

LOVE IN WAR

Q

GUERNICA

WRITTEN  
BY

SAM

ZIVILE  
DIE  
MANNS

EXT. HIGH UP ABOVE THE CLOUDS - DAY - PRESENT DAY

We are looking down on Los Angeles from a DRONE'S POV. The CROSSHAIRS hone in on the neighborhood of LOS FELIZ. Specifically, four blocks west and one block south of the HOUSE OF PIES, if you're familiar.

EXT. EDGEMONT STREET - DAY

Street level of what we just saw from above. It's just like any other day. A hipster in pajamas picking up after his dog. An old lady picking bottles from a recycling bin. A single car honk. A bus braking. Leaf blowers. A young woman on her morning run. Old Armenian men playing chess on their porch.

It might be observed that there are BLUE SIGNS in building windows all down the street. We can't see them too clearly.

INT. NEIL'S APARTMENT - NEXT

Empty bottles of Jonny Walker, menthol butts you can smell through the screen, a RHODODENDRON PLANT overdue for hospice. It's more of a tomb than a home these days. And there, in the middle of the room, slumped on a couch, the living corpse of -

NEIL MUDD (30s) in briefs and undershirt, pale and disheveled -- as lively as his dying rhododendron. He wears a sadness so pure that it has become his face. When was the last time he slept? or showered. or smiled. Days? Weeks? Months?

And what is Neil doing? He's looking at a BOX. It's a smallish cardboard box by his front door. We can just make out a scrunchie, a Snoopy sweatshirt, a hair brush.

Neil picks up a pen and a notebook. He goes to write. But abandons that idea and picks up his phone instead.

Neil scrolls mindlessly through his favorite women on Instagram. He pokes at his cock. Maybe he can jerk his way through the sadness today. But there's no movement. He thumbs past several political posts you might catch if you're quick.

He pauses at a post by EMMA GARLAND (30s) a social activist - softly wise and glowing. Her post has millions of likes. In Neil's eyes - sadness mixes with lust, anger, love, pain.

EXIBIA (O.S.)

Neil!?

Neil peels back his curtains and is blinded by the sun - it's not especially bright, but he hasn't seen outside in a while.

Standing below is EXIBIA, a warm, maternal, middle-aged Mexican woman wearing a cleaning apron over a Creedence Clearwater t-shirt. She's holding a bag full of ORANGES.

NEIL

Exibia! Hi!

EXIBIA

I brought you oranges!

NEIL

Those are yours?

EXIBIA

From my tree, yes. Very juicy.

NEIL

Oh my goodness- yes! So sweet of you - I would love those!

EXIBIA

I'll leave them down here. You need me to clean yet or still okay?

NEIL

No, it's pretty good right now.

EXIBIA

Plants okay?

Neil looks to his rhododendron. It's on its deathbed.

NEIL

Yep. All good!

EXIBIA

You sure? It's been a while. You hire someone else? Someone younger?

NEIL

No! Never. Maybe next week.

EXIBIA

Okay, Neil. You let me know.

NEIL

I will.

EXIBIA

Oranges right here!

She puts the bag down against the side of the building.

NEIL  
Okay bye, thank you, Exibia!

Neil closes his blinds and collapses back onto his couch.

Where was he? Oh, right: Total heartbreak. ...Emma...

Neil looks at her post. His heart beats louder.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Idiot... Idiot... Idiot...

The sound of RUMBLING, like a jet plane, growing louder and louder in his heart. Louder still the rumbling grows..

Neil's apartment seems to SHAKE. That's because it IS shaking around him. And it IS a jet plane.

An EXPLOSION across the street.

At first, a surreal silence.

Then SHOUTING. CAR ALARMS. CHAOS. "Bomb! Bomb!"

Neil pulls himself off the couch, looks out to the street below: SMOKE billowing from the building across the street. FLAMES. RUBBLE. His neighbors running.

Neil, with no change in emotion, takes a drag from his cigarette and exhales. We hear Neil's narration - detached and cynical. Think Martin Sheen in APOCALYPSE NOW.

NEIL (V.O.)  
The war had finally made it to Los Feliz. Shit...

FREEZE FRAME on Neil.

A TEXT SCROLL (a la opening of Star Wars) over freeze frame:

TEXT SCROLL  
It is the extremely near future.  
America is in the midst of a second Civil War. After years of political and cultural division, violence escalated to the point of no return. After a Founder militia attack on the Virginia State Capitol building, the Founders formally seceded from the Union.  
The US Army split into two and began fighting.  
(MORE)

TEXT SCROLL (CONT'D)  
 Battles broke out in the Midwest and east, and soon spread to the south and then the west, until most of the country was in full-blown war. Only California, with its size and resources to sustain its own economy, managed to stay clear of the fighting. Until today.

END FREEZE FRAME.

Neil's eyes go wide with PANIC as he remembers -

NEIL  
 Exibia!

Neil SPRINTS out his door, still in his underwear -

Down the stairs -

NEIGHBOR  
 We're under attack, homie! Stay inside!

EXT. NEIL'S APARTMENT BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

Runs out the door, frantic. Runs right through the street and into a crowd surrounding the building, looking everywhere.

NEIL  
 EXIBIA!?? EXIBIA?!!!

NEIGHBOR  
 It's okay! No one's hurt!

NEIL  
 EXIBIA!!

Eventually, Neil stops. *She's safe. Right?*

CLOSE ON: Exibia's ORANGES, spilling out of their bag.

INT. NEIL'S APARTMENT - NEXT

CLOSE ON: The BOX of Emma's stuff sitting by the door.

NEIL (V.O.)  
 I used to fantasize about being a great warrior, leading my battalion out of the trenches, guns blazing, my manuscript tucked in my boot like Hemingway.  
 (MORE)

NEIL (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
But now war had finally arrived at  
my doorstep. And all I could think  
about was her.

Neil is wearing a pair of WOMEN'S LEGGINGS over his face,  
longing for any remaining scent.

NEIL (V.O.)  
I needed to get laid.

His PHONE RINGS a picture of JACOB PERLIN, a sweet, jovial,  
round-faced angel of a man who looks like a rabbi wearing a  
COWBOY HAT, pops up. Neil answers.

NEIL  
Hey Jacob.

JACOB  
It's fucking happening, man! Where  
are you?! Are you okay?

Neil removes the leggings from his face and tucks them in the  
box - the one with the scrunchie and Snoopy sweatshirt.

NEIL  
It just missed me, unfortunately.

JACOB  
Can you get me 500 words by 11?

NEIL  
Jacob.

JACOB  
I need copy, man! I wouldn't bother  
you if I didn't really need it-

NEIL  
I can't.

JACOB  
It doesn't have to be perfect.

Neil's eyes find one of the BLUE SIGNS we noted earlier. It  
says "Fight With Me" and EMMA posing like Rosie the Riveter.  
Close on her EYES. It's like she's looking directly at Neil.

NEIL  
(shakes off the sad)  
Maybe it's writer's block, I don't  
know.

JACOB (O.S.)  
Writer's block?! During a war?!

Neil looks out his window. Right in the middle of the street:

A HORSE.

Not a CGI or animated horse. A real horse - just hangin out on Edgemont Street, looking very out of place.

JACOB (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
At least come into the office. You  
don't have to write. Just as my  
friend. So I can know you're okay.

The horse seems to be staring right at Neil. Weird.

JACOB (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
Hello? Neil? You still there?

Neil snaps out of it, closes his blinds.

NEIL  
Fine, I'll come. But I'm NOT WRITI-

JACOB (O.S.)  
(hanging up)  
-Greatseeyousoon.

Neil's TV, which was knocked to the floor in the blast, is on. The news plays in the background while Neil gets dressed.

TV NEWS HOST  
Just over an hour ago, a building in Los Feliz was bombed in an airstrike. No casualties have been reported. It is the first such attack on California soil since the Civil War started three months ago.  
Los Feliz is requiring all residents aged 18-60 to enlist in the Union Army immediately.

Neil dumps some water into his dying rhododendron and leaves.

INT. NEIL'S APARTMENT BUILDING - LOBBY - LATER

A KEEN UNION VOLUNTEER waits at the bottom of the stairs.

NEIL  
(under his breath)  
Oh fuck.

KEEN UNION VOLUNTEER  
Hi there. I'm here to help people enlist for the Union.

NEIL

Oh. I'm kind of in a hurry. Maybe later.

KEEN UNION VOLUNTEER

Okay. We'll be here all week!

EXT. NEIL'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NEXT

The chaos from the bombing has subsided.

An INFLUENCER takes SELFIES in front of the rubble.

EXT. VERMONT AVE - NEXT

House of Pies. Fred 62. Overpriced feminist vintage shops with vagina-shaped CBD pipes and rainbow-crystal dildos.

Neil passes several EMMA SIGNS.

NEIL (V.O.)

There was the war outside and the one going on inside. I only had time for one.

He crosses the street to escape the signs. A UNION TANKER carrying UNION SOLDIERS stops in front of him. On the side of the tanker: A GIGANTIC EMMA BANNER.

NEIL (V.O.)

And I was losing.

An EXCITED CHILD makes the Emma pose at the soldiers, in solidarity. The soldiers do it back. Neil grits his teeth.

INT. BRU COFFEE BAR - DAY

The cafe is empty - nobody at the counter. Neil is confused.

NEIL

Hello? Are you open?

From below the counter, a TINY GUN appears aimed at Neil.

BARISTA BREE

Who's there! Announce yourself.

NEIL

Um... Bree? It's Neil.

Slowly a head rises from below the counter. Hair dark and spiky, glasses futuristic - like a Wong Kar Wai character. Her eyes dart around suspiciously.

BARISTA BREE  
Did anyone follow you in?

NEIL  
No.

BARISTA BREE  
Pour over?

This is BARISTA BREE. Way too cocky for her small size and prone to conspiracy theories. She and Neil have a special bond - born simply out of the fact that he always talks to her, unlike most customers who treat her like the help.

NEIL  
Would love one.

BARISTA BREE  
Just got a new batch from Rwanda.  
You're going to love it.  
(then)  
Haven't seen you in a while.

Bree starts to make his pour-over.

NEIL  
Eh. Yeah. Just been... crazy busy.  
Surprised you're open.

BARISTA BREE  
People still need coffee during  
war. Union soldiers drink for free.  
You enlist?

NEIL  
Hell no. You?

BARISTA BREE  
(fronting)  
I was thinking about it.

NEIL  
...And?

BARISTA BREE  
Totally could. Still might.  
Probably will. But for now - I feel  
like I need to be here.

NEIL

Uh huh. Sure.

BARISTA BREE

Everyone's saying that it was just some fluke insurgency bombing, that the real fighting won't be here. But I think it's here to stay. And when it does-

She jumps into an aggressive fighter's stance.

BARISTA BREE (CONT'D)

Hey. Between you and me- and I'm not just blowing smoke- the paper isn't as good without you. I mean it - you can feel the difference. The way you write - each word is just - perfectly placed. It's like making a good cup of coffee - a craftsman can tell - you get me?

NEIL

Well, that's very nice, Bree. But I think you're the only one in Los Feliz who actually reads the Lede.

BARISTA BREE

I just have this feeling - I JUST have this feeling - that the Union will need us for something big.

NEIL

Well I hope not.

She hands Neil his pour-over coffee. He savors his first sip.

NEIL (CONT'D)

Damn that's good, Bree.

BARISTA BREE

What are you writing now?

NEIL

Eh. Nothing.

BARISTA BREE

Nothing?

NEIL

Yeah. Kind of have writer's block.

BARISTA BREE

During a war??

EXT. VERMONT AVE - NEXT

Neil continues down Vermont. Workers board up storefront windows or stack SANDBAGS for protection. UNION SOLDIERS sit outside Palermo, playing cards, sipping oat milk lattes.

NEIL (V.O.)

I was always jealous of war-time artists. Picasso with Guernica. Vonnegut with Slaughterhouse 5. Hemingway. To be a war-time artist meant you were one of the big dick Mount Rushmore artists. It meant fame. Immortality. It's embarrassing to say, but of course I wanted that. And now I'd finally gotten my war, and I couldn't bring myself to write a single word.

EXT/INT. SKYLIGHT BOOKSTORE - CONTINUOUS

We follow Neil through the bookstore, to the back.

NEIL (V.O.)

The truth is, I would burn all my writing, turn down Mount Rushmore, and retreat into anonymity forever just to feel her face against mine. I'd dress up as her niece and wash her feet. Just to be near her once more. So it goes.

INT. SKYLIGHT BOOKSTORE - BREAK ROOM - NEXT

Neil moves aside a RUG, pulls up a HIDDEN FLOORBOARD that reveals a STAIRCASE. We follow him down to-

INT. LOS FELIZ LEDE HQ'S / BASEMENT - NEXT

A dumpy but colorful basement that has served as the headquarters of the LOS FELIZ LEDE since 1999.

We can see the evolution via the articles lining the walls. It started with pitchfork-esque music and film reviews, local recommendations and satire. After 9/11 it got political.

REPORTERS, COPY EDITORS, PHOTOGRAPHERS are working leads, getting high, watching the war unfold on instagram.

JACOB PERLIN (Editor in Chief) wears his signature COWBOY HAT and is flipping through channels on the office TV.

JACOB

Do you guys know what channel the  
war is on?

STACY

Okay boomer. Nobody watches TV.

Stacy (Black, 30s) is Neil's favorite writer at the Lede.  
They enjoy each others' banter - the more acidic the better.

Jacob sees Neil and gets up to hug him.

JACOB

There he is.

On TV, SEAN PENN is on the news, riling up a Union Battalion.

STACY

(to Neil)

Where the fuck have you been?!

NEIL

Hi Stacy.

STACY

You know I've had to write twice as  
much copy since you've been gone?!  
I'm sorry you had a tough *break-up*  
or whatever.

