linguist.

Thomas flashes him a look that would stop traffic. He
blushes.

THOMAS

... In 1962. Phonetics, in his eyes, were the starting point for students...

(Turns to the spotty student)

... Who were *willing* to learn...

(Turns back to address the whole class)

... to get a basic idea of a culture's Phonemic ways. The two terms are completely complimentary, and allowed, in his words, 'to give a three dimensional perspective'.

Again, the students scribble down notes.

THOMAS (cont'd)

This leads us neatly to the next category, Narratives, or more to the point, Personal Narratives. The word Narrative comes from the Latin word 'narrare', meaning 'to recount'. A narrative is a way of telling a story that describes a series of events, fictional or non-fictional, using various means—literature, pictures, songs, speech, dance, even motion pictures. Personal narratives, however...? Anyone?

None of the students look up from their notebooks; avoiding all eye contact with their tutor.

THOMAS (cont'd)

The process of a personal narrative is closely linked to a person's identity, either singular or cultural...

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Michelle slouches on the sofa, mug of coffee in hand. A small pile of the yellowed letters rest on the arm of the couch. She reaches over and grasps the top envelope, opening it carefully to avoid spilling her drink.

She begins to read the letter. Her eyes dart from left to right, a profound look of compassion on her face.

We hear Thomas' lecture narrating over this scene.

THOMAS (V.O.)

... and in the process constructs memories. It is, by all means, the essential fundamental nature of 'the self'. A personal narrative can be spoken or written, and contains important views from the participants perspective. It's a way of allowing us, the viewer, to inherit thoughts, ideas and opinions. They have the power to invoke in us memories or experiences, which we have not ourselves witnessed.

Michelle wipes a tear from her cheek.

EXT. WILLIS HOUSE - EVENING

The sunset lights up the sky in a beautiful orange glow above the Willis house as the Ford Mercury heads along the driveway, gracefully coming to a stop outside the property.

Thomas opens the car door, and steps out onto the gravel. He stops for a moment, taking in the picture perfect skyline. He locks the car door.

He steadily walks around the back of the car then opens the passenger-side door, and removes a bulging briefcase.

A slight gust of wind takes hold of a yellowing envelope which protrudes from the top of his briefcase, and blows it gently in the air and away down the drive.

Thomas sighs, drops the briefcase back on the passenger seat, and races off after the letter.

He traps it underfoot after what must look to the neighbours like a dance routine. He scoops it up, heads back to the car to collect the briefcase. The car door is slammed shut and locked.

INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

A perfectly functional kitchen set-up. No 'mod-cons', just basic equipment consisting of a whistling kettle, oven etc.

Michelle is seated on a barstool of a timeless chrome design at a large central granite island, mug of coffee in hand. A small pile of envelopes are neatly stacked in front of her on the work surface.

She is startled from her look of intense concentration by the noise of a door banging in the distance. She turns her head towards the living room.

MICHELLE

Hi, honey.

Thomas shouts his response from the other room.

THOMAS (O.S)

Hey!

She smiles as he enters the room. He places his case down on the island and smiles back. He leans in and kisses her forehead.

THOMAS

Good day?

MICHELLE

Yeah, okay. You?

THOMAS

Same old...!

He notices the pile of letters on the countertop.

THOMAS (cont'd)

Great minds!

Michelle's face adopts an expression of bewilderment.

MICHELLE

Huh?

He laughs gently.

THOMAS

Great minds think alike. The letters. You been reading them today, huh?

MICHELLE

Yes, why?

THOMAS

I took a few to work today. Handed them out to the kids. You know, a kinda workshop for them.

MICHELLE

Oh, you never said.

THOMAS

It was a last minute idea, really. I thought it might help them understand better if they'd actually got chance to see some forms of a written narrative for themselves.

MICHELLE

How did it go?

THOMAS

Great. I couldn't have planned it better if I'd tried. They really got into the subject, even those that usually seem like they're only at university to avoid working for a living.

Michelle smiles and raises an eyebrow.

THOMAS (cont'd)

Hey! I've got a good excuse. I do actually have to work when I'm there you know!

MICHELLE

Yeah yeah!

THOMAS

No, but seriously. They went down a storm. Some of the kids' reactions to the stories they were reading were quite heartfelt.

MICHELLE

I wouldn't expect anything less. The emotion in some of those letters is overwhelming. They're so...

THOMAS

... Moving?

MICHELLE

I was gonna say 'Real'.

THOMAS

Yeah, that too. They're almost like an... addiction to me, sometimes.

MICHELLE

As in...?

THOMAS

The letters aren't enough. Not any more. I want... no, not want, NEED to know more. These were real people. They had lives. We've been privileged to have a glimpse into their lives, but I want to know more- Who they really were or are, you know? Do they have family, do they have kids of their own, what was their profession before they got drafted in.

MICHELLE

Great minds indeed!... I'm more interested in 'Mother'. She was their rock. They relied and counted on her to raise their spirits during a completely heinous time of their lives. She touched a lot of people.

THOMAS

Sure. It would be interesting to see if the memory of 'Mother' is still alive. There's so much we don't know- what happened to them all after the war, did they keep in contact with 'Mother'? Did they revert back to their old lives, families, jobs?

MICHELLE

Let's do it then.

THOMAS

Do what?

MICHELLE

Let's go back to the Indiana backcountry. We've both got the weekend free. We could get our detective hats on!

THOMAS

You honestly think we can find anything out by snooping?

MICHELLE

We'll never know if we don't try.
We've got lots of information at
hand.

(Nods towards the pile of
letters)

Names, places, people. What have we
got to lose?

THOMAS

Our weekend and a tank of gas.

MICHELLE

C'mon. You know you need to know
more. At least *try*. We could start
out by checking records or
something at the library first.

THOMAS

Okay, I'll do the library thing,
but if we can't dig up any
information, I'm not scooting
around little townships on a whim.
Deal?

MICHELLE

Deal!

Thomas begins to remove his jacket.

MICHELLE (cont'd)

What're you doing? Leave it on.

THOMAS

Whatever for?

MICHELLE

The library is open for another two
hours, we'll grab some food on the
way home.

Thomas shakes his head as he pulls his jacket back on.

EXT. LIBRARY - LATER

The grand architecture of the building is highlighted by the
final rays of the setting sun.

Thomas and Michelle walk arm in arm towards the main doors.

They step aside to allow an elderly lady to pass, then head
inside.

INT. LIBRARY - LATER

Thomas, Michelle, a huge pile of books and a stack of letters occupy the table on which is situated a microfiche, in the far corner of the vast echoey room.

Every sound is magnified to the point where Thomas and Michelle are aware that even their excited whispers can be heard throughout the room.

MICHELLE

(under her breath)

What did I tell you? Everything is pointing to that one town. And I mean everything, some of the places even still exist. A small town like that, the memories must live on in some way or another.

THOMAS

(A wave of excitement in his raised voice)

Yes, you're right... Mother, we're coming to find you!

