CAESAR'S TOMB
SCRIPT

CAST OF CHARACTERS

REV. MORGAN SWINTON – Hal Wilson
ALICE FAY SWINTON – Judy Hearn
IDA FALCONE – Lee Slater
BROTHER IN LAW –
GEORGE – EDDIE'S FATHER – Jim King
DR. FOSSE – Tom Welsh
NAVY NURSE – Chris Rank
EDDIE FALCONE – Robert Forester
MARGARET CAMION – Robin Finley

MUSIC

(*sound of typing*)

SWINTON:

Winter had set in. The bony fingers of the trees picked at the edges of the slate on the gray roof with a soft irregular scraping. In the dining room window Alice Fay's image reflected in profile as she clicked away at the next day's lesson plan. Her blond hair, long and straight splayed across redsweatered shoulders. Her hands picked at the Olivetti's keys slowly, almost languidly.

The house was silent except for the intermittent scratching on the roof and the slicking keys. A shallow snow fallen unseen muffled the sound of the traffic on the road in front of the parsonage—a light snow, not yet deep enough to call out the heavy rumbling of the snow ploughs. On my lap, my book lay open, light from the floorlamp spread yellow on its unread pages. It was late evening. A time for the closing sounds of night to guide the day quietly away—the mind's twilight—that time when thoughts lose their fatness and flatten into drifting plains bisecting each other like galaxies sliding through one another unimpeded so vast are the distances they command. A quiet calm, and then…

(*Phone ringing.*)

ALICE FAY:

"You got that?"

So blond, so red, her image flat on the glass didn't look up, didn't stop typing.

(*Phone again*.)

ALICE FAY:

"Morgan, you going?"

SWINTON:

I gathered my book, set it on the end table and muttered a mild oath.

(*Another ring.)*

It was insistent now, urgent even. The hour gave it that prescience. Parishioners normally called at suppertime. I moved slowly, deliberately. No need to hurry. Certainly I didn't know what was waiting at the other end of the call. But it was ten o'clock and my imagination, my limited experience told me it was not good. It would probably be a long night.

I was the minister, the one to call when tragedy strikes. It was my own choosing, this vocation. Some notion that ideas are important, that fresh thoughts about God could help order this shattered world had pulled me into the church's fold. Filled with idealism and the egocentric confidence of youth, I offered myself. Seminary-trained, I offered myself believing I was prepared for the care of parish life. In retrospect, I know now I presented myself naked: no technical skills, innocent of life's guile, and the armor of religious banalities discarded. I was seeking yet life's redeeming gift to fill that void. So I stood innocent before my flock. But there was no risk of embarrassment. The congregation, the town even, clothed me in their own religious assumptions and I had but to display the outward trappings of the ministerial role to be accepted. Unaware of my duplicity, they wrapped the distinction of the clergy about me and draped me in the mantle of their own expectations.

"This is Reverend Swinton. Good evening."

IDA FALCONE:

Reverend Swinton, this is Ida Falcone. Eddie's mother—Eddie Falcone. He was on your high school soccer team. You remember him.

SWINTON:

The voice, clearly under stress, was unfamiliar, but the crisp and flinty speech was vintage New England. It overlay a subtle lilt that betrayed Mediterranean roots.

I remembered Eddie. I had been asked to coach the newly established Barton High School soccer team because I was the only one in that rural town who knew anything about the game. I coached as a volunteer and Eddie Falcome was the team's center back. Not much for ball skills, all the kids started too late for that. But Eddie made up for his lack of skill with blazing speed, remarkable vision and an aggression that was more than a little manic. Thought short for a center back, Eddie could jump, and he knew how to put his head on the ball. He was "good in the air" as they say and skillfully bridged the play between offense and defense.

IDA FALCONE:

We don't go to your church, Reverend—we're Catholic you know. But Eddie, he still talks about you….Could you come over?

SWINTON:

Could I come over? Of course I could come over. I was the minister. The one to call, and in small towns church affiliation is often secondary to tragedy's need.

"Certainly, Mrs. Falcone. Do you want to tell me the problem" Is Eddie okay?"

IDA FALCNE:

If you could just come over, Reverend, we'd appreciate it.

SWINTON

"Remind me where you live, Mrs. Falcone?"