NEIL

Well, there's the war outside and  
the war inside and I only have ti-

STACY

-Honey, I'm an unmarried bisexual  
black woman in her 30s, do you have  
any idea how many wars I fight at  
once all the time?

NEIL

Wait, you're black?

STACY

So stupid.

Stacy walks off. Neil takes a seat with Jacob. Beat.

JACOB

You remember our first edition?

NEIL

Yeah. You filled all the unpaid ad space with ads for the Summer '99 Phish tour that nobody paid for.

JACOB

We've been doing this a long time.

NEIL

You said you wouldn't pressure me to write.

JACOB

You're right. You're right.  
(can't help himself)  
What about a humor piece? You're funny. Or used to be, anyways.

NEIL

Your penis is funny. Why don't you print that?

JACOB

That's a great idea.  
(over his shoulder)  
Stacy, can we get a picture of my penis and publish it in the comedy section because it's so tiny and pathetic.

STACY

(without looking up)  
No, Jacob. That's sexual assault.

JACOB

(quickly back to Neil)  
That's sexual assault.  
(then)  
Last thing I'll say and then I'll drop it. I just think people really want to hear from you right now.

NEIL

The straight cis male who just wants to get laid during a war?

JACOB

(spinning it)  
The broken-hearted straight cis male who has a big heart and who deserves happiness and love and who may or may not be pretending sex will cure his broken heart. But yeah, I guess you're fucked.

Neil spots an EMMA POSTER taped to the wall. He sour.

NEIL  
What's *she* doing here?

Jacob jumps up, performatively angry for Neil's benefit.

JACOB  
This doesn't belong here, k?

STACY  
Um... I know you are not tearing  
down that strong, brave WOman.

JACOB  
Yeah, no, you're absolutely right,  
Stacy. Fuck the Patriarchy. Which I  
represent. I want to put this brave  
Sister where we can see her better.

He puts the poster back up, but angles it away from Neil.

JACOB (CONT'D)  
The future is female, the male is  
past, make a woman cum for once,  
etcetera, etcetera. Love it.

The women in the room nod. That's right.

NEIL  
Thanks for trying.

JACOB  
(switching gears, gentle)  
Have you talked to her?

NEIL  
She won't talk to me.

JACOB  
She obviously still has feelings  
for you if she needs a boundary  
like that. Give it time.

NEIL  
What time. The world is ending.

JACOB  
So... is it really writer's block?  
Or something else?

NEIL  
I just think - why bother writing  
if I know it won't be good enough.

JACOB  
Good enough for what?

Neil finds EMMA'S EYES on the poster. Good enough for her.

INT. LOS FELIZ TOWN HALL - LATER

SHOUTING. The Usual (Union) Suspects arguing over the neighborhood's war response. Mostly people wanting to hear themselves talk, or get a good story for their instagram.

Neil finds himself checking out the WOMEN in the town hall. Their eyes... their legs... chests... lips...

NEIL (V.O.)  
It was all the usual left eating  
the left bullshit. I was only there  
in case they took attendance. Don't  
wanna end up on some list. Or  
worse, Twitter.

He makes eyes at a woman, who recoils, disgusted that he would be trying to flirt now. He tries another, who rolls her eyes. *Nobody's in the mood to smash during war.*

NEIL (V.O.)  
Their lists didn't care about my  
broken heart - they needed  
soldiers. There were rules. And  
like another political party I can  
think of, the Union could be  
(German accent)  
"pretty ztrict about zer rules."

Neil meets the eye of PIXIE CUT WOMAN wearing a LOS FELIZ LEDE tee. She smiles at him. He smirks back.

But the spell is broken by Barista Bree who aggressively sidles up next to Neil, sweating, late.

BARISTA BREE  
Did they take attendance?

INT. NEIL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

VALERIE, ("Pixie Cut" from the town hall) clasps on her bra. Neil, sitting up in bed naked, feels a pang of confusion.

NEIL  
You don't have to go.

Valerie laughs. That's not what tonight was, for her.

VALERIE  
Have a good night.

Valerie walks out. Neil leans back, processes. He was just used for sex. That's... pretty cool, right? He smiles, willing himself to be excited about being used.

Neil picks up his notebook and pen and tries to write. But nothing comes. And his smile fades.

NEIL (V.O.)  
I had gotten what I wanted. But it was just a transaction. A trophy. A last fuck at the end of the world.

The night sky lights up with EXPLOSIONS in the distance.

INT. COPY CAT PRINT SHOP - DAY (**FLASHBACK**)

Neil, younger here, enters a boutique Printing shop. It's only two years ago, but this Neil is a different person. No war (inside or out) has furrowed his brow or bagged his eyes. He's Early Bob Dylan - before any hard rain fell.

And there is Emma, the young woman whose face is on all those signs. She's behind the counter, wearing a Snoopy Sweater, smoking a Vietnamese cigarette, head in a book.

NEIL  
Here to pick up for Perlin?

She doesn't even look up at him. Looks for his order.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
You can smoke here?

EMMA  
I can do what I want.  
(beat)  
Just kidding ha. I'll get in big trouble if my boss finds out.

NEIL  
Yeah. No. I won't tell.

Emma places his order on the counter.

EMMA  
I liked this issue.

NEIL  
You read it?

EMMA

Some of it.

NEIL

You read everything that comes in?

EMMA

No ha. But I like to know what's going on in the neighborhood. And... I like him.

She points to NEIL'S BYLINE.

NEIL

You do?

EMMA

He's not like most guy writers. Do you know him?

NEIL

Yeah. I'll let him know. What was your name?

EMMA

Emma.

She passes him the receipt to sign.

NEIL

Why not like other guys?

EMMA

Mmmm.... Most guys can't sit with a genuine feeling. They always have to ruin it with some dick or fart joke. He seems sensitive.

NEIL

He is.

CLOSE ON: Emma's hand takes the receipt from Neil's. The shot is slow. We sit with the discomfort of the genuine feeling.

NEIL (V.O.)

Don't make a fart joke. Don't make a fart joke. Don't make a -

NEIL

See you around.

Neil leaves. Emma picks up the receipt and sees the name. A tiny gasp. When she looks up, Neil is gone.

EXT. COPY CAT PRINT SHOP - CONTINUOUS (**FLASHBACK CONTINUES**)

Neil is smiling from ear to ear.

NEIL (V.O.)

I walked six city blocks before I  
realized I was walking in the wrong  
direction.

Neil stops, turns around, and walks the right way.

NEIL

When I went in, she didn't give me  
a second look. I didn't blame her.  
I wasn't much to look at. I have  
these uneven eyes that almost look  
crossed, my nose is fat in the  
wrong place, my shoulders slumpy.  
But when she found out I was Neil  
Mudd, sensitive writer, well,  
suddenly my fat nose was handsome,  
my crossed eyes mysterious, my  
slumpy shoulders elegant. This is  
why my writing had to be perfect.  
It was my ticket to Being Loved.

Neil has to walk past her again, praying she doesn't see him  
having gone the wrong way. She does. And smiles to herself.

NEIL (CONT'D)

But it was also a prison. How could  
you write anything if you thought  
your worth hung on each syllable.

END FLASHBACK.

TV: An over-produced NEWS BANNER for CIVIL WAR 2.0 - DAY 91.

MSNBC NEWS HOST

As we enter the fourth month of  
Civil War, another grim milestone.  
Half a million Americans have now  
died in battle and the number. Is.  
Growing. But first. A military  
caravan over five miles long is on  
the move in California and you  
won't believe where it's headed.  
We'll tell you exactly where it's  
going, and what you'll need to  
survive... right after this short  
message from our sponsors. So don't  
touch that dial!

An ad for TED LASSO plays.

Neil has his phone is to his ear. Voicemail.

NEIL

Exibia. It's Neil again. Just  
checking to see if you're okay.  
Haven't heard from you. Give me a  
call, okay? Okay. Adios.

Neil dumps the dregs of his coffee in his rhododendron.

INT. NEIL'S BUILDING - STAIRS - NEXT

KEEN UNION VOLUNTEER is waiting for Neil with a clipboard.

KEEN UNION VOLUNTEER

Hey there, comrade!

Neil pushes past with a grunt.

KEEN UNION VOLUNTEER (CONT'D)

That's ok! You still have til the  
end of the week! We'll be here!

EXT. NEIL'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NEXT

Neil walks out the front door of his apartment building,  
whistling the "watch out for Sean Penn" ditty when -

He stops cold in his tracks.

There, standing on the cracked sidewalk, looking right at  
Neil, stands... that HORSE. The same one from the opening.

*What is going on with this thing?* Neil shakes off the  
surprise and continues on up the street.

But no sooner does he forget about the horse, Neil hears a  
CLACKING behind him. He looks back and sees the horse  
following him. Ohhh..kay....?

Neil keeps walking. The hooves follow. Neil stops. The horse  
stops with him. (For now, his name will be "Horse.")

NEIL

(to Horse, annoyed)

What?

Neil walks. Horse walks. Sweet, whimsical MUSIC begins.

Neil picks up the pace. Horse picks up the pace. Neil checks  
over his shoulder. Horse maintains a 10-15 foot distance  
behind Neil. Neil stops abruptly. Horse stops abruptly.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Come on, man. I'm having a bad day.

Neil starts to walk backwards, facing Horse, with a hand up to stop Horse from following. For a few steps, it works. When Neil thinks he's gotten through to Horse, Neil turns around and walks facing forward. Of course, Horse follows.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
I don't have anything for you!

Neil turns onto Franklin. Horse turns onto Franklin.

EXT. FRANKLIN AVE - NEXT

Neil, looking to lose Horse, cuts through the parking lot. But Horse follows, not missing a beat.

Neil starts to jog. Horse starts to jog. Neil runs faster. Horse easily keeps pace. On-lookers stare in bemusement.

NEIL  
It's not funny!

It is funny.

EXT. VERMONT AVE - NEXT

But no sooner does Neil step outside does Horse step into view. And he appears to be... smiling?

NEIL  
Do I know you?

Neil walks on. Horse follows. Music picks back up. But Neil has had enough. He turns abruptly to Horse.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Look. I'm not an animal guy, okay?  
Frankly, I don't like horses.  
Harsh, but true. What kind of person doesn't like horses? You see? I'm a very dark individual. Not a lot of love to give to animal or man. I can't even take care of a plant. You understand? No love here. Just... toxic masculinity and a dollop of permanent sorrow. I listen to a lot of Radiohead, you catch my drift, brother?

Horse stares blankly.

NEIL (CONT'D)

You want someone who isn't so complicated and sensitive and more present in a relationship. Now... quit following me around and let me be a miserable, stubborn rock - unable to hurt or be hurt by anyone, man, woman, or beast.

Neil walks away. Of course, Horse follows. Music continues.

NEIL (CONT'D)

Why did I think that would work.

WOMAN

Is this your horse?

NEIL

Nope.

MAN

Can I pet your horse?

NEIL

You can have him!

Everyone wants to meet Horse. But Horse only wants Neil.

A man tries to pet Horse, but Horse bucks and recoils.

READER NOTE: Except for Neil, Horse is afraid of men.

FLIRTY WOMAN

Hey Horse Daddy.

NEIL

Oh, it's not my-  
(abrupt shift)

I mean. Hey. Yes. That's me. HORSE DADDY. And this... is my horse.

Horse beams. Could it really be true? Am I Neil's?

FLIRTY WOMAN

See you around, HD.

NEIL

See you around, HM.

Neil keeps walking. Horse, a new pep in his step, catches up.

EXT. SKYLIGHT BOOKSTORE / VERMONT AVE - NEXT

Neil goes for the door. But first he turns to Horse.

NEIL

Welp. That was fun. Hope you find  
what you're looking for. Goodbye.

*"What do you mean, 'Goodbye?'"* Horse seems to say (music will  
help do this). *What about all that "horse-daddy" talk?*

NEIL (CONT'D)

Oh. And sorry for the harsh  
language back there. There's the  
war outside and a war inside. You  
know? Never mind. Good luck, Horse.

Neil goes in. Horse hangs his head.

INT. LOS FELIZ LEDE HQ'S / BASEMENT - NEXT

A buzz in the office as deadline looms. Jacob sits with Neil.

NEIL

A horse has been following me  
around town.

JACOB

Tell me about it. We have a  
deadline is tomorrow and of course  
I don't have anything to print.

NEIL

Do you think Jews got horny during  
the holocaust?

JACOB

You know everyone has to enlist.

NEIL

We have press exemptions.

JACOB

I have a press exemption.

NEIL

Are you saying I don't?

JACOB

I'm asking for you to not put me in  
the position of lying for you.

NEIL  
I have writers block!

JACOB  
I know. I totally get it. But the Union may not be as sympathetic to writer's block. It's not like having scoliosis or wealthy parents. I just don't want Sean Penn coming after you.

STAFFERS break into a DITTY to the tune of a children's song.

STAFFERS  
For the Union  
Wear your blue.  
Wear your blue.  
If you don't  
Watch out watch out  
Sean Penn Sean Penn  
Is coming for you!

They all immediately return to work. Stacy approaches Neil.

NEIL  
Stacy, I swear to God if you say anything-

STACY  
-No! I'm just saying hello... To a little fucking pussy. That's you.

JACOB  
They're enforcing it, Neil.  
(then)  
In the 10 years I've known you, all you've ever said is that you always wanted to be a wartime writer. My man. This is it... this is that! Just try the *motion* of writing. See how it feels. No one even has to read it.

Neil sighs and turns to his desk. He flexes his fingers over the keyboard. He looks around. His co-workers are typing away freely. *Are their fingers not cold and stinging?*

He tries again. Types. Deletes. Types. Deletes. Repeat. GAH!!

NEIL  
Why should I write? Huh?!  
Give me one good reason!

JACOB

Because... it's what you do? You're good at it? Because I'm asking?

NEIL

Why.

JACOB

Why?

NEIL

WHY!

JACOB

I don't know - what do you want me to say? You were born to do it.