Michelle scowls at Thomas' lack of consideration to the other users of the library, then stifles a giggle as a 'Sshhh' resonates from the other side of the room.

FADE TO:

BLACK SCREEN

Titles read: 'The Awakening'

FADE IN:

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DAY

A dirt-track weaves in and out of the beautiful countryside on a fine summers day.

The peaceful serenity is interrupted by the faint noise of an engine in the distance.

The noise slowly gets louder as the FORD MERCURY, driven by Thomas, with his wife by his side, glides gracefully into view.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - MOMENTS LATER

The car slowly grinds to a halt. In the distance stands the grand, imposing covered bridge.

Michelle, again, exits the car before it has even stopped.

She excitedly fidgets, waiting for her husband to exit the vehicle.

She grabs him by the hand.

MICHELLE

Come on, hurry!

THOMAS

Are we really leaving the car here?

MICHELLE

Yes. I told you, the town is only a short walk on the other side of that bridge. I checked before we left.

THOMAS

But why not just *drive* into town, 'Chelle?

MICHELLE

Because I want to just check the land at the side of the bridge where we found the letters, and since we're already out of the car, and you've got a bee in your bonnet about your beloved gas tank, I thought we'd take a walk.

THOMAS

A walk? With your level of enthusiasm it'll be more like a sprint!

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF THE TOWN - LATER

The wooden board baring the town's name and population looks in pristine condition - a community that cares about it's status and inhabitants.

Michelle and Thomas stop in front, as Michelle removes her camera from her bag and takes a picture or two, before grabbing Thomas by the hand, almost dragging him towards the buildings in the distance.

EXT. HIGHSTREET - MOMENTS LATER

The view of the street looks almost like a snapshot of a historical scene. The rows of well tended and maintained wooden shops and buildings with their handed painted signs and white-washed picket fences are almost humbling.

Michelle and Thomas seem almost alien as they make their way along the street. Silhouettes of curious onlookers peeking behind windows framed by ornate shutters become obvious to them as they pass.

A smartly dressed TEENAGER steps out from within one of the buildings across the way. Thomas calls out to him as he crosses the road towards him-

THOMAS

Excuse me! Young man!

Michelle hurries to catch up with her husband.

TEENAGER

Yes, sir?

THOMAS

I wonder if you could help me- Do you perchance know where I might find...

He takes an envelope out from his jacket pocket, and shows it to the boy.

THOMAS (cont'd)

... This address?

The boy scans the writing on the envelope.

TEENAGER

Wilmot? Yes, sir. Take a right down here.

He points to a junction not too far in the distance.

THOMAS

Thank you. You've been a great help.

MICHELLE

Thanks.

She smiles to the boy, then realises that Thomas has already made his way towards the junction. She touches him on the shoulder, then almost trots off towards her husband.

EXT. WILMOT AVE - LATER

A residential street. As Thomas and Michele head along, the buildings seem to get more run down.

He points to an imposing, boarded up house in the near distance.

THOMAS

There!

Michele's voice sounds somewhat downbeat-

MICHELLE

Oh dear. That doesn't look too promising.

Thomas leaps ahead, and races towards the front door. He knocks.

He turns to face Michelle.

THOMAS

You never know...

He raps heavily on the door again. It groans and drops from its hinges a little.

Thomas shrugs and slings his arm around Michelle's waist. They turn and head back towards the highstreet.

EXT. HIGHSTREET - MINUTES LATER

Michelle and Thomas appear from the side street, and turn right along the row of buildings.

Thomas stops dead in his tracks. Michelle continues for a good few paces, unaware that her husband is no longer beside her. She stops and turns.

MICHELLE

Thomas?

His face almost cracks into a smile. He nods across the way towards a building.

THOMAS

Recognise this, 'Chelle?

She turns to face the ornate BARBER SHOP, with its glorious red and white spiralling striped pole.

Michelle smiles as she notices the name of the establishment-

MICHELLE

...Stewart's. My God, Thomas. It's exactly as it was described in the letter!

THOMAS

Yep. It's probably been passed down through the generations.

They walk towards the door as they chat.

MICHELLE

It's nice.

THOMAS

What? The shop?

MICHELLE

No, that things get passed down through the families. It's so rare these days.

THOMAS

Where we live maybe. Little towns like this? It's a way of life.

He leans forward and pulls open the door.

THOMAS (cont'd)

After you, my dear.

MICHELLE

No, after you. What business would a lady have going into a barber's shop. We don't want to worry them unduly!

They laugh.

INT. STEWART'S BARBER SHOP - CONTINUOUS

A sparsely fitted out establishment. A single leather chair rests before an ageing mirror. A glass container filled with disinfectant houses a comb, a pair of scissors and a razor.

The bell over the door jangles as it opens.

An old dog raises it's head and sniffs the air as Michelle and Thomas enter. It stands arthritically, and lets out a little growl.

A voice shouts out from a back room-

VOICE

Be with you in a minute.

Thomas clears his throat.

THOMAS

No rush, take your time.

Upon hearing the voice of a stranger, VIC, late sixties, bald, wearing a apron, rushes through the back doorway and into the shop.

He looks Thomas and Michelle up and down.

VIC

I can fit you in, but I don't do no ladies, I'm afraid.

Thomas laughs.

THOMAS

Another time maybe!

VIC

Then how can I help you? Something for the weekend maybe, sir?

Vic casts a wink towards Thomas.

Michelle splutters-

MICHELLE

Oh, no! Nothing like that! We'd just like to pick your brains, if we might.

VIC

Well that depends. I don't know nothing about nothing.

Thomas senses the hostility and lurches forward with right hand outstretched.

THOMAS

Allow me to introduce myself, Mr. Stewart isn't it?

Vic nods and reluctantly grasps Thomas' hand.

THOMAS (cont'd)
 I'm Professor Willis... From the
 city Uni. I'm... We're trying to do
 some research, and I was... We were
 hoping you'd be able to help.
 Thomas. You can call me Thomas by
 the way.

VIC
 Well, Professor Willis...

Thomas interrupts sternly-

THOMAS
 Thomas, please!

VIC
 Well, Professor Thomas. I don't
 know how I can help. What's your
 forte?

THOMAS
 My forte?

VIC
 Whadda you teach? At the
 university.

THOMAS
 I focus on folklore mainly. You
 know, stories. That's why we're
 here.

VIC
 You want a story?

MICHELLE
 No, Mr. Stewart. We've got the
 story. We just hoped to get a
 little more background, as it were.

Vic rubs his head.

VIC
 Do you want to go out, come back in
 and start again? I don't follow.

Michelle turns to her husband.

MICHELLE
 Show him, Profes... Thomas.

Thomas steps to the side, placing his case down on the
 chair. He pops the clasps open, and slowly raises the lid.

VIC
My God... What have you got
there...?

He steps towards the open briefcase.

VIC (cont'd)
Where in heaven's name did you get
those things?

Michelle stifles a grin.

MICHELLE
You... You recognise them?

VIC
How... how did you know to come
here? I don't understand.