Half past ten now. At least the night was pleasant—clear, cold, but not an uncomfortable evening for late November.

Neither Alice Fay nor I were native to New England. A very different environment, the sand and pine woods of north Florida, land below the descending protuberance of the St. Mary's river was home to us as children. Barefoot, skinny, bug-bitten brown legs, we were raised on adjoining farms in the palmettos, scrub oak, jack pines, and narrow opinions of that isolated place. Its religious fundamentalism, racism and conservative politics were our cultural heritage. Alice

Fay was the first to rebel. A skeptic to her roots she grew to challenge any ideas that struck her as intellectually dishonest. It was Alice Fay's father who taught her the courage of inquiry and the dissecting skill of argument's dissolution.

As for so many young men from the small towns and farms of rural America, the war in Europe showed her father a new world. Time and place in England, France, and Germany offered him the opportunity to test opinions not his own, and on the sideboard of the varied cultures laid out before him, he found a feast. He favored himself enriched even as he advanced the carnage of war across that sad landscape. The people fascinated him. They were the first he had met who were not like himself and he was jumbled by the breadth of sadness and anger conflict had gouged in their faces. The books and the accounts, but moreover the expansive attitude brought home by this backwoods farmer broke the isolation of the pine woods for Alice Fay. They dropped her into a landscape of contrary ideas and cultural distinctions that widened her eyes and animated her spirit. When the opportunity offered itself, she determined to breakout of those woods and experience for herself the wonders she found in her reading and her father's telling.

As for me, I did not share the same intellectual curiosity. Unexposed to ideas, I lived in a world of images and tactile sensations that bore little on language. It was the feel and wonder of things at hand that held my interest: the pervasive grit of the sand, the mystery of the sun's warmth on a winter day, the satisfying heft of a rifle on a trudge through the woods, the beautiful curve of the dun horse under the plough, the amber flow of the eternal river which collected itself from the cypress swamp.

And so there was a trade; I helped Alice Fay to see and to feel the texture of our place. She taught me the language of expression and the mystery of abstraction. Holding hands, walking the dusty road between our farms, first the pudgy hands of children, then the interlaced fingers of youth, and in time the exploring touch of lovers, we were companions and except for the occasional discontent, never apart. It was Alice Fay who insisted I learn the power of words.

ALICE FAY

"If we're going to do this life together, you'll learn how to expose the poet's heart I know is in there. Come, Morgan, let's go down by the river, she led me to the river. Sit, dig your feet into the damp sand and watch the river's drive to the ocean, Listen, Morgan. Think about the river… I'm in the water now. "*Calling her waters from the swamp,/ She eased over me/ An amber flow lifting me from her sandy floor/ To hold me suspended/ In liquid's peace …"*

SWINTON:

And,

ALICE FAY:

"Shhh! Give me a minute, *Insensate, pitiless/ She sought the seams and crevices of my body/ With currents rivulets/ To caress me tenderly/ Into forgetfulness. In starlight's fading, She gently then/ Sent velvet fingers and tangled hair/ To carry me unsuspecting/ To her salty lair in the lime green sea."* So that's the way it is, Morgan. The way it is. Kiss me.

MUSIC

The Falcone house was set back from the road in a stand of woods. Towering oaks, maples, and a few conifers surrounded a typical two0story white New England farmhouse. With weathered clapboard siding and gray shutters, it had been built about the end of the nineteenth century. Warm light from the downstairs windows washed the snow-covered walkway like a welcoming beacon. There was no light from the second floor.

I found Mrs. Falcone, her sister and brother-in-law, and Eddie's sister with her younger brother in the living room. Ida Falcone was tall and thin. She wore a straight black dress set off by a white lace collar closed around her neck. Her eyes were black and even though red-rimmed, flashed with determination. She wore her black hair pulled back in a severe bun that failed to harden the kindness in her face. Like Eddie, her dark complexion betrayed her southern Italian ancestry. I looked about the room and a photograph on the mantle caught my eye. A young woman walked briskly across a European train platform. Her print dress billowed with her stride and her long dark hair flowed out from her shoulders. She looked downward at the camera, her face open and smiling, a picture of youth, confidence, and anticipation. What events I wondered had ground her into the woman who stood before me.