NEIL

Forget it.

(then)

I want you to say that I should write because I am great.

JACOB

-You are-

NEIL

-Truly great. That in this town where there are a million writers, a million guys who look just like me and do what I do, that I rise above them all. And not just the way I put words together, but because there's something special about me. That my writing doesn't need to be perfect and it would still move people. They'd still be grateful for me in the world.

JACOB

That's all true. You are great.

NEIL

It's too late.

JACOB

Why's it too late??

NEIL

I told you what to say.

Neil storms off.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
(to Stacy)  
Don't look at me!

JACOB  
(gives chase)  
Doesn't mean it's not true! Neil,  
wait!  
(to Stacy)  
Don't be looking at him.

EXT. SKYLIGHT BOOKSTORE - NEXT

Jacob catches up to Neil.

JACOB  
Hey that's a horse.

NEIL  
I told you.

Horse watches on, his head comically swiveling between Jacob and Neil on each line.

JACOB  
I thought you were being  
metaphorical. They'll make you  
enlist, Neil.

NEIL  
I don't care.

JACOB  
I'm serious. I can't cover for you  
any longer! They'll come for me.

NEIL  
Don't cover for me.

JACOB  
What about the horse?

Horse looks to Neil for his answer. Yeah, what about me?

NEIL  
Don't drag him into this.

Horse looks back to Jacob, etc.

JACOB  
Your Guernica?

NEIL  
Do you even know what Guernica is?

JACOB  
(no)  
Of course!

Neil pats Horse.

NEIL  
This is my Guernica.

JACOB  
Guernica. Good name.

NEIL  
(to Horse)  
How bout you, what do you think?  
That your name? Guernica?

Horse smiles. Guernica smiles.

JACOB  
You really want to be in the  
trenches with these vapid Los Feliz  
fucks?

NEIL  
I am one of these vapid Los Feliz  
fucks, Jacob. I am one of them.

Neil walks off. Guernica follows.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Okay, Guernica. You wanna follow  
me? Fine. Just don't try to start a  
conversation with me or ask me to  
take you to LAX or anything.

JACOB  
(calls after them)  
Or write 500 words!

EXT. BRU COFFEE BAR - DAY

Neil stops into Bru.

NEIL (V.O.)  
In the movies, war was non-stop. I  
thought that you were always about  
to step into the line of fire. That  
snipers were on every rooftop. That  
dead bodies were everywhere.

Neil comes out with his coffee. Guernica is waiting for him.

EXT. YUCCA'S TACOS - DAY

Neil casually eating street tacos as UNION SOLDIERS RUN BY.

NEIL (V.O.)

But war - at least this war - was nothing like that. It was sunny and warm. Birds chirped. You bought groceries. Drank coffee. Life was pretty normal, for the most part.

Guernica eating street tacos.

EXT. GRIFFITH PARK - DAY

Neil taking a leak in the park.

NEIL (V.O.)

For a while, I only heard guns and bombs in the distance. I didn't step over one dead body.

Guernica taking a leak next to him. He long outlasts Neil.

NEIL

I get it, you win.

EXT. OBSERVATORY - SUNSET

Neil atop Griffith Park. He's eating one of Exibia's oranges. We pull back to see Guernica behind him, also eating Exibia's oranges - but whole, skin and all.

NEIL (V.O.)

But like a pain you can only distract yourself from for so long, this war was coming for me. Los Feliz was going to turn to rubble. My home would soon be ruins. And I'd be buried with it, one more number on the nightly news.

MILITARY HELICOPTERS swirl above.

NEIL (V.O.)

If I make it out of this war alive, what will my story be? Would anyone be left to listen? Would Emma hear about it? Would she care?

Guernica moves closer to Neil and stands by his side.

Sounds of WAR down below...

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE NEIL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Neil puts his keys in his front door. But the door is unlocked already. Weird, but ok. He goes inside and sees-

INT. NEIL'S APARTMENT - NEXT

On his couch is a UNION COLONEL, peeling an orange.

UNION COLONEL  
Take a seat, Neil.

Neil turns for his door to escape, but another UNION OFFICER blocks the door. A FEMALE GENERAL, back turned to us, examines the rhododendron. She turns around. It's JANE FONDA.

JANE FONDA  
You're not in trouble, sweetie.

Then Neil sees: SEAN PENN is also there, in his fatigues. Sean Penn offers Neil a cigarette. Neil takes it.

SEAN PENN  
We understand you have a horse.

NEIL  
Guernica.

UNION COLONEL  
You haven't enlisted have you, son?

NEIL  
I'm press exempt, sir.

UNION COLONEL  
We looked into your credentials.  
You haven't published in months.  
Now were you planning on doing  
anything for the Union or were you  
going to continue doing fuck all?

NEIL  
I'm suffering from writer's block.

UNION COLONEL  
During a war?

JANE FONDA

(good cop)

We need your help, Neil. Do you  
really want a revolution or do you  
want to just play a revolutionary?

UNION COLONEL

Everything we are about to tell you  
is highly classified and if it were  
ever to come out, we would deny  
this conversation ever took place.

NEIL

Yeah yeah I've seen movies...

UNION COLONEL

Officially, the Founders have no  
interest in Los Feliz. But the  
recent attacks aren't random.

NEIL

Are you sure you've got the right  
person? I'm just some-

UNION COLONEL

- Pay attention! Atwater has fallen  
and Glendale will soon follow.

INSERT MAP OF EAST LOS ANGELES.

UNION COLONEL (CONT'D)

If they take Los Feliz, they get  
the 5, the 134, the 101. Once they  
have the major highways, they have  
LA. They have the West.

NEIL

I think you've got the wrong guy-

UNION COLONEL

-The Founders have check points all  
along Los Feliz Blvd. Real hairy.  
Vehicles can't get through.

NEIL

(understanding now)

But I have a horse.

SEAN PENN

Guernica. Guernica.

UNION COLONEL

Your mission is to proceed off-road  
through the heart of enemy  
territory and deliver a folder to  
our special agent in Glendale.

JANE FONDA

By any means necessary.

NEIL (V.O.)

It was just what I'd fantasized  
about: My manuscript tucked into my  
boots, fighting and writing from  
the trenches. It was a suicide  
mission. It was perfect. Almost.

SEAN PENN

You'll be a goddamn American hero.

UNOIN COLONEL

But if you fail - No more taco  
trucks. Kiss your vagina marijuana  
pipes goodbye. No more matinee of  
Portrait of a Lady on Fire in 35.  
You're a white guy, so you might be  
able to live normally, but everyone  
else, well... I don't have to say.

NEIL

I want to be helpful. And I should  
mention that I'm a fan of all of  
you. I'm a big Klute guy, Jane. But  
the truth is, even if I wanted to  
take this mission, I simply cannot  
ride Guernica. Can't mount him,  
can't dismount him. I'm not even  
sure how we feel about each other,  
personality-wise. I don't know how  
to shoot a gun and I don't want to.  
And frankly, I don't really shop at  
the vagina pipe store. If this is  
so important, you should find  
someone with a more war-like  
constitution.

Jane Fonda, meanwhile, has found a photo of Neil and Emma.

JANE FONDA

There's another reason we're coming  
to you. Comrade Emma asked  
specifically for you.

Neil sits up. But stops himself from getting too excited.

NEIL

I doubt that- she won't talk to me.

JANE FONDA

She obviously trusts you. There must be something there still.

NEIL

She said she didn't want to speak to me.

JANE FONDA

Honey, if I've learned anything, it's that nothing is ever over. Even if you don't want to do this to win the war, do it for love. For the chance at love. It's as noble and radical as anything you can ever do in this life.

SEAN PENN

Who knows. Maybe you'll win both.

JANE FONDA

Neil, there's nothing here for you.

NEIL

My rhododendron. Who will water it?

JANE FONDA

Honey... The rhododendron is dead.

INT. LOS FELIZ LEDE HQ'S - NEXT DAY

Hundreds of copies of the latest edition of LOS FELIZ LEDE chugging through the printing press. Neil waits with Jacob.

JACOB

One of my writers is gonna be the next Paul Fucking Revere! The British Are Coming! The British are Coming! I mean... we're still talking about that guy after 500 years.

NEIL

I don't know how to ride a horse. What if I fall.

JACOB

-Then you get back on. Besides, you're already on the ground, man. Look at you. What's one more fall?

NEIL

They said Emma asked for me.

JACOB

Whoa. Really?

NEIL

I'm not sure what it means. I mean  
she still hasn't texted so-

JACOB

She's not just gonna limp back into  
a relationship with you after you  
hurt her, but she's giving you a  
chance to win her back.

NEIL

What if it's just because she knows  
I'll do it because I love her but  
doesn't want anything more?

JACOB

(you kidding me?!)

You ride Guernica into the fucking  
battlefield - into the shit, man,  
through bombs bursting in the thin  
air - the thin fucking Glendale air  
- the rocket's red glare, giving  
proof - all sorts of proof - that  
our flag is still there?!

(ramping up)

You gallantly ride through  
twilight's last gleaming and  
complete this mission - this  
perilous fight?! By, I dunno, let's  
say... dawn's early light? Fucking  
ramparts!? You bet your broad  
stripes and bright stars she'll  
want you back.

EXT. NEIL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Darkness. The sound of HEAVY ARTILLERY.

JANE FONDA (V.O.)

To accept the mission, place a blue  
flag outside your window.

SEAN PENN (V.O.)

It's a secret message to us.

JANE FONDA (V.O.)

He knows that, Sean. It's obvious.

The light from the blasts illuminate a BLUE FLAG placed in the dead rhododendron's pot for Fonda to see.

INT. NEIL'S APARTMENT - MORNING

The window shades are up. The empty bottles and cigarette butts are gone. No rhododendron. Even the bed is made.

NEIL (V.O.)

I called Exibia to see if she could clean my apartment while I was gone. If I was going to die, I couldn't have people seeing it like this. My mom would kill me all over again. But I didn't hear back.

A FOLDER labeled "CLASSIFIED" slides underneath the door.

EXT. NEIL'S BUILDING - NEXT

Neil tucks the FOLDER into Guernica's saddle pouch. Guernica lowers himself. Neil awkwardly climbs on. They head off.

JANE FONDA (V.O.)

You'll have 24 hours to complete the mission. If you do not deliver the message within that time frame, we will be unable to protect you.

NEIL

(to Guernica)

Did you hear what Fonda was saying just now or do I need to repeat it? I'll repeat it, just to be sure. "You'll have 24 hours to complete the mission..."

EXT. VERMONT AVE - NEXT

Neil rides Guernica as neighbors watch from windows.

SEAN PENN (V.O.)

If you feel doubt in the pit of your stomach, that is a good thing. It's only out of fear that heroes are made.

NEIL

The star of I Am Sam says that if you feel doubt in the pit of your stomach, that is a good thing...

JANE FONDA (V.O.)

You are to tell nobody, not even your closest friends or family about the mission. This point is absolutely critical.

EXT. BRU COFFEE BAR / VERMONT AVE - NEXT

NEIL

Off on my top secret mission!

Barista Bree is waiting for Neil with one to-go coffee.

BARISTA BREE

I didn't know if Guernica drank coffee, so...

NEIL

I think coffee is just one of those things we keep secret from our horse friends.

BARISTA BREE

This is the Rwanda. I was thinking - they had a Civil War, too, and this coffee was harvested from the same soil where so much blood was spilled. I don't know if it's the good guy blood or the bad guy blood, but they made it through that Civil War and this delicious coffee was able to make it all the way to Los Feliz - from my hand to yours. Anyways, here's that gun.

Barista Bree hands Neil a massive handgun.

BREE

Now go be Hemingway or one of the other impressive big dick writers.

NEIL

Who knows, maybe after the war ends, the Rwandans will drink Los Feliz coffee.

BARISTA BREE

Well the reason that coffee is able to grow in Rwanda is because of the elevation. Our elevation, being a coastal city, is too low.

NEIL

Well - it was just a nice thought.  
You take care now.

Neil salutes Barista Bree goodbye. Barista Bree doesn't recognize such cues and continues on.

BARISTA BREE

It's actually grown in soil that contains volcanic ash. We don't have that here. Nearest volcano is-

NEIL

Yeah, no, I see now. Welp. Be safe.  
If I don't see you again, I always appreciated our talks.

BARISTA BREE

Me too, Neil. You always kept it in the community. That's what these Founder fascists don't understand-

Neil gives a little kick to Guernica to move.

BARISTA BREE (CONT'D)

They want to make everything and everyone the same so they stay in line- Well fuck that! Community!  
(they're gone; to herself)  
Community...

EXT. SKYLIGHT BOOKSTORE - NEXT

Jacob is waiting with a smile and some snacks.

JACOB

There he is. There's my Paul Revere. You got everything you need? Water? Food? I got you some Pringles. Sour cream and onion?

NEIL

I'm okay.

JACOB

No, take them. You have no idea how often I've gotten out of a hairy situation with some Preengs.

Jacob puts PRINGLES in Guernica's saddle.

JACOB (CONT'D)

How about a gun? You protected?

NEIL

My barista's letting me borrow  
hers.

JACOB

Good.

(then)

You okay? Nervous?

NEIL

Look. I don't goodbye well.

JACOB

It's not a goodbye. Oh! I almost  
forgot. Wait here.

Jacob goes inside. Neil waits, taking in his neighborhood.

Jacob comes out and hands Neil an old, blue, weathered Hebrew  
Prayerbook with LIKRAT SHABBAT embossed in gold on the front.

JACOB (CONT'D)

This was my Grandfather's. It was  
the only thing he brought with him  
to America when he escaped the  
Holocaust. It will keep you safe.

NEIL

Thanks, man. But... you know I'm  
not Jewish.

JACOB

But maybe Guernica is.

They each smile that smile you give to a dear friend when you  
know you might never see them again. Neil slides Likrat  
Shabbat into the side pocket of Guernica's saddle.