THOMAS
One of the letters. It describes
this shop down to a tee.

VIC
And this letter, what does it say?

THOMAS
From what I remember, it spoke of
this very shop, Stewart's. It was
quite melancholic, you know,
letters from the front line of
battle. The shop was owned by the
writer's father. There'd been some
terrible family quarrel, and the
young boy didn't have any family to
correspond with. And so...

VIC
And so, I wrote to Mother.

Michelle lets out a little squeal of joy. Her hands visibly
tremble. She (over)confidently strides forward and sits in
the barber's chair.

MICHELLE
Ju... Just do me a favour and say
that again.

Vic replies with a knowing smirk-

VIC
What all of it?

MICHELLE

No, the last bit. Just say that last bit.

VIC

I'll say that last bit in return for something.

Michelle responds excitedly-

MICHELLE

Of course, anything. Name your price.

VIC

Oh no, lady. There's no fee. I'd just like to take a seat in my own chair, if you don't mind. You've just dredged the past back into the present, you see, and I don't think my dicky-ticker can handle it if truth be told!

She leaps from the chair and offers the seat to Vic in the manner of an exaggerated waiter. He creaks himself down into the chair. His eyes are transfixed on the briefcase of letters.

VIC

I said- And so, I wrote to Mother.

Michelle applauds enthusiastically and out of character. She plants a kiss on Thomas' cheek.

EXT. HIGHSTREET - CONTINUOUS

The highstreet is a league away from the hustle and bustle of the city.

A frail looking old lady hobbles along the roadside. She pauses for her breath every few steps. She takes a handkerchief from inside her sleeve then wipes her brow. She continues.

INT. STEWART'S BARBER SHOP - SECONDS LATER

The barber is still seated in the chair, swivelling it to and fro.

Thomas kneels on the floor in front of the open briefcase, rapidly flicking through the envelopes.

THOMAS

It must be in here somewhere...

MICHELLE

It definitely is. I remember reading that one yesterday.

Thomas triumphantly holds a tatty envelope above his head.

THOMAS

Et voilà!

MICHELLE

Is that it?

THOMAS

That's the baby! How come when you're looking for something, it's always the last thing...

VIC

Because once you find it, you stop looking!

Michele snatches it from Thomas' grasp and in one swift move hands it over to Vic. His hands tremble as he takes it.

VIC (cont'd)

Could you do me a favour?

THOMAS

Of course, you want some privacy. We understand.

VIC

No, you useless great Maroon. I need you to pass me my glasses. I'm as blind as a bat without them.

EXT. HIGHSTREET - CONTINUOUS

The frail old lady bangs on the barber shop window with her walking stick.

Through the window we see Vic, Michelle and Thomas Physically jump.

Vic smiles, nods then waves towards the old lady. She nods in return.

INT. STEWART'S BARBER SHOP - CONTINUOUS

VIC
Nosey old bird!

Thomas laughs.

THOMAS
A friend of yours?

VIC
She'd like to think so! She's
always poking her beak into
everyone else's business. You don't
need no newspapers while-ever
HILDA's on the prowl.

MICHELLE
Ooh! You think she'd be able to
help us.

Vic answers abruptly-

VIC
Nope.

Michelle anxiously looks towards Thomas.

VIC (cont'd)
A lot of the folk round here aren't
too fond of strangers. 'Specially
them that are rooting around in
other peoples business. What are
you doing this for anyhow? A book?
The local rag?

THOMAS
No, no, sir. I assure you, this is
totally for our amusement...

Michelle interrupts-

MICHELLE
I don't think amusement is quite
the right word there, Thomas.

THOMAS
No, you're right. I apologise
Mister Stewart. The fact is, we're
intrigued. No, more than intrigued-
we're... Enthralled.

Vic raises an eyebrow.

THOMAS (cont'd)
 We've read these letters. We've
 been moved by them. Somedays, I
 can't think of anything else.
 They're alive. They're living,
 breathing glimpses to the past.
 They're so much more. I can't even
 think of a word to describe them...

Thomas and Michelle think briefly for the right word, both
 speak at the exact same time-

THOMAS
 They're... Profound.

MICHELLE
 They're... Profound.

Vic scans through his letter once again. His expression
 changes with every line read. He looks up, physically
 shaken.

VIC
 I... I had shut all this out years
 ago. At least, I thought I had. It
 was Hell, but it was life. Our
 life. My life.

His voice breaks and his face pains somewhat, almost as if
 he is hearing the noise- the shells, the gunfire, the
 sirens.

VIC (cont'd)
 I was just a kid. A teenager.
 Ripped from my surroundings and
 drafted onto the front line. I
 didn't want to go. I cried. I
 sobbed to my father...

A tear rolls down his cheek.

VIC (cont'd)
 'You will fight for your country'
 he said over and over. We
 quarrelled, we rowed. In the end he
 all but disowned me. I wrote him
 many times, but he never replied. I
 was an embarrassment to him- an
 unpatriotic embarrassment. I... I
 was only a kid, don't you see?

He stands to his feet, and heads towards the back of the
 shop, facing away from Thomas and Michelle.

MICHELLE

Mister Stewart, if we're upsetting you, I apologise. You don't have to...

VIC

She kept my head together, that lady. I wrote letters to her, and I always got a reply. I know she wrote letters to many, many soldiers, but the way she wrote her words. She made you feel that you were the only one.

He turns back to face them.

VIC (cont'd)

Made you feel important... Loved even.

His composition falters- he cries.

MICHELLE

Mr Stewart, are you okay?

VIC

She meant so much to me at that time, but you know what pains me?

Michelle and Thomas stand in silence, hanging on to his every syllable.

VIC (cont'd)

I can't even remember her name. She was my rock for God's sake, and I can't even remember her name.

He raises his hands to his eyes as he weeps. Thomas and Michelle and visibly moved.

Michelle swallows back a tear.

VIC (cont'd)

Mother, I'm so sorry.

Hilda's face can be seen peeping through the side of the window.

FADE TO BLACK

EXT. HIGHSTREET - LATER

Michelle and Thomas exit the barber's shop. She turns and waves as she closes the door behind her. She wipes her eyes.

THOMAS

You alright?

MICHELLE

I don't know. I wasn't expecting that, you know. We've opened up some really old, painful wounds there. I feel so guilty.

THOMAS

I know, honey. He was a lovely old guy. Quite a character! He'll be okay. He's old. You forget things as you get older, you know.

MICHELLE

There's a difference between forgetting things and blocking things out though. He was devastated.

THOMAS

He was. But he was more upset about not knowing mother's name more than all the pain of the war. We need to find out her name, just for him, if nobody else. Let him have some closure.

Michelle sighs.

MICHELLE

Where now? The farmhouse?

THOMAS

Yeah. Mister Stewart seemed pretty adamant that one of the letters was written by the guy that lives there, so it's worth a try.

MICHELLE

But...

THOMAS

But what?

MICHELLE

I didn't expect a reaction like
Mister Stewart's. I don't think I
could handle that again.