IDA FALCONE:

He's upstairs, Reverend, we found him wandering in the woods back behind the house this evening—well his brother did. Eddie had the shotgun, was babbling on how he would kill anybody in a uniform, and himself too. George, that's Mr. Falcone, he talked him into coming home. Eddie's up there now sitting in the dark on the bed. The shotgun's on his knees.

SWINTON:

Mrs. Falcone wiped her eyes with her handkerchief.

BROTHER IN LAW:

"George and Eddie's brother is in there with him, Reverend.

SWINTON:

It was Mrs. Falcone's brother-in-law, a large gangly man with a leathery sun-baked face. His accent was familiar, slow and drawn out. Somewhere down south…the mountains maybe.

BROTHER IN LAW:

He's sure nervous Reverend Swinton. You know, fidgeting and all. He won't give it up, that shotgun, and he won't come down. Just keeps threatening to kill his self. He needs help but we don't know what to do, so Ida says we should call you.

SWINTON:

The light was low in the room, coffee and cakes on the table in the dining room were scarcely disturbed. The odor of baking mixed with the musty smell characteristic of old New England parlors filled the room. Everyone was sitting except Mrs. Falcone who stood in one corner, her small white handkerchief balled up in her clasped hands. In contrast to her dark complexion, her hands were white, stiff as alabaster, tense against the black dress. Occasionally she would fold and unfold the handkerchief with quick anxious movements then ball it up again and again in her hands.

The family looked at me with a mixture of expectation and resignation. It was as though they hoped I had an answer but at the same time were skeptical of my ability to actually do anything. They were farm people who knew that things don't always turn out for the best, but for whom, as a practical matter, hope offered a better option than despair.

Was I a priest to them? The fact I was Protestant, that didn't matter? Did I have the magic relationship with God that would allow Him to intervene for their boy? Was that why they called me? Did they expect me to pray? Did they want me to pray? I didn't think so. And I couldn't do it anyway. It wasn't in me.

IDA FALCONE:

What should we do, Reverend?

SWINTON:

What they needed and what they really expected of me wasn't religious at all. For that they would have called a priest. Practical help in finding a solution to this very human problem is what they hoped for: for Eddie to give up the gun and be placed where he would be safe. They had called

me because I knew Eddie. In the final analysis it was my relationship with Eddie and now with his family, not with God, that was important here. They would ultimately choose their own rational for life's absurdity. And who was I to judge their choice?

"Didn't he join the army right out of high school, Mrs. Falcone?"

I knew he had. The real question was why he was home. Eddie had been sent straight to Vietnam after basic training and his tour wasn't up yet. Still has three months to go.

Standing straight and stiff in her corner, Mrs. Falcone pieced together the story.

IDA FALCONE:

Eddie was home three days, Reverend. Told his brother some of what it was like there. Six months he was in Vietnam and seems to have been a good grunt. They call themselves that. I don't think he drank much and stayed clear of drugs, as far as we know. Eddie's always been a predictable and dependable boy.

SWINTON:

Mrs. Falcone worked her handkerchief and backed further into the corner of the room.

IDA FALCONE:

For months Eddie said he went on night patrols and had firefights in the jungle. In Pleiku Province, I think it was. He said once he was sent out on patrol for five nights in a row. On the last night they captured a North Vietnamese soldier and while they waited for the helicopter, he said his buddies decided to cut the prisoner up. This is really awful Reverend, but I guess you ought to know. I said why didn't they take him back, but Eddie said the guys decided he would just get thrown out of an airplane or something.

BROTHER IN LAW:

So Eddie says they tie this guy up to a tree, strip him necked and get in line to carve off a piece of him. They cut his eyes out, and then his nose was next. Ears and privates they cut off too. Finally they cut him open, gutted him like a deer, and left him tied to the tree as a warning to other North Vietnamese.

SWINTON:

My jaw was tight and I felt a tremor in my face as I stared into the incredulous eyes of Ida Falcon's brother-in-law. A fine dew formed on my forehead and absently I pushed a finger through it. I could imagine all too real the curses and grunts of the men, boys really, bent to their work. I could smell their sweat and the sweet odor of rotting vegetation.