JACOB (CONT'D)

Love you, man. Proud of you.

NEIL

Love you, too, Jacob.

JACOB

Get back soon.

NEIL

By dawn's early light...

Neil gives Guernica a pat and they head off down up the road.  
Jacob recites a prayer in Hebrew for them.

EXT. FRANKLIN AVE - NEXT

Guernica and Neil ride off into the sunset.

EXT. SHAKESPEARE BRIDGE - NEXT

They pass over the heartbreakingly small Shakespeare Bridge.

EXT. MISC - LATER

Shots of Neil and Guernica passing out of Los Feliz.

NEIL (V.O.)

I had a best friend growing up:  
Wiggy. We did everything together.  
First drink. First smoke. I had  
secrets that nobody else knew but  
him. And I was the only one who  
knew his.

INTERCUT FLASHBACKS: PHOTOS of TEENAGE NEIL & TEENAGE WIGGY.

NEIL

Wiggy was one of the first to join  
the Founders Army. How did we end  
up so far apart? Is it because I  
watched the Blue show and he  
watched the Red show?

FOX PROPAGANDA. MSNBC PROPAGANDA.

NEIL (CONT'D)

I have no doubt that if Wiggy  
caught me out on the street today,  
he'd blow my brains out. I know  
because he told me as much in a DM.

DM: If I catch you on the street, I'll blow your brains out.

NEIL (V.O.)

And if you'd asked me a month ago,  
I would've done the same to him.

A battalion of FOUNDERS lying DEAD, MASSACRED on the street.

NEIL (V.O.)

But someone beat me to it.

The sun passes overhead.

EXT. SIDE STREET - LATER

The neighborhood looks like it was recently ransacked. Broken windows, Founder propaganda, fires. Emma signs defaced.

Guernica stops abruptly and backs up.

NEIL  
What is it?

Neil pulls on the reins to stop him.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Where are you going? Other way!

That's when he hears - BOOTS CLACKING. Not just any boots-  
A FOUNDER SOLDIERS' BOOTS, dozens, getting closer.

Guernica whinnies in fear.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
SShhh!! Quiet!

GUERNICA BUCKS.

LIK RAT SHABBAT, Jacob's prayerbook, goes FLYING OUT of the saddle. Guernica sprints off, Neil holding on for dear life.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Stop! Stop! STOP!!!

Neil pulls back on his reins. Guernica doesn't stop. Neil looks down at the ground flying by underneath him.

Neil closes his eyes and lets go of the reins and falls to the ground, tumbling several yards. His hands and knees scraped up. He looks back to Guernica, who has stopped.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Oh. Now you stop.

Neil picks himself off the ground and heads towards Likrat.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
C'mon. We have to get Likrat!

But Guernica won't get closer. Neil goes without him. Guernica then runs over and stands in Neil's way.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Move, Guernica.

Neil tries to get around him, but Guernica blocks him.

NEIL (CONT'D)

The guy's grandfather escaped the fucking Holocaust with it. I can't be the guy to lose that. Come on!

The Founders are getting close. Guernica ducks behind a tree.

NEIL (CONT'D)

Fine. Stay there. Don't move.

Neil gets low and makes a run for Likrat. He's on a collision course with the battalion. Fuck. Too late. He's not going to make it. Neil retreats and joins Guernica behind the tree.

Neil peers around the corner. We get a good look at the Founders: Men, women, children, fat, strong, skinny, dumb, fierce. All of them white, of course.

FOUNDERS ON BULL-HORN

This is now Founder territory. All Unioners will be shot on sight.

Guernica is freaking out. Neil, his own heart pounding, puts his body against Guernica's, showing Guernica how to breathe.

NEIL

Like this.

After a few big, shared inhales, Guernica finds his breath.

UNION CIVILIAN (O.S.)

Fuck you, Founders!

A FATAL GUNSHOT rings out. And that's the end of any yelling.

Neil looks over - Guernica has peed himself and is shaking.

NEIL

It's okay. I got ya.

Neil holds Guernica in an embrace.

The Founders are marching right over Likrat. It gets kicked and stepped on, but none of them pay it any mind. Except-

A CHILD SOLDIER, 11 tops, picks up the book. He catches eyes with Neil. The boy looks like Neil might've looked as a boy. They both seem to sense this. *How did it all come to this?*

CHILD SOLDIER'S DAD

Son, let's go!

Child Soldier opens his mouth to speak - he could bust Neil right now. But he drops the book and runs back to his unit.

CHILD SOLDIER'S DAD (CONT'D)  
Keep up. You're embarrassing me!

When the Founders are far enough away -

NEIL  
Stay here. I'll be right back.

Guernica doesn't want Neil to leave.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
I promise.

Neil makes a run for it. He scoops Likrat from the ground and races back to Guernica - running for dear life.

He passes the slumped corpse of Union Civilian ("fuck you Founders"). The first dead body Neil's seen. It's horrific.

Neil makes it to Guernica, looks over his shoulder. The Founders are far away. It's safe. For now. He puts Likrat back in the saddle pouch, latches it tight.

He tries to hop back onto Guernica, but can't.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Damnit.

He tries again. Fails. This is embarrassing. He's rattled.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
What the hell am I doing. I'm not cut out for this shit. And for what? The off-chance that Emma thinks I'm a hero? Ha! I'm a glorified mailman. What happens when we get near actual battle? She's not gonna take me back. Who am I kidding. Let's go home. Have some coffee.

Neil trudges back towards home. Guernica catches up to him and stops by his side.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
What?

Guernica bends low. He wants Neil to get on. Neil relents, and mounts Guernica awkwardly as always. As soon as Neil is on, Guernica heads towards Glendale.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Hey! I said we're going home!

Neil tries to turn him, but Guernica won't turn around.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Guernica! GUERNICA!

He yanks the reins. Guernica stops and harrumphs in anger.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
You wanna keep going? Is that what  
you want? To finish the mission?  
You want to be a hero? Maybe prove  
to some horse Emma that you want  
her back? What is it?!

Guernica takes a step forward. Neil sighs.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
My ass is gonna be so chapped  
tomorrow. Fine. Let's go.

Guernica gallops onwards, with a little pep in his step,  
Neil's ass bouncing on the saddle.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
OW. OW. OW. Ow. Ow.

NEIL (V.O.)  
When war first broke out, I thought  
it wouldn't touch me. I thought I  
could hide from it. Let it pass. I  
was sure I'd never have to see any  
blood. Certainly not my own. But in  
war, no one escapes.

FURTHER UP THE ROAD - LATER

Neil consults his map. He looks down a hill. It's steep.  
Fuck. Neil turns Guernica towards the hill.

NEIL  
Nice and slow.

Guernica goes down the hill, but it's too fast for Neil.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Whoa, Nelly! Whoa, Guernica!

Neil pulls tight on Guernica's reins but it's no use.

CLEARING - NEXT

Neil hangs on for dear life.

NEIL  
Okay okay stop! Stop!

He yanks the reins hard. Guernica slows to a stop. Neil hops off and lays down on the ground. Catches his breath.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Couldn't have just written 500  
words.

Neil looks to Guernica. Gets an idea. He gets up, studies Guernica, who is weary of whatever Neil is thinking.

Neil gets right up to Guernica's side. Guernica backs away.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Stay.

Guernica stays. Neil lifts a knee, starts bouncing on one foot while lifting his other leg to mount Guernica.

Guernica lowers himself to make it easier.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
No. Back up.

Neil pushes Guernica to get him to stand upright.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
If we're doing this, I have to  
learn how to do it the right way or  
we'll never make it.

Neil lifts his leg slowly up towards Guernica's back - as high as it can go. It looks very awkward.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Alright. I'm gonna jump. You ready?

Neil looks around to see if anyone is watching first. They're alone. He jumps, but falls far short.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Okay. Gotta really -

He jumps again, but is really no closer. Fuck. Neil takes several steps back to get a running start. He runs at Guernica, but Guernica backs away quickly.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Guernica, man. Work with me here.  
Okay, wait.

Neil pulls out his phone and searches YOUTUBE: "how to ride a horse."

A TINY YOU-TUBE JOCKEY demonstrates how to ride a horse.

TINY SOUTHERN YOU-TUBER  
The first thing you need to do is  
mount a horse...

NEIL  
Ah. Okay. You're supposed to -

He shows Guernica the youtube video.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
See how it stays still and sorta  
rocks to the side? You got it? This  
is the last time, okay? I think  
I've pulled several muscles.

Neil does a little climb-jump and pulls himself ungracefully onto Guernica, belly first, swinging his legs over. He's half-on, half-off when Guernica pops his rear, throwing Neil in the air. Neil's lands his butt on the saddle. There.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Now that I've perfected that...  
The dismount.

Neil consults youtube again, watching the jockey dismount. Neil tries. He leans off the side, unwilling to make the jump. So Guernica swings and knocks him off.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Hey! What the fuck, man?

Neil sits on the grass, grimacing in pain. He and Guernica take each other in. This isn't fun. For either of them.

Guernica starts running wildly in circles and rolling on the ground (acting like a puppy).

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Oh, are you having fun now?

Guernica smiles. He is. And then runs around playfully again. *He's showing Neil how to have fun.*

Guernica goes over to Neil and nudges him to do the same.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Oh, is it my turn? Is that what you  
want?

Neil gets up on his feet. He looks at Guernica, who looks excited that Neil wants to play.

Neil does a half-assed run and twirl. Not good enough.

READER NOTE: Music underscores this sweet, silly dance-duel.

Guernica plays again, with gusto. He's not afraid of looking silly.

Neil mocks him with a "this is stupid" face.

Guernica doubles down.

Neil goes further.

Back and forth, until Neil is running in circles and leaping alongside Guernica.

Guernica rolls on the grass.

Neil rolls in the grass.

It's silly and weird and just about the most lovely thing you could imagine. Neil is no longer mocking it. He's letting himself be silly, imperfect.

Neil lays on his back, laughing and covered in dirt. His first fun in who remembers when. Same with Guernica.

INT. NEIL'S APARTMENT - MORNING - (**FLASHBACK**)

The rhododendron plant is alive and happy.

Neil is sitting up in bed, editing his latest article. Emma, in only a big t-shirt, carries in a cup of water. They've been together for several months now.

EMMA

Are you making sure to water your plant?

NEIL

Yes.

EMMA

I got it for you because it's easy to take care of ha. Just needs a little-

As Emma adds water to the plant, some of it spills on Neil.

NEIL  
Hey!

EMMA  
Oops!

She spills some more intentionally, playfully, on Neil.

NEIL  
HEY!

EMMA  
OOPS OOPS OOPS!

NEIL  
You're in trouble.

EMMA  
It was an accident!

We follow Neil into his kitchen. He grabs his own cup. Emma tries to wrestle it from him, knowing what he's going to do. He fends her off, and manages to fill the cup with water.

EMMA (CONT'D)  
Neil don't!

NEIL  
I'm not going to do anything. I  
just am thirsty.

She runs and hides. He chases. He gets her wrists pinned to the bed with one hand and teases the cup of water over her.

EMMA  
NEIL! NO!

NEIL  
I'm just watering the plant!

He tips the cup more.

EMMA  
NEIL!!!!

Emma hits the cup back at him, spilling water all over both of them. She gets up and runs, shrieking with laughter.

They chase each other around, taking turns throwing water at each other until they're both drenched and out of breath. She ends up on top of him in bed, wet and exhilarated.

EMMA (CONT'D)  
Do you love me?

*THUNDER.*

END FLASHBACK.

EXT. CLEARING - DAY (**PRESENT DAY**)

The clouds are dark and heavy.

NEIL

When was the last time it rained?

Is he talking about the weather? Or himself.

NEIL (CONT'D)

Eventually those clouds are gonna split in two and it's gonna rain til it pours. It might never stop.

Neil looks over to Guernica. Guernica is fast asleep.

Neil gets up and starts walking off.

On he explores, lost in thought. Until-

A STRANGE NOISE. Neil cautiously walks towards the sound.

Behind a tree is a FOUNDER SOLDIER.

Neil carefully draws his GUN and listens.

The FOUNDER seems to be crying quietly.

Neil gets closer and sees that the crying Founder is a BOY.

All of a sudden - the Boy slaps himself in the face and launches into several fast PUSH-UPS.

Then Neil sees that the boy isn't a boy, but a middle-aged LITTLE PERSON. This is Creep (his self-appointed name).

CREEP

10, 11, 12 - Come on you, pussy!  
13, 14, 15-

Creep collapses on the ground. Neil approaches carefully.

NEIL

Are you okay?

Creep hops to his feet and draws his gun.

CREEP

Hey. Get back! Get fuckin back!  
Put your fucking gun down!

NEIL

You put yours down!

It's a duel.

CREEP

Get down! Get on the ground!

NEIL

You get down!

CREEP

I'm about to shoot!

NEIL

Me too!

Both are too afraid to shoot.

NEIL (CONT'D)

Are you really a Founder?!

CREEP

Goddamn right I'm a Founder!

NEIL

Really? Don't you think someone  
like you should be a Unioner?

CREEP

Why?! Because I'm a little person?

NEIL

I mean... yeah?

CREEP

I'm a proud Founder. You Union?

NEIL

Goddamn right I'm Union! Proud!  
Can we put our guns down now?

CREEP

Are you alone?

NEIL

Yes. Well, there's Guernica. But  
he's not trained with weapons.

CREEP  
You got food?

NEIL  
...I've got some Pringles, I think?

Beat.

CREEP  
What flavor?

CUT TO:

Guernica tilts his head curiously as he watches Creep on the ground next to Neil eating the Sour Cream and Onion Pringles.

Neil gets his hand stuck in the Pringles container, reaching for the bottom bits. Creep sees that Neil is just some dude caught in this mess like him- harmless, a weakling really.

CREEP (CONT'D)  
Where ya headed?