Thomas lovingly places his arm around Michelle's shoulder. He pulls her close, almost taking in the scent from her hair. She forces a smile.

EXT. FARMHOUSE OUTSKIRTS- DUSK

Birds tweet in the many trees. The farmhouse stands majestically at the end of a long winding dirt track.

In the distance, the silhouettes of Thomas and Michelle can be seen approaching the building.

EXT. FARMHOUSE - SECONDS LATER

Thomas flashes a smile to Michelle.

He knocks on the door. Shuffling footsteps can be heard getting gradually louder as they near the door.

A creak and slam of a bolt, the door swings open.

Thomas takes a step back.

RUTH, elderly, scruffily dressed, stands in the doorway.

THOMAS

I'm sorry to bother you, Ma'am. I was wondering if we might have a word with Charles?

Ruth eyes them up and down suspiciously.

RUTH

Charles is away fishing. Won't be back for some time, see?

THOMAS

I do see. Thank you for your time.

RUTH

Now just you wait here. I was warned about you?

MICHELLE

I think you've got us mistaken for somebody else.

RUTH
No. You're the two.

She turns to face inside the house and yells-

RUTH (cont'd)
Hilda! Hilda! Is this who you were
talking about?

Shuffling footsteps can be heard approaching, and eventually the old lady who banged on the barber shop window appears behind Ruth.

HILDA
That's the two. They were poking
about in Vic Stewart's shop. Look
at them. They've got city-type
written all over them. He was in
bits, old Vic. I saw him through
the window. What business is it
round here for newspaper reporters?

MICHELLE
We're not reporters, I can assure
you...

HILDA
With a fancy camera like that? You
think I'm wet behind the ears!

THOMAS
I can assure you, Hilda...

HILDA
See Ruth? They even know my name.
Investigative journalists. That's
what they are.

THOMAS
I assure you, we are not. One
hundred percent. I only knew you're
name because Mister Stewart told
us.

HILDA
Did he now? Don't listen to a word
he says. His mind's not what it
was, you know.

Thomas smirks and winks towards Michelle.

THOMAS

Well, actually, he was singing your praises. Pillar of the community, he said.

Her frosty expression thaws a little.

MICHELLE

We were simply trying to find some information about these letters...

A look of anger crossed with contempt forms on her face. She interrupts snappily-

HILDA

Have you ever heard the expression that a woman should be seen and not heard?

Michelle cuts her off sarcastically and defensively.

MICHELLE

Have you?

Hilda, enraged at the comment pushes Ruth to the side and slams the door shut. Thomas jams his foot in the way.

THOMAS

Please, ladies. No need for bickering. The letters, that's the only reason that we're here. Not to argue, not to ruffle any feathers or pry into your private lives. We just want to know about the letters.

The door creaks open a little more, easing the pressure on Thomas' foot. He snatches it away.

HILDA

Letters? What letters?

MICHELLE

We...

Thomas cuts her off and takes control of the situation-

THOMAS

We found some letters. A lot of letters, actually. Some while back.

RUTH

Go on.

THOMAS

Well, it transpires that they were written from men from this town. The majority of them, anyway.

Ruth and Hilda look puzzled.

THOMAS (cont'd)

They were written in the war. From the front line. All addressed to 'Mother'. We spoke to Mister Stewart because his shop was mentioned in one of the letters. It was his letter in fact, one he wrote. We're trying to find out who this 'Mother' actually is... or was... We checked out her address on Wilmot, but it's derelict.

HILDA

Well that's all very interesting for you, isn't it? This is a close-knit community here. We don't appreciate city folk coming round here prying. What do you know about the war? Or fighting in the War for that matter? Your generation knows nothing about our generation, and you have no right to share OUR stories. Get away.

She slams the door, as Thomas raises his hands, almost as if he is surrendering.

EXT. ANTIQUE SHOP - LATER

The couple trudge along the street, the spring in their step completely absent.

They pause outside the antique shop and peer through the window.

A middle aged woman who is sat behind the counter stands and smiles. She beckons them in enthusiastically.

Michelle turns to Thomas.

MICHELLE

Thomas, no!

THOMAS

Come on, she looks friendly.

He reaches over and pulls open the door to the shop.
Michelle begrudgingly follows.

INT. ANTIQUE SHOP - CONTINUOUS

The shop is packed to the rafters with antiquities, more like a museum than a store.

BARBARA, forties, well dressed, greets them with a friendly smile.

BARBARA

Good evening. Was you looking for anything in particular?

MICHELLE

I'm not sure. We're interested mainly in things from the war.

BARBARA

I've got all sorts! Anything in particular?

MICHELLE

Diaries... Photographs... Letters?

BARBARA

Letters you say?

THOMAS

We happened across some letters a while back. Memoirs from the war. We're just trying to follow it up. You know, get a little back story, find out about mother.

BARBARA

Did... Did you say 'Mother'?

Thomas unfolds a letter from his pocket and presents it to Barbara.

THOMAS

I sure did. Letters to Mother. We've got a whole stack of them.

BARBARA

Snap!

MICHELLE

Snap? What do you mean?

BARBARA

I mean 'snap'! So have I.

Thomas and Michelle look at each other and laugh in unison. Barbara heads towards the front door of the shop and flips the open/closed sign then locks the door.

BARBARA (cont'd)

It's nearly closing time anyway!
Come through to the back, I've got
a fresh pot of coffee in there with
our names written all over it!

Barbara leads the way behind the back of the counter into the living quarters.

INT. LIVING QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

The room is almost as full of junk as the shop, with most spaces piled high with trinkets.

Thomas and Michelle sit at the cluttered dining table in the centre of the room.

Barbara methodically removes the piles of ornaments from the table and places them on the floor. She brings over the coffee pot, skilfully grasping three mugs in her other hand.

She pours the drinks for her impromptu guests.

THOMAS

Thank you, you're too kind...

He picks up a business card from the table and reads the proprietors name-

THOMAS (cont'd)

Mrs. Trebus, is it?

BARBARA

It is indeed. But please call me
Barbara.

MICHELLE

It's a wonderful place you have
here, Barbara. It's a veritable
Aladdin's cave!

BARBARA

It's not to everyone's taste, but I love it, and... It pays the bills, doesn't it?

Michelle nods in agreement as she takes a sip of her coffee.

BARBARA (cont'd)

Is it too strong? I've got some creamer knocking around somewhere.

MICHELLE

It's fine, thank you. Just how I take it. I must say, it's not the kind of welcome we were expecting.

BARBARA

Oh?

MICHELLE

We nearly didn't come in here. We ran in to a bit of hostility earlier.

BARBARA

Let me guess. Hilda?

THOMAS

Correct! She accused us of snooping around. She said it wasn't any business of our generation.

BARBARA

Oh, ignore her. We're not all tarred with the same brush around here. She's just... bitter.

MICHELLE

It's not just with us then?

BARBARA

No, far from it. She's renowned around here. She's harmless enough. But if she got wind that you're rooting around digging up war stories... Well it would be like a red rag to a bull.