BROTHER IN LAW:

Eddie says he stood off and didn't take no part Reverend. Thank God for that, huh? The frightening thing is that he says it really hadn't meant nothing to him. He's actually seen worse, if you can believe that. How could it a meant nothing to him Reverend Swinton, something like that?

SWINTON:

It meant something, I thought. It meant something, but it would probably take a lifetime to find out what.

The big man pushed a plaid flannel sleeve across his face, gripped the banister, and went on. He didn't expect an answer. "

BROTHER IN LAW:

The next evening, Eddie's told by his sergeant to get ready, they was going on patrol again. Now that's six nights n a row and it seems Eddie just up and says no, not him, he wasn't going. He says he didn't know why, but something in him just says no. Seems like they wasn't really required to go that many nights in a row and Eddie says, no. Well, as you can imagine, there was this big row and Eddie's thrown in the stockade. When he still refused to go and it looks like he's coming apart in the head, he's sent stateside for a mental evaluation. That's when Eddie goes AWOL and comes home.

IDA FALCONE:

Today he got the shotgun, And walked back in the woods. He told me, don't worry yourself mom, everything's fine. When his brother found him that's when he was roaming around in the woods and muttering about shooting uniforms and killing himself.

Eddie's father came down the stairs, now.

GEORGE:

He's really tense and agitated and he won't give up that damn shotgun. Said he won't go back to the army because they'll just put him in jail again. He'll kill anybody in a uniform who

tries to take him…Good evening, Reverend Swinton. Sorry to drag you out like this, but it's sure good of you to come. You know anything we can do to settle him down?

SWINTON:

Settle him down—a sedative to blunt the cutting edge of unwanted memory. Abraham Fosse came to my mind, Abraham, my fishing buddy and family doctor. Everyone called him ham. So, Ham, I thought, it's time to go to work. Time to be a doctor. Why did I think he would come? That was not even the question. He had the skills, the ability to help. It was assumed he would respond. So I called Fosse, explained the situation and asked if he would come over; give Eddie something to calm him down. It was almost midnight now and Ham was incredulous.

DR. FOSSE:

"Wait a minute boy! You wake me up in the middle of the night and ask if I'll come give a sedative to an upset AWOL soldier less than forty-eight hours from the jungles of Vietnam. A guy sitting in a dark room with a loaded shotgun on his lap. A guy threatening to kill anyone in a uniform and maybe even himself?

SWINTON:

"Yeah Ham. So don't wear your World War One uniform.

DR. FOSSE:

It was the Korean War, you sorry excuse for a Christian. Can't you get someone else to do this? Call Dr. Mallow.

SWINTON:

Jesus Ham. Mallow isn't my doctor. I don't call him when I'm sick. I don't fish with him. And it wasn't at his house that I ate that disgusting slice of beef tongue. God I almost had to leave the table when you cut into that thing….Look, we need you now.

DR. FOSSE:

"You'll pay, you bastard.

SWINTON:

Fosse's face was a deathly gray and his eyes were dancing and jumping under his black bushy eyebrows when he walked into the parlor. I had to stifle a smile when I saw that the doctor

has come in such a hurry he had thrown an overcoat on over his pajamas and wore black wingtip shoes with no socks. The whole outfit was topped off by a gray gangster fedora that had been out of style for twenty-five years. He was clearly scared to death but that didn't stop him from throwing another barb. After the family introductions, he sidled next to me.

DR. FOSSE:

A wreck of a Catholic ministered to by a Protestant clergyman who couldn't catch fish with dynamite, and an old Jew doctor who doesn't know enough to stay in bed….Who else are you going to involve in this ecumenical circus, boy?

SWINTON:

"He's upstairs Ham. His father'll take you up. Good luck. And Ham, don't make any sudden moves."

How the hell I could find humor in this situation was an embarrassment and a few uninvited Santayana lines crowded into my head,

"As in the crevices of Caesar's tomb/ The sweet herbs flourish on a little earth: / So in this great disaster of our birth/ We can be happy, and forget our doom."

When Dr. Fosse came downstairs he looked more sad and bewildered than scared.