NEIL  
Glendale.

CREEP  
Shit. You don't wanna go there.  
It's about to get real hairy.  
(shakes his head)  
God I want to play that battle!

NEIL  
I don't get why you're Founder.

CREEP  
Why. You think Unioners care about  
Little People?

NEIL  
Well - yeah, we're accepting of  
everyone. That's kind of the deal.

CREEP  
Buncha phonies. David Copperfield  
types, you Unioners.

NEIL  
What are you talking about?

CREEP  
Founders'll tell me to my face what  
they think about me: Midget piece  
of shit, freak, abortion.  
(MORE)

CREEP (CONT'D)  
 I love it. It's honest. Unioners on  
 the other hand, they love to speak  
 for everyone. They wanna coddle me.  
 But I'm no victim. I chose my name.  
 I chose my flag. I am my own  
 master!

NEIL  
 I saw you crying back there.

CREEP  
 Crying?! What?! I wasn't crying!

NEIL  
 Okay, man. Whatever you say.

Neil, Creep, and Guernica continue in silence. Finally-

CREEP  
 I lost my bow.

NEIL  
 Your bow?

CREEP  
 I play violin in the 114th Nevada  
 Founder Infantry Marching Band. And  
 now I can't play without my bow.  
 God I'm such an idiot.

Creep hops down and counts off another 10 push-ups.

NEIL  
 You're in a Founder marching band?

CREEP  
*Nearer My God To Thee. Nelly Bly.*  
*Morning Reverie*, of course. *Little*  
*Round Top*. I have one specialty -  
 when the boys are tired and scared,  
 my song gets them geeked up to  
 fight. Nobody plays it but me.

NEIL  
 What's the song?

CREEP  
 Ma used to sing it to me when I was  
 young. It was the only thing that  
 got me out of bed when I was  
 depressed from being bullied. She'd  
 sing it and by the end of it, I'd  
 be practically sprinting to school,  
 ready to take on anyone.

NEIL  
Let's hear it.

CREEP  
Well, now nobody can hear it until  
I find my goddamn rosin bow. Made  
of real horse hair, you know.

NEIL  
Can you sing it for me?

CREEP  
No way.

NEIL  
Why not?

CREEP  
No, my voice is terrible.

NEIL  
I don't need it to be perfect, I  
just want to hear it. Come on.

He hums a few notes and stops.

CREEP  
Nope. Not gonna do it.

NEIL  
Oh, come on. It was good!

CREEP  
Do you sing?

NEIL  
No. I write.

CREEP  
Okay. Write me something.

NEIL  
What?

CREEP  
If you want me to sing something,  
you have to write me something.

NEIL  
I can't just write you something.

CREEP  
Why not?

NEIL  
It's not that easy.

CREEP  
A fellow prisoner of perfectionism.  
One day I'm gonna be set free.

Creep eyes Guernica's tail closely.

Voices from Creep's WALKIE TALKIE break the silence.

CREEP (CONT'D)  
It's a sweep. Looks like we're not  
going anywhere tonight unless  
you're in the getting shot mood.

LATER THAT NIGHT:

A very small fire.

CREEP (CONT'D)  
You're not really on a top secret  
mission for the Union, are you.

NEIL  
Well. I am, but... mostly I'm just  
trying to win back my ex.

CREEP  
There we go! Now we're talking. Go  
on. When did you break up?

NEIL  
The day the war started. I broke up  
with her. But then I realized how  
stupid that was and tried to get  
back with her. But it was too late.

CREEP  
Have you told her how you feel?

NEIL  
Well. I said I wanted to see her  
but she didn't want that. But then  
this mission - she asked for me.

CREEP  
Ahh... Gotta save the princess  
being held at the dragon's castle.  
That old game. So what are you  
going to say when you see her?

NEIL  
I'm gonna say I want her back.

CREEP

That's it?

NEIL

Well, probably more.

CREEP

Go ahead. Let's hear it.

NEIL

You want me to say it to you?

CREEP

Yes. Tell me. I'm- what's her name?

NEIL

Emma.

CREEP

Like the famous Resistance Emma-

NEIL

Yes. Like that exact Emma.

CREEP

Holy shit, man. She's hot.

NEIL

Easy, Creep.

CREEP

Okay. I'm Emma. "Hi, Neil."

NEIL

(this is weird, but ok)  
Hey Emma. So I've been thinking a  
lot about us -

Creep snores.

NEIL (CONT'D)

What? I'm just starting.

CREEP

This is the love of your life,  
right?

NEIL

Right.

CREEP

You've been missing her for months.  
Pining for her. Jacking off to her.  
Crying.

(MORE)

CREEP (CONT'D)  
 Imagining all the things you'll do  
 differently now if you get a second  
 chance.

Yeah.

CREEP (CONT'D)  
 You gotta lay it all on the line -  
 you have to show her - spell it out  
 - it's now or never.  
 (then)  
 Who am I going to tell? I'll be  
 minced meat if I don't find my bow.

NEIL  
 What do you mean?

CREEP  
 A violinist without his bow is like  
 a soldier without his gun. Without  
 my bow, I'm dead weight. They'll  
 kill me. So yeah - you might be the  
 last person I ever talk to.

NEIL  
 Okay. Okay. Emma... Emma who loves  
 martinis - no vermouth - "the way  
 they're supposed to be made." Emma  
 who reads books. Emma who makes me  
 make her coffee and then only  
 drinks a sip. Emma who gets dark  
 and sad, sometimes for days. Emma  
 who likes to cuddle and wriggle and  
 squirm her way into the nook of my  
 neck until it's just right. I would  
 do anything for a second chance at  
 loving you. I was too selfish  
 before. I was a fucking dodo but I  
 have so much love to give now, and  
 I want to give it all to you and  
 nobody but you.

Neil takes a deep breath. Turns to Creep for his reaction.

CREEP  
 Mmm... Kinda gay.

NEIL  
 "Kinda gay?" What are, you a teen  
 bully from the 80s? You've been  
 around Founders too much.

Off-screen NOISES.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
What was that?

Neil and Creep duck behind a tree and look back: A FOUNDER SOLDIER with a TIGHT MOHAWK passes in the distance.

CREEP  
You know what that is, right?

NEIL  
Your Mom who taught you the song?

CREEP  
When they're about to go on a mission where it's assumed they'll die, they shave their heads like that in a mohawk. Vietnam thing.

Up above, the storm cloud grows even darker.

LATER -

They settle into sleeping bags for the night.

NEIL  
You good?

CREEP  
I'm swell.

NEIL  
You ever been in love, Creep?

CREEP  
I was once.

NEIL  
What happened?

CREEP  
I Neil'd it all up. Thought I could do better.

NEIL  
Did you have a good speech?

CREEP  
If I did, I wouldn't be laying here in the dirt with you.

NEIL  
You think the war will end soon?

CREEP  
 Has any war ever really ended? Wake  
 up, sheeple.  
 (then)  
 She'll take you back. She wouldn't  
 have asked for you if she didn't  
 still have feelings.

Neil nods. *Creep's right... Isn't he?*

NEIL  
 We'll find your bow. You'll be  
 inspiring the slaughter of my  
 people at the hands of your own  
 oppressors in no time.

CREEP  
 Don't try anything tonight.

NEIL  
 Night, Creep.

The last embers of the fire fade out. And so do we.

FADE IN:

Neil is sleeping. Creep quietly gets out of his sleeping bag.  
 He takes out a KNIFE.

Creeps over to Guernica.

Raises the knife to Guernica's rear -

Guernica makes a noise -

Creep slips back into his sleeping bag. Neil looks over.

Creep pretends to be asleep.

Neil rolls over and goes back to sleep, fading out again.

FADE IN:

A CRACKLE on Creep's radio wakes Creep up.

A FOUNDER COMMANDER gives orders in code.

CREEP  
 Neil. Wake up! Wake up!

Neil groans.

CREEP (CONT'D)  
 Neil! We gotta go now! The 114th is  
 coming.

NEIL  
 Okay. Okay.

Neil and Creep quickly gather their things.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
 (to Guernica)  
 We gotta go bud.

But Guernica doesn't follow.

CREEP  
 Let's go!

Neil pulls on Guernica's reins. Guernica pulls away.

CREEP (CONT'D)  
 Man. They will kill you.

NEIL  
 He's not budging.  
 (to Guernica)  
 Guernica. Come. Now.

CREEP  
 We gotta go man. Now!

NEIL  
 You go.

CREEP  
 They will kill you.

NEIL  
 I'm not leaving Guernica.

CREEP  
 Man, I'm not joking. These half-  
 breeds are vicious - they'll kill  
 you - they'll kill Guernica!

Creep starts humming a tune to Guernica. It's slow at first.  
 And quiet. The song builds. Creep starts singing the words-

CREEP (CONT'D)  
*I wish I knew how... it would feel  
 to be free...*

Creep adds some quiet snaps.

CREEP (CONT'D)  
*I wish I could break... all the  
 chains holding me...*

It's NINA SIMONE "I WISH I KNEW HOW IT WOULD FEEL TO BE FREE"

CREEP (CONT'D)  
*I wish I could say all the things  
 that I should say. Say 'em loud.  
 Say 'em clear. For the whole damn  
 world to hear...*

Guernica perks up. Creep is really going for it now.

CREEP (CONT'D)  
*I wish I could share all the love  
 that's in my heart. Remove all the  
 bars that keep us apart.*

Guernica jumps gleefully in the air, no longer afraid.

CREEP (CONT'D)  
*I wish you could know what it means  
 to be me. Then you'd see and agree  
 that every man should be free...*

Guernica bends low for Creep to get on. Neil helps Creep on. Then Neil gets on behind him. They ride off together.

CREEP (CONT'D)  
*I wish I could give all I'm longing  
 to give... I wish I could live like  
 I'm longing to live...*

CREEP'S SINGING (LOUD NOW) SCORES A MONTAGE OF THEIR JOURNEY:

*I wish I could do all the things that I can do... Though I'm  
 way overdue, I'd be starting anew...*

They ride through a narrow dirt path.

*I wish I could be like a bird in the sky. How sweet it would  
 be if I found I could fly...*

They're free of danger. Exhilarated by their escape.

*Oh I'd soar to the sun! And look down at the sea.*

The morning sunlight cuts through the trees. Neil walks beside Guernica. Creep stands on Guernica's back.

*Then I'd say, cuz I'd know. Then I'd say - hey - cuz I'd know  
 - I'd know how it feels - I know how it feels - yeah yeah -*

Guernica is running in circles, Creep holding on to the reins with one hand like in a rodeo. Neil chases, laughing.

*Yes I know how it feeeeels - how it feeeels to be free...*

As the song ends, they arrive at the side of a road.

Creep holds them back from going any further. They duck and peek over a grassy ridge:

FOUNDER FLAGS draped everywhere. Emma signs defaced. Rubble.

TANKS pass by.

Neil looks over. Creep is panicked.

CREEP (CONT'D)  
I don't want to die.

NEIL  
You're not going to die.

CREEP  
I said I was ready for it, but I'm not. I'm not!

Creep starts hyperventilating. Guernica sidles up next to him and breathes. Just like Neil did for him.

CREEP (CONT'D)  
We have to turn around.

NEIL  
I'm not turning around.

CREEP  
You won't make it through.

NEIL  
I have to complete my mission.

CREEP  
Fuck your mission. It's suicide.

NEIL  
I have to go on. I can feel her near.

CREEP  
You're not thinking straight.

NEIL  
Maybe. But if I go back now, I'll always regret not trying.

CREEP

This is your one life.

NEIL

My whole life I've put off love.  
Well I'm not going to anymore.

CREEP

I'll be rooting for you, Neil. Not to win the war, of course. I want to be clear that I hope you and your kind all die so the real America can live how we want to live. But damned if you don't deserve to win in that one very specific, personal way that has no stakes to the country as a whole.

NEIL

That's what you think...

CREEP

So I guess this is farewell.

NEIL

What are you going to do?

CREEP

I'll either find my bow or...

He can't say it. He doesn't need to.

NEIL

I hope you find your bow, you right wing self-hating nazi douche.

CREEP

I hope you win back Emma, you phony snowflake cuck.

They smile. Creep walks back towards the woods. But then Guernica runs towards Creep and cuts him off.

NEIL

Guernica! Who's side are you on?

CREEP

(to Guernica)

Okay, I'm sorry for calling Neil that. He's not a phony.

Guernica turns his butt towards Creep. *WTF?* He shakes his tail. Creep suddenly realizes what Guernica's doing.

CREEP (CONT'D)  
Are you sure?

Guernica waves his tail again. Creep takes out his knife, and cuts off a section of Guernica's tail (for his violin bow).

CREEP (CONT'D)  
One day, maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow or the next day - when you least expect it - you'll hear the song ma taught me, and you'll be there playing it with me. Farewell, Guernica.

Creep salutes Guernica and they go their separate ways.

When the last of the Founder tanks pass out of sight, Guernica bends low and Neil gets on. They cross.

EXT. AMERICANA AT BRAND - NEXT

An AIR RAID SIREN BLARES.

Chaos as scared SHOPPERS are escorted out by UNION SOLDIERS.

UNION SOLDIER OVER LOUDSPEAKER  
This is your last chance. The Union is no longer safe in Glendale. Get out now as quickly as possible.

Beside him, a TRANSLATOR speaking into her own megaphone in Spanish. Neil does a double take. It's EXIBIA, Neil's cleaning lady, now in Union Army Fatigues.

EXIBIA  
*This is your last chance. The Union is no longer safe in Glendale. Get out now as quickly as possible.*

NEIL  
Exibia!?

EXIBIA  
Neil! Oh goodness! Hi sweetheart!

NEIL  
What are you doing here??

EXIBIA  
I joined the Union as a translator.

NEIL

I'm so glad you're okay. I was  
worried-

EXIBIA

I'm okay. Just trying to help.

NEIL

Are you - are you okay on money?