MICHELLE

Really?

THOMAS

We didn't mean to offend anybody.
In fact the old guy in the barber
shop was wonderfully helpful.

BARBARA

Old Vic? He's lovely, once you get
used to his dry sense of humour,
that is! No, you see, Hilda lost
her sweetheart in the war. I doubt
she'd even have a polite
conversation to a man of the cloth
about it!

MICHELLE

Such a shame.

BARBARA

Isn't it?

Thomas raises the briefcase onto the table and pops open the
clasps.

THOMAS

Are you interested in looking at
these, Barbara?

BARBARA

Of course! I don't shut up shop
early for any old instance you
know.

She walks over and stands behind Thomas, gazing in the
briefcase.

BARBARA (cont'd)

Wow, you've got a fair few in
there. Did you get them at the
estate sale?

MICHELLE

Estate sale?

BARBARA

The sale at Miriam's old house. On
Wilmot.

THOMAS

Oh, we visited that address earlier
today. It's derelict. So Miriam, I
take it, is our elusive mother?

BARBARA

She is indeed. Her house has been empty for a few years now. They sold the smaller items off as an estate sale, and the bigger stuff went to auction. Including the house.

MICHELLE

Did the house not sell? It's such a shame for a property like that to go to rack and ruin.

BARBARA

I'm not sure about the house. I didn't go to the auction, only the sale. She didn't have many possessions though. I was looking for stock for my shop.

She approaches a shelf and removes a shoebox, places it on the table.

BARBARA (cont'd)

This was the only thing I got...

She removes the lid, revealing a stack of letters in considerably better condition than the yellowed envelopes in Thomas and Michelle's possession.

MICHELLE

Wow!

She leans forward, and flicks through the contents of the box.

MICHELLE (cont'd)

Photographs too! How wonderful.

BARBARA

It is, isn't it? I couldn't bring myself to sell them. They're too personal.

MICHELLE

I'm glad you didn't! I don't suppose there are any photographs of mother... Miriam?

BARBARA

Unfortunately not. She was a reclusive type really.

THOMAS

Did she have any children?

BARBARA

No, no children, no husband. She kept herself to herself.

MICHELLE

It's amazing that someone like that would spend all that time writing to all those young men during the war.

BARBARA

It's touching, isn't it?

MONTAGE: DISSOLVES OF THE VARIOUS HANDWRITTEN LETTERS AND SEPIA TINTED PHOTOGRAPHS.

EXT. ANTIQUE SHOP - NIGHT

The moon casts an eerie alabaster hue to the shop front. The street is now deserted.

INT. ANTIQUE SHOP - CONTINUOUS

An army of clocks burst to life chiming the arrival of nine o'clock.

INT. LIVING QUARTERS - CONTINUOUS

Thomas looks startled as he realises just how long they have spent in the shop. He turns to Barbara.

THOMAS

Is it really nine? Where did that evening go?

BARBARA

Time flies when you're having fun.

MICHELLE

Indeed it does. Thank you, Barbara. I think we'd better be making tracks now. We've taken up far too much of your time.

BARBARA

Believe me, it's been a pleasure. Are you stopping in the town, or travelling home?

MICHELLE

We hadn't planned on stopping, but I don't think we planned on staying this late either. We're not even parked nearby.

BARBARA

Really? Where are you parked up?

THOMAS

The other side of the bridge. It's not that far, but it'll be pitch black.

BARBARA

If I had room, I'd offer for you to stay here for the night, but unfortunately...

She nods over towards the couch, littered with sheets and a pillow.

BARBARA (cont'd)

That's the only bed I've got! And that's where I sleep.

MICHELLE

You've been wonderful. We'll come back next time we're here any fill you in on any developments.

BARBARA

When are you back?

THOMAS

I don't know. Next weekend maybe.

BARBARA

Until next time then. It was good to meet you both.

EXT. ANTIQUE SHOP - LATER

Michelle and Thomas head out of the shop onto the street. Barbara stands in the doorway.

MICHELLE

One more thing... Miriam. Do you know when she died?

BARBARA

You know what, I'm not even sure if she has passed away! I'll see if I can't find some more out for when I see you next.

MICHELLE

I hadn't even considered that she might still be alive, what with the letters being so old.

Michele and Thomas flash a smile to each other, a small gleam in their eyes.

Thomas wraps his arm around his wife as they set off along the road.

THOMAS

You know what? Let's sleep in the car tonight.

FADE OUT

EXT. FORD MERCURY - EARLY MORNING

Dawn is just breaking, birds tweet in the trees surrounding the couples car. As we near the windscreen we see that only Thomas is inside, uncomfortably reclined on the driver's seat and somehow still asleep.

He stirs, rubs his eyes, then reaches to rub his stiff neck. After a few seconds he realises that his wife is not in the car.

He catches a glimpse of a note, scrawled in eyeliner on one of the old envelopes. It reads- 'Gone to Barbara's. Too excited to sleep X'

He smiles to himself and almost instantaneously reaches under his seat for his tattered packet of smokes.

EXT. ANTIQUE SHOP - LATER

Thomas walks steadily along the street towards the antique shop in the early and unworldly early light.

He tries the door. Shakes his head. Knocks lightly.

A few seconds pass. He knocks again, more strongly this time. The glass rattles. Still no response.

He hears a distant shout-

MICHELLE

(O.S)

Thomas! Thomas!

He turns and gestures her to shush. She giggles and disappears inside a diner.

INT. DINER - SECONDS LATER

A small and homely diner. Totally free of customers except for Michelle and Barbara, who sit together at a table in the window. A pot of coffee stands in the centre of the table, surrounded by other condiments.

Thomas heads towards the ladies. He sits, and overturns the coffee cup placed ready for his arrival. He smiles at Barbara.

THOMAS

Good morning, Barbara. I... I apologize for my wife's over zealous attitude.

Michelle shakes her head.

BARBARA

No need whatsoever. I was already up and about.

THOMAS

At this ungodly hour? I find that hard to believe.

He pours a cup of the steaming fresh coffee, then takes a huge gulp.

THOMAS (cont'd)

Am I the only person who actually gets *excited* when I remember about the existence of coffee when I wake up in the morning?

Another gulp, and a weary grin.

BARBARA

It's good, huh?

THOMAS

Believe me, Barbara. At this time of the day, anything's good.

BARBARA

Oh, I'll take that as a compliment then, I think?

MICHELLE

Yes. It's a compliment. Thomas has a certain way with words. It takes him an hour to wake up, usually.

Barbara smiles as she leans over, then tops up everyone's cups.

BARBARA

I'd better put another pot on...

THOMAS

You'd better...?

BARBARA

Ha ha! Yes, I'm known as a bit of a multi-tasker around here! I'm always up at the crack of dawn, and old Freddie finds it a bit of a struggle to cope with this place all on his own.

Thomas nods in agreement. He's heard enough of an explanation. Barbara continues regardless-

BARBARA (cont'd)

So, I clean up for him, open the diner, and then it's all ready for him when he arrives.

MICHELLE

He won't mind us being here, will he?

BARBARA

Jeez, no. He loves company. He would talk the hind legs off a donkey, that one. Bless him.

MICHELLE

He lives in town, I take it?

BARBARA

Just round the corner. He was in the war...

MICHELLE

Really? Will he talk to us, do you think?

BARBARA

Lady, did you hear a word I just
said to you? Just try and stop him!

EXT. HIGHSTREET - LATER

FREDDIE, dressed in a smart but fraying suit, ambles steadily along the street. He reaches the diner. He looks surprised to see he already has customers. He straightens his tie, licks his hand to tidy up his hair then opens the door.

INT. DINER - SECONDS LATER

Barbara is behind the counter. She smiles sweetly and waves at Freddie as he enters.

BARBARA

Good morning, handsome. You've got
visitors.

Freddie speaks at very loud volume, almost a shout-

FREDDIE

I noticed. Friends of yours?

BARBARA

Well, yes. I suppose they are.

She heads out from behind the counter, takes Freddie by the arm and leads him to the table.

BARBARA (cont'd)

Freddie, I'd like to introduce you
to Thomas and Michelle.

Freddie offers out his hand to Thomas. He obliges and
handshakes firmly.

THOMAS

Good morning, sir. Lovely place you
have here.

BARBARA

Thomas is a Professor at the
university in the city.

Freddie frowns a little.

FREDDIE
Eh? Speak up, my girl.

He turns to face Michelle, and adds with a smirk-

FREDDIE (cont'd)
Deaf as a post, you see. Bloody shells!

Michelle giggles.

BARBARA
I said, Thomas is a professor at the city university.

FREDDIE
Professor, eh? Very good.

BARBARA
They've come to hear some of your stories.

FREDDIE
My stories? How long have they got?

Thomas laughs, and pulls out an empty chair for Freddie to sit on. He nods, then sits.

FREDDIE (cont'd)
So, what brings you to these parts?

MICHELLE
It all started a while back. We were... I was taking photographs of the scenery around here and we found a pile of letters...

THOMAS
Actually, I think the letters found us.

MICHELLE
True. Anyway, these letters. They were so powerful, they touched us. And we just needed...

Thomas places a stack of letters in front of Freddie.

FREDDIE
To find Mother...?

MICHELLE

Well, to find out about mother.
What can you tell us?

FREDDIE

About her, not a great deal. About how she helped the youngsters of this township during their time of need, a hell of a lot. I did not actually *know* her, you see. None of us did.

Thomas replies, almost as if asking a question-

THOMAS

We've gathered that she was a little reclusive.

FREDDIE

Now that's an understatement if I ever heard one. You know, she had no friends or family to speak of, but... she had dozens of sons. In the spiritual sense anyhow. She was our rock. The one reliable constant throughout to endless mayhem.

MICHELLE

How lovely she must have been. How did so many young men end up communicating with her?

FREDDIE

I can't speak for everyone, but I met her here. In this diner.

THOMAS

Small world, huh?

Barbara stands from her chair.

BARBARA

No, small town! You'll have to excuse me, I need to nip and see to my shop. I might put a 'back in ten minutes' sign in the window. If you swap seats with me, Thomas, I'll be able to see my store-front from the window.

THOMAS

Not a problem.

He slides his cup over the table towards where Barbara was seated before he has even finished speaking.

BARBARA

You're too kind. Thank you.

Thomas nods and smiles as Barbara heads out the door.

THOMAS

You were saying, sir?

Freddie takes an age to begin to speak. Michelle looks almost on edge for him to carry on the conversation.

FREDDIE

My folks ran this diner, you see. I'd seen her knocking about around the town, but I'd never spoken to her... And she'd never spoken to me. I was in here a couple of days before we knew we were going to be drafted. She was here, but she didn't look like her usual self.

MICHELLE

Really?

FREDDIE

She looked upset. Almost pained. I don't know why, but I pulled up a chair and sat at her table.

He gestures to a table in a dimly lit corner of the room.

FREDDIE (cont'd)

And we talked. And talked... and talked. It seemed funny, I'd never even seen her speak to anyone in this town, and here she was, opening her heart to me.

MICHELLE

That's beautiful. What did she tell you, do you remember?

FREDDIE

I do, but as many years ago as it was, I don't think it's my business to be telling anyone else the ins and outs of her life. Besides, I promised her.

THOMAS

Of course. We respect that one hundred percent. We actually doubted whether we had any right to be on this quest ourselves, you know, meddling in peoples pasts.

FREDDIE

Now that's not the issue. Damn, I'd even tell you what I had for breakfast if you wanted to know. But a promise is a promise, no matter how many years have past. All I'll say is that I felt for her. I felt a real connection. It was the first time I'd been able to open up about my feelings and fears... And probably hers too.

MICHELLE

They say it's always easier to speak your mind to a stranger.

FREDDIE

And *they* would be right. She listened. She understood. More importantly, she didn't judge me. To cut a long story short, she gave me her address, and made me promise that I would write her. She was known as 'Mim' around here, but it turned out that I would address her as 'mother'. It seemed strange at first - I had a mother. But this, this was spiritual.

The conversation is halted as Barbara enters the diner. She swoops over, grabs the now empty coffee pot, and heads off behind the counter, squeezing Freddie's shoulder as she passes.

FREDDIE (cont'd)

At first, I couldn't comprehend what had happened. But meeting her on that fateful day turned out to be a gift to me. Not just to me, you see, but lots of us. There's no greater gift than the gift of friendship. When I was away, I couldn't bear to tell my folks of all the pain, anguish and heartache I was witnessing. But I could express myself freely and without any guilt to her.

THOMAS

A gift in itself.

FREDDIE

Indeed it was. It wasn't just the horrible things though. It was nice to be able to share stories about our little town and our old lives, which seemed like only distant memories.

THOMAS

She helped you during your hour of need.

FREDDIE

And many others. I think she kind of helped herself too in the process. I felt safe knowing she was there. Silly I know. It was almost as if she was watching over us.

MICHELLE

That's so poetic. What a lovely lady. How about the other young men, how did they end up in correspondence with her, do you know?

FREDDIE

I'd guess a few of them had ran into her the same way as I did, I don't really know. A lot of it came about through word of mouth. We were all very close during that time.

MICHELLE

Of course. You would have to be.

FREDDIE

One guy writes a short note to her, it gets sent with another soldier's letter, and I guess it just snowballed. But you know what the most amazing thing was?

THOMAS

Tell me.

FREDDIE

She replied to every single one.
Every last one of them.

THOMAS

What a lovely, lovely lady.

FREDDIE

Well, I suppose she had a lot of
time on her hands, but that's
beside the point.

MICHELLE

Did you stay in contact when you
finally came home?

FREDDIE

Now here's the funny thing. We
called at her house a few times,
but she would never answer her
door. We wrote, no response. It was
as if her job was done when we were
back home safely. Of course we
bumped into her from time to time
on the street, but all we got was
the smile of a stranger.