EXIBIA

Money? Money for what...?

Neil and Guernica head directly towards the Americana,  
against the tide. OMINOUS MUSIC as they head inside.

EXIBIA (O.S.) (CONT'D)

*Get out as fast as you can.  
Glendale is no longer safe.*

EXT. COURTYARD PLAZA OF AMERICANA AT BRAND - NEXT

A UNION ARMY SQUADRON in action, pulling down medical tents,  
rushing people out, setting controlled fires to storefronts,  
burning documents. They carry out what they can from stores.  
Full retreat. It's Warsaw hours before the Nazis sacked it.

Neil and Guernica arrive in the center of the plaza.

NEIL

What's going on?

UNION SOLDIER

The Founders are bringing the  
house. They're taking the Americana  
at Brand.

UNION SOLDIER (CONT'D)

Didn't you hear me, comrade? It's  
Warsaw.

NEIL

Have you seen Emma Garland?

UNION SOLDIER

What?!

NEIL

Have you seen Emma Garland - the  
one from the-

UNION SOLDIER

I know who she is. What are you talking about?

NEIL

Is she here?! At the Americana?

UNION SOLDIER

Fuck if I know. Let's get the fuck out of here!

(running away)

Don't say I didn't warn you!

Neil takes the CLASSIFIED FOLDER from Guernica's pouch.

NEIL

(to Guernica)

I'll be in and out. Stay here.

Neil walks off. Guernica whinnies. Neil looks back - Guernica looks scared. Neil puts up a reassuring hand.

INT. BARNES AND NOBLE BOOKSTORE - NEXT

Neil enters the empty bookstore. Somehow, the vibe inside is like any other non war-time day at the Barnes and Noble. Muzak. Nothing like the war zone outside.

CASHIER

I can help the next customer.

Neil (the only customer) approaches the cashier, CARLA and hands her the CLASSIFIED FOLDER. She scans it.

CARLA

You're all set.

NEIL

That's it?

CARLA

That's it!

NEIL

There's nothing more?

CARLA

Nope!

NEIL

... Is Emma Garland around? She's actually the one who asked for me.

CARLA

I don't know anything about that.

NEIL

Really?

CARLA

Sorry.

NEIL

Okay. Well. Thanks.

(then)

I mean really? It's just that - after all I went through. With Creep. And Likrat. And Guernica. And teaching him to breathe. And then him teaching Creep to breathe. And wanting to quit and then going on anyway, no matter how afraid I was, or how pointless it all felt. And she's just... not here?? I practiced this whole speech.

CARLA

Do you need validation?

NEIL

(sigh)

More than you know.

She hands Neil parking validation.

EXT. BARNES AND NOBLE / COURTYARD PLAZA - NEXT

The Americana is under siege. Gunfire. Grenades. The Founders are bombarding the Union, who are trying to retreat.

Neil emerges. He can barely see through the haze of smoke.

Guernica is nowhere in sight.

NEIL

Guernica? Guernica!?

He looks around everywhere, frantic.

NEIL (CONT'D)

Guernica!

OFF-SCREEN VOICE

Neil?

It's EMMA. Emma the icon, Emma the source of all of Neil's heartache. She's in military fatigues. Blood drains from Neil's face.

EMMA

Hey.

NEIL

Hey.

They stand alone together while war rages all around them. Neither quite knows what to say. It's loaded. Awkward.

EMMA

It's good to see you.

NEIL

Yeah. It's good to see you, too.  
Are you okay? Are you hurt?

EMMA

No. No. It just looks bad ha.

NEIL

Okay. Good.

Behind them, soldiers try to load a missile into a launcher.

EMMA

How are you? How have you been?

NEIL

I'm good. I'm good. Having trouble writing, you know.

EMMA

I'm sorry.

NEIL

Eh, it's the usual.

The soldiers fire the missile. It explodes violently nearby.

NEIL (CONT'D)

How are you?

EMMA

Good! Busy. But good.

NEIL

Good. Yeah, you seem busy.

EMMA

Yeah.

Against the backdrop of all-out war, the most awkward, absurdly mundane, loaded conversation.

EMMA (CONT'D)

So...

NEIL

So... Oh! Um. I'm glad I ran into you. I have a box of your stuff. If you wanna... pick it up sometime or I can drop it off. Your Snoopy sweatshirt. A scrunchie.

EMMA

Is that what you wanted to tell me?

NEIL

Well. Also - I... you know, I did the mission. Just now.

EMMA

The mission?

NEIL

The mission. You know.

EMMA

I don't really know what that is.

A soldier is struck with a flying bayonet through his heart.

NEIL

You didn't ask about me for a top secret mission for the Union? To save you?

EMMA

I can't tell if you're joking ha.

NEIL

I can't tell if you're joking.

EMMA

I'm not. I'm fine. Good, actually. I don't need saving, Neil.

It's a punch in the gut. *The Princess never needed saving.*

NEIL

Fucking Fonda. Well, anyways, it was dangerous, and I was brave. And I think it might help the Union win the war. But no biggie.

EMMA

No biggie.

NEIL

You... look great. I hope that's okay to say.

EMMA

Thanks. You, too.

NEIL

(no, I objectively don't)  
Really?? I look like shit.

EMMA

Well okay, not really ha.

They share a laugh. Then an awkward beat. An opening?

NEIL

Emma. I made the biggest mistake of my life not showing you how much I loved you-

EMMA

-Neil-

NEIL

I know I hurt you.

EMMA

Please-

NEIL

If you would just give me one more chance to show you-

EMMA

Neil. I care about you, but I don't think of you that way anymore.

NEIL

But you haven't seen me when I've loved you how I want to.

EMMA

We had been growing apart for a while. It's okay. It happens.

NEIL

Didn't you love me?

EMMA

Of course, but we can't just go back. I've changed. I've moved on.

NEIL

Are you sure?

SOLDIERS (O.S.)

ADVANCE! GO GO GO!

A fleet of Union soldiers rushes by with a battering ram. Emma and Neil look on. They turn back to each other.

EMMA

I should probably go now.

NEIL

Okay, yeah. Do you need a ride? I've got a horse- Or did - have you seen Guernica? Oh there he is!

Neil finally spots Guernica approaching.

EMMA

Thanks, but I should help hold our position while we evacuate. Also, I live here now ha, so-

NEIL

-In Glendale??

EMMA

Like I said. I've changed. It was nice running into you, Neil.

NEIL

Yeah. You, too.

Neil's eyes well with tears, his heart sinking.

EMMA

Neil?

NEIL

Hm?

EMMA

I hope you keep writing. I'll be looking in the paper for you.

A HUGE EXPLOSION, like the period at the end of a long novel that you don't want to end, at the gates of the Americana.

NEIL  
Goodbye, Comrade.

EMMA  
Goodbye, Neil.

NEIL  
Emma?

EMMA  
Hm?

NEIL  
I'm glad I got to talk to you  
again. Even for a little.

EMMA  
Me, too, Neil.

Emma re-joins her troops. Neil takes a moment alone to process. It's over. It's really and finally over.

Guernica has joined him, snapping him out of it.

NEIL  
You ready, Guernica?

Guernica stands there, still.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
C'mon, time to go home. Mission  
accomplished. I guess.

Guernica take a step back from Neil. Neil is confused.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
You're staying, too?

Guernica puts his head down, a little embarrassed.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Okay. So this is goodbye?

Guernica steps forward and nudges his head against Neil's.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
You know. I always thought my  
life's masterpiece would be some  
brilliant piece of writing.  
Something that would win some prize  
or be on some all-time list, live  
on in the history books. But it's  
not going to be those things. I  
have something better.  
(MORE)

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Something more artistic than  
anything anyone could write or  
paint or film. Are you going to ask  
me what?

Guernica doesn't move.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
It's what we did together. It's us.

Guernica still doesn't move.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Too cheesy? Fair. I can't say I  
understand your choice, but if this  
is the end... You stay strong, you  
hear me, Guernica? You stay strong.

A BOMB explodes in the distance, heavy and deep and final.  
Guernica watches as Neil walks away from him, for good.

EXT. STREETS OF GLENDALE - LATER

Neil walking home. He looks small without Guernica.

EXT. LA RIVER - NEXT

Neil trudges on, not bothering to seek cover. He's crying.

It starts to RAIN.

EXT. SHAKESPEARE BRIDGE - NEXT

The RAIN is coming down harder now.

Bullets fly through the air. Neil moves through, unflinching,  
numb. What's a gunshot to a dead man?

EXT. FRANKLIN AVE - NEXT

LIGHTNING now. Mythical strikes from an angry God.

Neil stops suddenly. His eyes go way wide with realization.

NEIL  
OHHHH SHIIIT.

FLASHBACKS:

Neil tucks LIKRAT SHABBAT in Guernica's saddle.

Before that, Jacob hands it to Neil outside Skylight.

Before that, Jacob's grandfather gives it to little Jacob (wearing a little cowboy hat).

Before that, Jacob's Grandfather prays with it in a boat.

Before that, Jacob's Grandfather hustled out of his home the night of Kristallnacht, grabbing Likrat on his way out.

END FLASHBACK.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Likrat!

Close on Neil - *there's no way I can go all the way back.*

CUT TO:

EXT. SHAKESPEARE BRIDGE - NEXT

Neil SPRINTING back across the Bridge in the pouring rain.

EXT. LA RIVER - NEXT

THUNDER now, following him as he runs, with all his might -

INT. BRU COFFEE BAR - SIMULTANEOUS

Jacob bursts in. Bree's tiny gun is pointed at him.

BARISTA BREE (O.S.)  
Announce yourself!

JACOB  
It's Jacob. Have you seen Neil?

Bree pops up. She's wearing full body armor.

BARISTA BREE  
He's not back?

JACOB  
No. I thought - hoped - maybe he stopped in for a pour over or something. You know how he needs his third-wave organic coffee.

BARISTA BREE  
Maybe he stopped at Proof. Or...

JACOB

What?

BARISTA BREE

No. Nevermind.

JACOB

Say it.

BARISTA BREE

At the... Starbucks Terrace.

JACOB

He would never.

BARISTA BREE

No. I know. You know if he was  
desperate or whatever-

JACOB

I could go look for him. It's just -  
if he comes back, and I'm not  
there, he might go looking for me  
and then we're both out looking for  
each other.

BARISTA BREE

I could wait at the paper while you  
look? Nobody's come in for coffee  
for hours. Come to think of it - I  
haven't seen anyone even pass by.

JACOB

Are we the only ones not out  
fighting?

BARISTA BREE

I would love to be fighting. You  
know that, Jacob.

JACOB

I know that.

BARISTA BREE

I'm not a coward, okay!

JACOB

Neither am I!

They're not sure they believe themselves. What to do...

EXT. OFF-ROAD - NEXT

Neil runs and runs through the same path he first went on.

He runs past the tree where he first saw Creep.

Where they set up camp.

Where they sang and both rode Guernica.

Further up ahead -

Lying on the ground is Creep's WALKIE. Further up ahead - OMINOUS DARK MUSIC as he sees CREEP'S LITTLE ARMY BOOT. Creep, another casualty of this goddamn war.

Neil runs on - there's nothing else to do.

INT. LOS FELIZ LEDE HQS / BASEMENT - NEXT

The UNION OFFICERS from Neil's mission (including SEAN PENN and JANE FONDA) debrief Jacob, who looks extremely worried.

JACOB

You have to go find him!

The Officers all look to one another, knowingly.

JACOB (CONT'D)

What? What is it?

Jane Fonda looks away. Sean Penn gravely offers Jacob a cig.

UNION COLONEL

The risk was always there that Neil would not complete his mission or that he would not return from it.

JACOB

You think he - ?

JANE FONDA

The others didn't come back either.

JACOB

The others?

SEAN PENN

You think he's the only one we sent? That we risked it all on Neil Mudd?

EXT. AMERICANA AT BRAND - NEXT

Founders raise the FOUNDER FLAG over the Americana.

EXT. COURTYARD PLAZA OF AMERICANA - NEXT

It's real hairy. Guernica is nowhere to be seen.

INT. BARNES AND NOBLE BOOKSTORE - NEXT

Neil runs in. Inside, it's as if there weren't a raging war just outside the front doors. He goes up the counter.

CARLA

Welcome to Barnes and Noble. How can I help you today, sir?

NEIL

You don't remember me?

CARLA

We get lots of customers.

NEIL

I was here only a couple hours ago. I had a secret folder you scanned -

CARLA

Is there something I can help you with?

NEIL

Have you seen a horse?

CARLA

Animal Section is Second Floor.

NEIL

No. Not a book. A horse. My horse. Guernica. He was just outside. He doesn't do well with strangers. He's very sensitive. Would you mind asking if anyone has seen him?

CARLA

I'm really not supposed to leave the register.

NEIL

I'm begging you. My heart is broken and I can't lose any more. See her?

He points to an EMMA POSTER, one corner drooping down.

NEIL (CONT'D)

I broke her heart and then she  
broke mine. And even though I'm  
rubble, I had been holding out hope  
and now I can move on. I need to  
get my friend's prayerbook. And I  
want to tell Guernica that I love  
him. I kinda did that in gesture,  
but I want to say it clearly, in  
case he doesn't understand  
metaphors.

Carla stares at him blankly.

NEIL (CONT'D)

I've been hiding for far too long.  
I've been just trying to survive.  
And now that I'm alive, I need to  
give back. I'm going to be so  
strong now, Carla. I'm ready to  
live. I'm ready to love.

(catches his breath)

That felt good to say out loud. And  
I'd give you one helluva  
recommendation to your manager.

CARLA

Well he is being super weird with  
me today. Let me just check your  
folder - it usually has info. But  
You can't tell anyone. I'd get in  
big trouble.

NEIL

I swear.

Carla gets the classified folder and scans it.

NEIL (CONT'D)

So how long has the Americana been  
a secret Founder stronghold?