THOMAS

It's such a shame. I see her old
house is empty now.

FREDDIE

No family you see. It's going to
rack and ruin.

MICHELLE

How long has it stood empty.

FREDDIE

Well here's the thing- Not as long
as I thought.

MICHELLE

Go on...

FREDDIE

I stopped seeing her about the town
over twenty years ago. I just
presumed she'd passed away. Then,
all of a sudden, there's a big
commotion and we find out she was
still alive. Living as a hermit you
see- self sufficient.

MICHELLE

And is she still...?

FREDDIE

That I couldn't tell you, I'm afraid. I'm trying to think when it all happened... It's got to be getting on for ten years ago.

Freddie shouts even louder than his usual volume-

FREDDIE (cont'd)

Barbara. When was the estate sale?

Barbara pops her head up from behind the counter.

BARBARA

Let me think. Eight years ago, was it?

Freddie struggles to hear her response-

FREDDIE

Eh?

Barbara leaves the counter, freshly brewed coffee in hand and joins them at the table, sits in Thomas' old place.

BARBARA

I said about eight or so years ago. I've got a hearing trumpet over in the antique shop if you want it!

FREDDIE

I don't need no hearing trumpet. If you spoke a bit more clearly I'd be able to hear you just fine. I don't have any trouble hearing these two, only you.

Michelle smiles- half laugh, half awkwardness-

MICHELLE

More coffee, Freddie?

FREDDIE

Eh?

Michelle gestures the fresh coffee pot to him. He nods.

MICHELLE

What about the other characters?

FREDDIE
I don't follow.

MICHELLE
The other soldiers who wrote the letters. Are any of them still round here?

FREDDIE
Some of them are. Some of them aren't. Vic...

He nods his head towards the shop front of the Barbers, visible through the window.

FREDDIE (cont'd)
He's still here.

THOMAS
Yes, we spoke to him yesterday. Nice guy.

FREDDIE
You think. Too sarcastic for my liking. What about Charlie?

THOMAS
Charles? From the farmhouse?

FREDDIE
Yes, that's the guy. Decent bloke.

MICHELLE
We tried to speak to him, but I'm afraid we were greeted with a frosty reception.

FREDDIE
By Charles? I find that hard to believe.

MICHELLE
No, not by Charles, there were two ladies at the house when we called.

FREDDIE
Well Ruth is normally friendly.

Barbara turns to Freddie and speaks in a 'you should have guessed' tone-

BARBARA

Hilda!

FREDDIE

Oh, Hilda. I see! She's a cantankerous old bird at the best of times. You'd be better off avoiding her.

THOMAS

Yes, we gathered as much. Charles was away fishing.

FREDDIE

Well that's no change. He's always fishing. Mind you, I would if I'd got Hilda spending every waking hour in my house too!

MICHELLE

Do you know where he fishes?

FREDDIE

Yes, over at the lake a few miles east. He caught a sixteen pound Bowfin there one time. He reckoned it was some kind of record.

THOMAS

Would you be able to give us directions?

FREDDIE

You in a vehicle?

THOMAS

Sure are.

FREDDIE

I can do better than that. I'll get my hat and jacket.

He winks as michelle as he stands.

EXT. LAKE - AFTERNOON

As the Ford Mercury pulls to a halt beside the beautiful lake, a solitary figure, almost a sillhoutte, can be seen seated on the grassy bank.

Thomas and Michelle almost leap from the car. Michelle turns to assist Freddie from the vehicle.

As they steadily approach the solitary angler, Freddie removes his cap.

FREDDIE
Charlie? Any bites today?

CHARLES, elderly but with a fine head of hair, smartly dressed, turns his head.

CHARLES
Fred? What are you doing here?

FREDDIE
I've closed the diner early. I've brought my only two customers here with me!

CHARLES
Oh?

Thomas steps forward, offering out his hand.

THOMAS
Allow me to introduce ourselves.
I'm Thomas, and this is my wife,
Michelle.

CHARLES
Good to meet you. What can I do for
you?

Thomas clicks open his briefcase, revealing the envelopes.
Charles stares at them for a second or two.

CHARLES (cont'd)
Why did you...? Put those away.
Please.

Thomas swiftly closes the briefcase.

THOMAS
I'm sorry. We didn't mean to cause
any upset or offense.

Charles responds, struggling to hide the emotion in his voice-

CHARLES
It's a little late for that.
Freddie, why did you bring them
here?

FREDDIE

They were trying to find out about old Miriam, that's all. I wanted to see what you could remember.

CHARLES

I remember nothing. I've tried all my life to block the memories of the things I had to endure. I certainly never thought I'd see those again.

He gestures towards the briefcase.

CHARLES (cont'd)

How did you get them?

MICHELLE

We found them.

CHARLES

And have... did you read them?

Michelle nods with a sympathetic smile.

CHARLES (cont'd)

You've no right. They're peoples private belongings. Their feelings. They might just be a wartime souvineer to you, but they symbolise years of torment for me.

THOMAS

I'm so sorry. We had no idea you'd react this way. We never meant any harm. I'm sure I can find *your* letters in here. I'd be more than happy to return them to you.

CHARLES

I don't want them, can't you see that? Get them out of my sight.

He is visibly shaken. Freddie steps forward and rests his hands on Charles' shoulders.

FREDDIE

Now Charlie, no need to over-react. We all had a bad time, you know. I just thought you'd be interested.

CHARLES

Well I'm not. Are you the two that came knocking at my door the other day?

THOMAS

I'm afraid we are!

CHARLES

And it wasn't enough for you that I wasn't home? You had to come chasing after me. The past is the past, and I'd rather leave it that way if you don't mind.

MICHELLE

I'm sorry. We won't take up any more of your time.

Michelle and Thomas head back to the car. Freddie stops a while at the lake side, talking to Charles. They anxiously watch, hoping to maybe lip-read a little of the conversation to no avail.

A few minutes pass, and Freddie ambles back towards the car.

INT. FORD MERCURY - LATER

The car steadily travels back towards the town. The occupants sit in silence.

A few uncomfortable moments pass, then suddenly Freddie speaks out -

FREDDIE

Pull over here, will you?

THOMAS

Here? Yes, sure.

The car pulls to a halt outside the FARMHOUSE.

MICHELLE

Charles' farmhouse? Is that wise?

FREDDIE

Look, take no notice of what Charles says. People handle things in different ways. It just opened up some old wounds for him, that's all. He'll be okay. I just want to have a word with Hilda.

MICHELLE

Hilda?

FREDDIE

Relax. She'll be fine with me.
Well, maybe not fine, but you know
what I mean. If anybody can tell us
what happened to Miriam, it'll be a
busy-body like her. It would
perhaps be better if you wait at
Barbara's.

THOMAS

We can wait in the car for you, if
you like?

FREDDIE

Nah. I've got to butter her up a
little. I can't just storm in there
asking questions.

MICHELLE

Again, is that wise?

FREDDIE

Sure. Besides, it was Charlie's
idea.

INT. ANTIQUE SHOP - LATER

Barbara, Michelle and Thomas are seated around the table in
the back of the antique shop.

Their attention is grabbed by the noise from the bell over
the door at the front of the shop.

Barbara stands, and makes her way through the door.

Seconds later, she reappears, followed by Freddie.

THOMAS

How did you get on?

FREDDIE

Well, it took a while, but I struck
gold, I think.

MICHELLE

Really? What...

FREDDIE

Old Miriam is still alive as far as we know.

Michelle's expression grows elated as Freddie speaks.

FREDDIE (cont'd)

According to Hilda, She was taken to a retirement home when she became unable to care for herself. That's what the estate sale was for- funds.

MICHELLE

My God, how wonderful. Well, not wonderful, but you know what I mean. Do you know where this retirement home is, by any chance?

FREDDIE

Sure do. It's in the next town, it's called Small Lea Grange.

THOMAS

That's great news. Do you think we should visit her?

FREDDIE

I don't think you should, not on your own, anyway. I'd like to see her again, though. And I'm sure old Vic wouldn't say no either.

MICHELLE

Do you think we would be able to arrange it?

BARBARA

I'm sure I'd be able to. I might have to tell a little white lie, but I can't see it being a problem. Shall we say next weekend?

THOMAS

That sounds good to me. I've got work tomorrow, so it will have to be at the weekend.

BARBARA

I'll see what I can do. Saturday or Sunday?

MICHELLE

Sat...

FREDDIE

It will have to be Sunday. I don't
open the diner on a Sunday, you
see.

BARBARA

You don't open the diner ANY day,
Freddie!

FADE TO BLACK

SUBTITLES 'SEVEN DAYS LATER' 'DELIVERING THE LETTERS'

FADE IN

EXT. HIGH STREET - DAY

As the Ford Mercury pulls up outside the Diner, Thomas and
Michelle are suprised to see several figures seated at the
table in the window.

They exit the car.

MICHELLE

I thought he said he didn't open on
Sundays?

THOMAS

Yes, he did!

INT. DINER - SECONDS LATER

The table in the window is full of people, all excitedly
chatting. An air of anticipation fills the room. It almost
seems joyous.

Thomas and Michelle enter, and are greeted by Barbara.

BARBARA

Good morning. Sleep well?

MICHELLE

Not a wink!

BARBARA

I doubt any of these had much
either...

Michelle turns towards the occupied table. She smiles towards Vic, Freddie. She is almost shocked to see Charles seated with them. He looks happy too.

MICHELLE

Charlie? How lovely to see you. I must say, I'm a little surprised.

CHARLES

I had some time to think. I've pushed everything to the back of my mind for way too long.

MICHELLE

Really?

CHARLES

I realised that I had not spoken to anyone about my time in the war. Not a soul- not my wife, my children. No-one... except Mother. I knew noone would be able to understand the way she did. I never even met her, you know, that's the oddest thing. I've carried this burden on my back and in my mind all my days after the war. I think back to the years before the war. I was free spirited, and young. I came back burdened and old beyond my years. That woman kept me sane. That's why I'm here.

VIC

That's why we're all here.

FREDDIE

You see. I told you he was a decent guy didn't I?

Barbara joins them at the table.

BARBARA

I'm going to follow you, and bring Vic and Charlie with me. Freddie it seems, is rather taken with your car, so he'll be travelling with you!

THOMAS

Not a problem, it is a fine vehicle, if I say so myself. So are we all set?

All the old soldiers stand in readiness, without saying a word.

EXT. HIGHSTREET - MINUTES LATER

The ford Mercury pulls away from the roadside, shortly followed by Barbara's vintage car with Vic and Charles inside.

The cars slowly disappear into the distance.

EXT. SMALL LEA GRANGE - AFTERNOON

The cars pull up outside the large, imposing and rather grand building.

All the passengers exit the vehicles. Still a sense of excitement surrounds them.

They all make their way to the entrance.

INT. RECEPTION - MOMENTS LATER

A grand, yet sterile looking room. A couple of wheelchairs stand vacant by the door. A huge desk stands at the rear of the room, stacks of neatly piled brochures and pamphlets atop.

The middle aged RECEPTIONIST, uniformed and neatly presented is approached by Barbara.

RECEPTIONIST

Good afternoon. Welcome to Small
Lea Grange. Can I help?

BARBARA

Hello, I'm Barbara. I called you
last week about visiting my Great
Aunt... Miriam. I've... I've
brought the rest of the family too.
It's been a while, you see.

The receptionists face drops a little- a look of panic.

RECEPTIONIST

You've come to see Mim?... Have you
had to travel far?

BARBARA

A fair way yes.

RECEPTIONIST

Oh, I see. Can you please excuse me a minute?

BARBARA

Of course.

The receptionist scurries away into another room. Barbara turns to the others and shrugs.

Moments later, the receptionist returns with the MANAGER, fifties, again smartly uniformed, but with an air of authority.

MANAGER

Good afternoon. I'm told you're here to see your Aunt?

BARBARA

Great Aunt, yes.

MANAGER

Well ordinarily, we wouldn't allow visitors. She's... how can I put this delicately? She's extremely frail, if you know what I mean...

BARBARA

Are you saying what I think you're saying?

MANAGER

Yes. I'm sorry to have to break news to you like this. I... We don't think she will be with us for much longer.

BARBARA

Oh, my. Would we be able to see her?

MANAGER

Ordinarily, no. But as you've had to travel all the way here, and because you're the first visitors she's ever had during her stay with us, we'll make an exception. Follow me please.

She leads the way through a door and down a corridor as the others follow.

INT. NURSING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

The room is stark- whitewashed walls frame the metal bed beside the window.

MIRIAM, nineties, frail and unalert lies on the bed.

Barbara enters the room. She speaks gently.

BARBARA

Miriam?

Miriam's head turns slowly to face Barbara as she stands at the door. She tries to speak.

BARBARA (cont'd)

Miriam, I've brought someone to see you...

Barbara steps aside to allow Charles, Vic and Freddie past. Miriam stares for a while. Thomas and Michelle stand quietly behind.

FREDDIE

Mother? We've come to see you...

Miriam's eyes light up. Her face forces a smile. She speaks-

MIRIAM

My... My boys. My boys!

She beckons them towards her, almost in slow motion. She whispers to Vic, Freddie and Charles-

MIRIAM

You're just in time...

Her eyes close, still with a sweet smile on her lips.

A tear rolls down Michelle's cheek.

FADE TO

CHURCHYARD - WEEKS LATER

Vic, Freddie, Charles, Michelle, Thomas, Barbara, Ruth and Hilda stand around the freshly dug earth of the grave.

The camera pans down to the floral tributes atop the earth, slowly zooming in on the notes pinned to the flowers, which read 'To Mother'.

The sympathy cards start to twitch in the breeze. The wind picks up. In the distance, a large number of yellowing envelopes can be seen whirling around, almost dancing.

FADE OUT