CARLA

Oh, it always has been. The flag  
just makes it official.

Carla clocks something on her monitor.

CARLA (CONT'D)

Okay. Lemme talk to my manager.

NEIL

Oh my God, Carla. You're more than a cashier at Barnes and Noble at the Americana at Brand. You're a life saver at the Barnes and Noble at the Americana at Brand.

CARLA

I appreciate the feedback. Aaaand I have a receipt for you...

Carla waits for the receipt to print out.

NEIL

Oh that's okay, I don't need it.

Carla scribbles something on it in sharpie.

NEIL (CONT'D)

None of my business - but, you might really like working at a place like Skylight Bookstore in Los Feliz. They're not so by the book, corporate. You can talk the way you wanna talk, you don't have to be afraid of your manager. You can be yourself - be rude if you want - not that you'd want, but-

Carla, ignoring him, passes the receipt to Neil.

CARLA

Well, we do get health benefits.

(hands him receipt)

Don't lose that.

Carla goes to the back room.

Neil looks to an EMMA POSTER with its corner drooping down over her face. Neil pulls up the corner and smooths it out.

He takes a look at the receipt that Carla gave him. On it, she's scrawled: "RUN!" Before he can register it --

MANAGER

You're here about a horse?

NEIL

Yes! Do you know where he is?

MANAGER

Sure. Right this way.

CARLA  
(intercepting)  
Sir, did you get your receipt?

Neil looks again at the receipt that says "RUN!" Now he clocks it. He looks up at the Manager. It's a trap.

Neil breaks away into a sprint.

He runs for the exits, but Founders are blocking the doors.

They chase him. Neil turns, and runs up the escalators. He bounds up the first flight, then second flight to-

INT. BARNES AND NOBLE - STARBUCKS TERRACE - NEXT

He makes it to the Starbucks Terrace. But he's kettled. He looks over the railing. Too high to jump. He's fucked.

FOUNDER SOLDIER (O.S.)  
Neil Mudd??

Neil turns to see - Holy shit -

NEIL  
Wiggy???

WIGGY - Neil's childhood best friend turned Founder Soldier.

INT. BARNES AND NOBLE - ESCALATOR - NEXT

Neil and Wiggy ride the escalator down together.

NEIL  
I thought you were dead.

WIGGY  
Well... I'm not.

NEIL  
How have you... been? - Jesus  
that's an awkward question.

WIGGY  
Been okay, I guess. Alive.

NEIL  
That's good. Good for you, man.

INT. STOCK ROOM - BARNES AND NOBLE - NEXT

Wiggy leads Neil into a back room at the Barnes and Noble.

NEIL  
Guernica!

Guernica is there. He leaps with joy when he sees Neil, but a Founder yanks his reins aggressively.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Don't touch him!

WIGGY  
Here, I got him. At ease.

Wiggy takes the reins from the other Founder.

WIGGY (CONT'D)  
Sit down, bud. This your book?

Wiggy holds up LIKRAT SHABBAT. Neil nods.

WIGGY (CONT'D)  
I want to thank you for bringing my  
horse back. I really missed him.  
(to Guernica)  
I really missed you.

Guernica stands frozen with fear of Wiggy.

NEIL  
I didn't bring him back, per se. We  
came together to deliver a message.

WIGGY  
Oh right. The message.

The other Soldiers chuckle. Neil looks confused.

NEIL  
Am I missing something?

WIGGY  
You are the message.

Neil doesn't compute.

WIGGY (CONT'D)  
We were late occupying the  
Americana and almost missed you,  
but luckily you forgot about your  
Jew book and walked right back.

NEIL

I - I think you're mistaken.

WIGGY

Why do you think we sent the horse  
to you?

NEIL

Guernica? No. He found me. We sorta  
found each other.

WIGGY

He's a double agent for the  
Founders. One of our top spooks.

NEIL

Okay. Right.

WIGGY

Didn't you think it was a little  
funny that a horse would just show  
up like that, follow you around,  
befriend you?

Guernica whips his head back and forth as if to deny it.

NEIL

Don't say that. It's not true.

WIGGY

That the Universe just sends you  
something out of the blue like  
that? For no reason?!

NEIL

There was a reason. I was sad and  
Guernica showed me how to be happy.  
Tell 'em, Guernica.

Neil looks to Guernica to save him here.

WIGGY

It was so easy, too. We gave him  
your scent -

NEIL

- No -

WIGGY

- He tracked you -

NEIL

- No -

WIGGY

- Earned your trust-

NEIL

- Stop -

WIGGY

-and delivered you both back to us.

Guernica bucks, whipping his head from side to side. But it's lost in translation. And now Neil's heart is rubble.

NEIL

Can I have my book back now.

WIGGY

I've always been jealous of you, you know. Ever since we were young.

NEIL

Why?

WIGGY

You can write.

NEIL

Anyone can write.

WIGGY

Sure anyone can write. I can write. But not like you. You can write and it can change how people *think*, how people *act*. That's incredible. That's real power.

NEIL

What do you want from me.

WIGGY

Because of your paper, the Founders are losing people to the Union.

NEIL

I didn't think anybody read our paper.

WIGGY

They do. And it's become a problem. Your options are - and I think there's a pretty good one in here for you - we can either kill you now (that's not the good one). Or - come write for us.

(MORE)

WIGGY (CONT'D)  
 You still get to write and you're  
 brains stay in your skull.

NEIL  
 I haven't written anything in  
 months. I'm not changing any minds.

WIGGY  
 I tried to tell them that. But they  
 think you're a high value asset.  
 They're always a little behind.  
 (beat)  
 There is a third option. You can  
 tell us the location of your paper.  
 So... Option one: That's me blowing  
 your brains out in this backroom of  
 the Barnes and Noble at the  
 Americana at Brand. Option two: you  
 use your writing mind control black  
 magic for the Founders. Or:

Another soldier puts out a map of Los Feliz before Neil.

WIGGY (CONT'D)  
 Show us where your newsroom is.

NEIL  
 What're you gonna do if I tell you?

WIGGY  
 You're a writer, use your  
 imagination.

Beat. Neil imagines the worst.

WIGGY (CONT'D)  
 Just tell me. I really don't wanna  
 deal with the smell.

Wiggy holds up his gun to Neil's head. Guernica whinnies in protest. Wiggy yanks hard on his reins to be quiet.

WIGGY (CONT'D)  
 Let's not do the back and forth.  
 The bluffing, the games, yada yada.  
 Where is the Los Feliz Lede?

Neil looks at Wiggy. A change comes over Neil's face.

NEIL  
 Option one.

WIGGY  
 What?

NEIL  
Option one. Kill me. Just kill me.

Is this a bluff?

NEIL (CONT'D)  
I've done nothing since the war began. I hid from everything. I hid from the protests, from the fundraisers, from the army. I hid from my own feelings. But I guess you can't hide from heartbreak any more than you can hide from war. It'll end up at your doorstep eventually. I couldn't fight both wars, so I picked the one inside. But that war's over and now I can help fight this one. So kill me. At the very least it'll mean I've done something. If I can't write - I can sacrifice my life - that will be my resistance.

(then)  
Pull the trigger.

Long beat.

ANOTHER SOLDIER  
The crap was that?

Wiggy considers. Then turns his gun to Guernica's head.

NEIL  
No!

WIGGY  
Where is the Los Feliz Lede?!

Guernica twists his head in fear. Wiggy yanks his reins.

NEIL  
Don't hurt him!

WIGGY  
You have three seconds before I blow his brains out. One. TWO. -

NEIL  
Skylight Books!! It's under the bookstore. On Vermont. Okay?

Wiggy nods to the other soldiers, who radio this info in.

INT. LOS FELIZ LEDE HQ'S / BASEMENT - SIMULTANEOUS

It's quiet. Barista Bree waits alone in the newsroom, standing guard. She looks in her coffee cup. It's empty.

INT. STOCK ROOM - BARNES AND NOBLE - NEXT

Neil slumped in a chair, totally defeated.

NEIL

What happened to us? We were best friends.

WIGGY

We grew apart. Happens.

NEIL

Don't we owe it to ourselves, after all our history, to try to work it out?

WIGGY

We were kids, man. It was a different time.

NEIL

We don't have to destroy each other. Can't we find a way to at least have some common ground?

Wiggy shrugs.

NEIL (CONT'D)

Is this all because I called you a nazi on facebook?

WIGGY

Shouldn't have done that.

NEIL

I'm sorry. Maybe I coulda gone about it better.

WIGGY

Little late for apologies, buddy.

We let the weight of that settle for a beat or two.

NEIL

That's okay. I'm not really sorry.

WIGGY

Boy, you're just asking for a bullet, aren't you?

NEIL

Would that make it all better? Huh?  
Will killing me fix your boo boo?  
Will it erase the fact that Sherry Salinberger liked it and shared it?  
Fucking racist snowflake.

WIGGY

MOTHER. FUCKER!

He aims his gun back to Neil.

NEIL

Go ahead! Make my day! Cosplay nazi douche.

WIGGY

You think I'm cosplaying, huh?

He cocks the gun and presses it to Neil's head.

WIGGY (CONT'D)

Is this cosplay?

NEIL

You're a bored loser and you want to feel important so you dress up in costumes and follow orders from people who think you're a joke.

WIGGY

You're dead.

Wiggy braces to pull the trigger but then EVERYONE TURNS. A STRANGE SOUND off-screen. It's the sound of --

MUSIC -

EXT. PLAZA - AMERICANA AT BRAND - NEXT

The 114TH DIVISION FOUNDER MARCHING BAND is performing. But the song they're playing warps into something else - confusion amongst the band as we see -

A pair of feet. One with a SINGLE TINY MILITARY BOOT. The other foot bare. We BOOM UP to see that it's CREEP! He's sporting a TIGHT MOHAWK. He's playing his NINA SIMONE SONG using the BOW made of Guernica's tail.

His bandmates, trying to keep up, find themselves playing the Nina Simone song, too. The BAND LEADER is livid.

BAND LEADER  
Stop stop stop! What are you doing!

But Creep only plays harder. The band is unable to stop playing the Nina Simone. Now they're all playing it.

INT. BARNES AND NOBLE BOOKSTORE - SAME

Neil smiles to himself.

While everyone is distracted, An ARMED FOUNDER SOLDIER talks to Neil discreetly.

ARMED FOUNDER SOLDIER  
I just wanna say - I get where  
you're coming from, but man... It's  
really fun.

NEIL  
What's fun?

ARMED FOUNDER SOLDIER  
(whispering, earnest)  
The *cosplay*.

The music gets louder, clearer when -

Guernica swings his body wildly and KNOCKS OVER WIGGY. Then BUCKS, kicking Wiggy and sending him flying across the room.

Neil grabs LIKRAT SHABBAT and jumps atop Guernica. NEIL'S FIRST SUCCESSFUL MOUNT!

Guernica leaps into the air, wild and free and brave. Neil, one hand on the reins and one hand high holding Likrat, as wild and free and brave as Guernica.

Guernica flees -

A SHOT IS FIRED -

Wiggy, on the floor, pained - his gun smoking.

Guernica recovers - rears back and CHARGES Wiggy. Wiggy takes aim for another shot - Guernica STOMPS HIM unconscious.

Guernica and Neil escape, bullets from the other Founder Soldiers whizzing by their heads.

EXT. PLAZA - AMERICANA AT BRAND - NEXT

The NINA SIMONE is louder. Triumphant. Unstoppable. Creep is in the zone, playing fearlessly, his bow guided by the hand of God, by Nina herself.

The FLEET OF FOUNDER HORSES are riled up, inspired, unhinged.

The Founder Soldiers are enjoying the change of tune, not realizing the chaos building.

BAND LEADER  
CORPORAL CREEP YOU WILL STOP  
PLAYING THAT SONG RIGHT NOW!!!

Guernica and Neil bust out of the bookstore into the open.

Only now the Founder Soldiers see what's happening.

Guernica and Neil head for the exit.

The song soaring.

The other SOLDIERS SHOOT at them.

NEIL IS STRUCK WITH A BULLET IN HIS SHOULDER. FUCK!!!

He clutches his shoulder but stays on Guernica.

The Soldiers give chase.

All of the war horses break free of their reins.

The band stops playing.

Creep continues playing his violin. He's the only one.

Neil and Guernica make it up to the exit.

But the Founders have gained on them.

They're caught.

But A BLUE MINI-VAN squeals to a stop between Neil/Guernica and the Founders. The bumper sticker on the mini-van reads: SHABBAT SHALOM.

JACOB PERLIN IS AT THE WHEEL, listening to Phish.

Jacob leans his cowboy-hatted head out his window.

JACOB  
YEEEEEE-HAWWWWWWW!!!

Jacob fires his gun into the air.

NEIL  
Jacob!!!

JACOB  
Go!

The Soldiers start attacking the mini-van. Shooting out the windows and tires. The mini-van is dead.

Jacob crawls out, under siege. Neil rides back to him.

One of the escaped War Horses pulls up to him and kneels down. Neil helps pull Jacob onto the War Horse. He's on.

JACOB (CONT'D)  
Let's go, buddy!

Now Neil and Jacob are both on horses. They flee.

All of the other War Horses split off in different directions. They're free.

Off-screen, a SINGLE BULLET RINGS OUT.

Creep's violin stops mid-note. Creep, and his song, are over.

EXT. PLAZA - AMERICANA AT BRAND - NEXT

Furiously they ride.

Neil looks at the BLOODY GASH in his shoulder. It's bad.

Another SHOT. Guernica is HIT. He sways but recovers.

Neil looks down to where Guernica was shot - a smoking BULLET HOLE right through the saddle pocket -

But stopped short of skin by the Likrat Shabbat prayerbook!

Another GUN BLAST. Guernica sways again. He stays up.

On they ride -

Through a hail of BULLETS whizzing by -

Through GRENADES exploding all around them -

Through RAIN and SMOKE and LIGHTNING striking from above -

The foursome - Neil on Guernica - Jacob on his horse - wounded but alive - flee the Americana at last -

EXT. STREETS OF GLENDALE - NEXT

Lightning and thunder continue to punctuate the white noise of the pouring rain - it's so loud you can hardly hear.

NEIL  
THEY KNOW ABOUT SKYLIGHT!

JACOB  
I CAN'T HEAR YOU!

NEIL  
SKYLIGHT! WE HAVE TO WARN THEM!

JACOB  
I'LL FOLLOW YOU!

Neil heels Guernica to go faster.

NEIL  
FASTER GUERNICA! FASTER!

EXT. LOS FELIZ BLVD - NEXT

They ride through BATTLES IN THE STREETS.

This is TRENCH WARFARE. It looks more like World War I.

QUICK FLASHBACK: Emma's face emerges from under a blanket. She throws her naked arms around Neil's head and smiles -

JACOB  
LOOSEN THE REINS!

Neil loosens the reins on Guernica.

BAYONETS THROUGH THE HEARTS OF AMERICANS.

QUICK FLASHBACK: Neil and Emma, laughing as they run around the apartment, trying to soak one another with cups of water.

Neil loosens the reins some more. Faster they ride.

MANGLED BODIES LITTER THE STREETS. Some are crawling out of harm's way. Others are already dead.

QUICK FLASHBACK: Neil and Emma in the back of a car at a drive-in movie theater, legs intertwined.

BOOOM! BOOOM! BOOOOOOM!!!

Everywhere is war.

Emma flashbacks spin fast and away until there are none left.

Neil has let go. He's focused. Fearless. Free.

Guernica plows right through the heart of battle - he doesn't recoil in fear. Neil doesn't either. They are flying now.

EXT. SHAKESPEARE BRIDGE - NEXT

Jacob and his horse over the Shakespeare Bridge. Neil and Guernica trail them. Several Founder military vehicles give chase. Neil is almost at the bridge when--

A MISSILE strikes the center of the bridge, creating a truck-sized gap in front of Guernica. Jacob and his horse are safely past. But Neil and Guernica are heading towards it.

JACOB

LOOK OUT!

The vehicles stop, trapping Neil. But Guernica picks up steam and LEAPS over the collapsing hole in the bridge.

Guernica flies through the air. Time stops. Bombs exploding in the sky. Jacob watches in terror. Founder soldiers, fingers frozen on their triggers, jaws dropping.

The gap seems too wide. They're not going to make it.

But Guernica lands on the other side of the gap!

The Founders start shooting, but Neil and Guernica, and now Jacob and his horse, are in the clear.

They make it to an open stretch. The battle and the storm behind them now. It's dark now. And quiet.

EXT. LOS FELIZ BLVD - NEXT

The horses are side by side now.

NEIL

You okay?!

JACOB

I think so! Are you hurt?!

NEIL

Yeah. But only physically!

JACOB

Why are you smiling?!

NEIL  
I'm alive!

JACOB  
Are you sure you're not just going  
into shock from blood loss?!

NEIL  
I didn't think I would ever get  
here again!

JACOB  
Los Feliz Blvd west of the 5?!

A FOUNDER PICK-UP TRUCK catches up to them. SOLDIERS in the back, ASSAULT RIFLES DRAWN.

Guernica picks up speed, but the truck keeps up.

A Soldier takes aim at Neil.

JACOB (CONT'D)  
No!

Jacob urges his horse faster. He puts himself between Neil and the Soldier.

The Soldier FIRES. Jacob is HIT. He is knocked off his horse.

NEIL  
JACOB!!!!!!

Jacob's limp body goes tumbling.

All time stops. As if in a dream, Jacob's COWBOY HAT blows gently away down the street, disappearing into the fog.

Jacob is dead.

Neil can't move or speak or feel his feet below him. He's in slow-motion, stunned. Guernica carries Neil onward.

EXT. LOS FELIZ BLVD - NIGHT

It's dark now. Lightning rages overhead. Thunder and bombs perform a death duet. Neil, clutching his wounded shoulder, and Guernica, his sturdy carriage, ride into the heart of Los Feliz, drenched with rain and tears and blood.

All sound drops out and we only hear Neil's voice.

NEIL (V.O.)

Sometimes when I'm on a long walk, I'll happen upon a perfect sentence - one that I didn't realize I was putting together in my head the whole time. I've reworked it and reworked it in my mind until I can imagine no better way of saying it. I used to imagine running through the door and telling Emma this perfect sentence. And upon hearing it, she'd love me even more. But by the time I get home, it doesn't sound the same. It was only perfect in my head, on that walk.

All around them, war. Like the climax of a fireworks show.

NEIL (V.O.)

Did I have a perfect sentence now?

Neil smiles at this as he rides fearlessly atop Guernica.

NEIL (V.O.)

No.

The twilight is exploding with bombs bursting in air, rockets glaring red, the entirety of war's chest thrown at them.

NEIL

I have something better...

CRACK!!! Neil is hit again, in his leg, before he can tell us his perfect sentence. All the noise returns: Explosions. Gunshots. Screaming. Guernica's labored breathing.

NEIL (CONT'D)

Go Guernica, go!

Neil urges him faster, faster, but Guernica is struggling, his wheezing deeper, he starts to stagger. A BULLET WOUND that Neil hadn't noticed has Guernica bleeding out.

NEIL (CONT'D)

We're almost home.

Guernica slows to a stop. Neil jumps off, drags Guernica to -

ALLEY -

It's quieter, more private. The occasional bullet flies by in the background, but they're out of the direct line of fire.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Guernica, we have to go.

But Guernica lowers to the ground.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Please! I'm not going without you.

GUNSHOTS ring out. Closer now.

Neil pulls Guernica. He won't budge.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
No, no, no, you can't stay! I need  
you! Please! PLEASE!

Neil is reduced to a boy, holding his dying friend, pleading.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
NO! I won't leave you! You have to  
come with me. I love you, you  
understand?!

He tries to do the breathing trick. But this isn't fear.  
Guernica's eyes cloud up with gray.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
(weeping now)  
Noooooo....

Guernica, with as much energy as he can muster, does his  
playful silly rolling around bit to make Neil feel better.  
Neil laughs through tears.

Guernica uses his last bit of energy to nudge Neil to move on  
without him.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
I love you.

He kisses Guernica one last time on the forehead as Guernica  
closes his eyes for good.

Neil gets up and runs -

He looks back and sees Guernica galloping away through the  
fog of war. He doesn't know if he saw that correctly. After  
weeks of following Neil like an orphaned child, Guernica  
rides off the other direction, setting them both free.

Thunder bores down now, and Neil runs on. He can't feel his  
legs anymore. He's exhausted and bloody and out of breath,  
but on he goes, finally making it past Franklin.

Neil shouts warning to Los Feliz. A modern Paul Revere.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
The Founders are coming! The  
Founders are coming!

The Founders FIRE into the House of Pies. Into the Indian Restaurant. Into the rainbow crystal dildo shop.

Neil limps down the street as fast as he can, legs rubber.

He passes KEEN UNION VOLUNTEER and stops.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
Give it to me.

Neil grabs the CLIPBOARD and signs it. Keeps running.

He COLLAPSES into the arms of- BARISTA BREE.

NEIL (CONT'D)  
It's you.

BARISTA BREE  
I've got you, Neil.

Bree holds Neil in her arms, cradling his head under her bosom. Bullets fly past them. Overhead, clouds pass slowly, as if time itself is slowing.

NEIL  
If I die, put me in the soil, grind  
me up, pour me over... and drink me  
down.

She looks down at Neil - his clothes soaked with rain and blood - his and Guernica's. She wipes the hair from his eyes.

BREE  
You're hurt.

Bree - with strength we didn't think she had - HOISTS NEIL UP IN A FIREMAN'S POSE.

She carries him over her shoulder down the street, through a hail of bullets, she lets out a primal scream and fires back at the Founder soldiers as she gets them to safety-

EXT/INT. SKYLIGHT BOOKSTORE - CONTINUOUS

Bree kicks open the door and carries Neil inside. She takes him to the back room, opens the hidden hatch-

INT. LOS FELIZ LEDE HQ'S / BASEMENT - CONTINUOUS

Carries him down the ladder, through the newsroom -

STACY

Neil?!

Bree carries Neil to his desk and props him up in his chair in front of a typewriter.

BREE

I'll be right back.

Bree hurries off.

NEIL

Stacy - You have to get out. The Founders are coming.

STACY

Where's Jacob?

NEIL

Jacob's gone. They're coming for all of us.

STACY

What do you mean Jacob's gone?

NEIL

You're the editor now, Stacy.

They share an emotional look. *Not Jacob.*

STACY

(crying)

Jacob...

NEIL

You have to get out. They are coming for the Lede. Right now.

STACY

What are you going to do?

NEIL

The only thing I can do.

Neil starts writing.

Off-screen, from upstairs - WINDOW GLASS SHATTERS.

NEIL (CONT'D)

I'll delay them. Go.

STACY  
I can't wait to read it.

She hugs Neil and runs off. Neil resumes typing.

Barista Bree returns with a FIRST AID KIT.

She cuts off his sleeve, cleans away the blood, gently dabs the wound with alcohol while Neil writes. The only sound is his typing, his breathing... her breathing.

A COMMOTION as the sound of SOLDIERS' BOOTS storm the bookstore. SHOUTING ORDERS. SCREAMING.

NEIL  
You have to hide.

BREE  
Keep writing.

Neil types faster, knowing his time is almost up. Bree is reading his work over his shoulder.

BREE (CONT'D)  
"The war had finally come to Los Feliz. Shit.

It's the narration from the beginning of the script.

BREE (CONT'D)  
"At first I thought I could hide from it. That it would never touch me. But feelings, like war, would find me eventually. It would arrive rattling my windows, shaking my building." Is this about Emma?

He ignores her. He types as if on his last breath. She reads as if it's her last breath.

BREE (CONT'D)  
"I used to be jealous of the artists who worked during war time. Picasso with Guernica, Vonnegut with Slaughterhouse 5, Hemingway. Now the war was here, and I couldn't bring myself to write a single word. So it goes."

Upstairs, the Soldiers seem to have taken control of the bookstore - their boots are stomping just above them.

BREE (CONT'D)  
We have to hide.

NEIL

I can't stop now. You go.

BREE

They'll kill you.

They look to each other. It's loaded. Is this goodbye?

NEIL

Go!

Bree, teary-eyed, runs off. Neil types - determined.

NEIL (V.O.)

In the movies, war was non-stop.  
You were always dodging bullets.  
Heroes were made on the  
battlefield. Many people die and  
their stories die with them.

The Founders find Neil alone, typing at his desk.

NEIL (V.O.)

But as it turns out, war is nothing  
like the movies. Sure there is  
violence. There is fear. The bombs  
are loud and the tears are quiet.

A SCARY FOUNDER SOLDIER smiles. They've got him.

FOUNDER

Get up!

NEIL (V.O.)

But there is also sunshine. There  
is coffee. There is laughter and  
beauty. There is Guernica.

The Soldiers draw their weapons.

FOUNDER

Let's go. You're under arrest.

Neil continues to ignore them as he writes.

SCARY FOUNDER SOLDIER

Shoot him.

The Other Founders cock their guns when -

Barista Bree jumps out from under a desk, holding a SEMI-AUTOMATIC - AIMED RIGHT AT THEM - a wild look in her eyes.

BREE  
Step back! ... He's WRITING!!

For just a moment, it puts the fear of God in the soldiers.  
Except the Scary one.

SCARY FOUNDER SOLDIER  
I don't give a shit that he's  
writing. Let's go or we'll fucking  
kill you.

NEIL  
Just a second. I'm just finishing  
this sentence. I've had writer's  
block and I'm finally in a groove.

Neil sways as he types, feeling into the rhythm.

SCARY RIGHTY SOLDIER  
What?! No. Shoot him!

NEIL  
Just let me finish this last  
sentence - if you're going to kill  
me anyway.

ANOTHER FOUNDER  
Let him finish. He's had writer's  
block.

ANOTHER FOUNDER'S FRIEND  
Writer's block? During a war?!

NEIL  
Thank you... Almost finished...

Neil's really going at it now. Feeling it. It's a bit of an  
awkward stand-off for the Soldiers and Bree.

ANOTHER FOUNDER SOLDIER  
...What are you writing about?

NEIL  
(smiling as he types)  
It's about love and war and  
Guernica. It's not perfect, but  
that's just how Guernica would've  
wanted it.

He writes and writes and writes and writes...

TYPING CONTINUES as the CAMERA CRANES UP ABOVE THEM -

THROUGH THE CEILING -

UP INTO THE BOOKSTORE -

UP ABOVE THE BUILDING -

ABOVE LOS FELIZ -

NEIL (O.S.) (CONT'D)  
...It's kind of a long sentence...

GUERNICA, UNHARMED, GALLOPS THROUGH THE SKY -

HE'S BEING RIDDEN BY A COWBOY WHOSE BACK IS TO US -

GUERNICA GALLOPS GLEEFULLY THROUGH TALL BUILDINGS -

DODGING BULLETS -

DODGING BOMBS -

DODGING WAR PLANES -

UP AND UP AND UP STILL -

GALLOPING UPON FLUFFY CLOUDS -

THE SUN PARTS THE CLOUDS AND THERE, ON THE OTHER SIDE, IS  
GUERNICA AND THE COWBOY ON HIS BACK, RIDING THROUGH THE SKY.

NEIL'S TYPING CONTINUES -

THE MAN RIDING GUERNICA IS JACOB -

JACOB AND GUERNICA BURST THROUGH THE RETICLE CROSSHAIRS -

JACOB RIPS OFF HIS COWBOY HAT AND WAVES IT IN THE AIR -

JACOB  
YEEEE-HHAAWWWWWW!!!!!!

THE END.