DR. FOSSE:

I remember the kid now. Marty, my grandson, was the goalie on that team. I never missed a home game….It's sad. The whole business is sad. He's still holding that shotgun you know, but he's calm and a little more rational now. He's convinced you're going to lock him up again. Of course that's exactly what you plan to do, isn't it? Don't miss the irony here boy. It's one of life's raw materials. You have four hours Reverend. Let me know what happens or what else I can do.

SWINTON:

After seeing Dr. Fosse out, Mrs. Falcone suggested that maybe the Army recruiter who signed Eddie up could contact the army base and get them to take him to a military hospital. Well, the recruiter wasn't too happy when I called him, told him about Eddie, and asked him to come to the house. Fortunately he felt some responsibility for Eddie. He arrived in slacks and a sport coat—no uniform.

The irony of our situation cut even deeper when after calls to five army bases and hospitals, it became apparent the army wanted no part of AWOL Private First Class Eddie Falcone; not in the middle of the night, not tomorrow, and probably not ever. The fact that he was AWOL, that he was suicidal and needed to be under cover, and that he has spent six months do nasty work in Vietnam meant nothing to them. One after another, they said they were sorry, but there was nothing they could do. The recruiter, Chip was his name, was embarrassed for himself and for the army. He stayed on to offer moral support if nothing else.

It was my turn then to try local hospitals that had psychiatric wards. With each call, the story was the same. He must be admitted by a psychiatrist. Do you have a psychiatrist who will admit him?

No. Could you give me the name of one I could call?

Well, no. There are no psychiatrists here this time of night and you couldn't contact them anyway at this hour unless you were a patient with an emergency.

Listen, this guy is an emergency. We have a young man here who is suicidal. He's also dangerous to others and needs to be under cover tonight.

"I'm sorry. We can't help you without a psychiatrist.

Okay, time was running out. The Army won't help this kid. The local hospitals can't help, how about the Navy?

It was a long shot, but I called the Chelsea Naval Hospital outside Boston.

NURSE:

This guy's in the Army. Let them take care of him.

SWENTON:

The Army wouldn't do anything. In fact, the Army's washed their hands of him, at least for the moment.

NURSE:

Hold on a minute. Okay, the Doc here says we'll take him. Tell me where you are and we'll come and get him.

SWINTON:

Okay, here's where wer are and by the way, please come in a regular car and don't wear military uniforms.

NURSE:

No uniforms?

SWINTON:

Just no uniforms. They seem to upset him.

NURSE:

Yeah, well…right. We'll see you in an hour or so.

SWINTON:

When they pulled up in front of the house three hours later, the Navy ambulance had all its lights flashing. Red light reverberated off the trees and cast flickering shadows and eerie crimson bursts of light on the house. Four male nurses in white Navy uniforms piled out and strode single file up the walk.

As they entered the parlor everyone stood up. A flood of hopeful expectation swept through the little group followed almost immediately by a sense of foreboding. This was as close to a moment of truth many of us would ever reach. The thought of Eddie' reaction, imminent now, fired our nerves.

"Christ," I muttered, "I asked you not to wear uniforms."

The nurses were upbeat, pleasant, matter-of-fact. They were young, their faces expressive and smiling. They apologized for being late. "Got lost," they said. They four acted as though this was all in a day's work for them. No big deal. And no, they didn't need any coffee or anything to eat. Thanks anyway. Where is the young man? We'll collect him.

IDA FALCONE:

He's upstairs and remember he has a shotgun.

NURSE:

We'll be careful. John, you two go up and we'll wait here.

SWINTON:

Everyone was still standing, talking when Eddie appeared on the top landing. All conversation stopped. The silence was palpable. Sticky, thick, and heavy, it crowded the air out of the room. Eddie looked small and withdrawn as he descended the staircase between the two nurses. One had his arm over Eddie's shoulder in the attitude of old buddies. Without pausing, the three glided straight toward the front door. As Eddie passed he turned and looked at me. It wasn't fear or defeat, resignation, or even accusation I saw in Eddie's expression. Any of those I was prepared for. It was his eyes: they were cold and gray, empty as though no one was inside. Nothing flashed: no fire, no light, not a glimmer of recognition. Two narrow slits revealed a deep and profound emptiness.

The sun was edging over the horizon when the ambulance left. I talked with the family for a few minutes, discussing Eddie and what we planned to do. Then I took my leave and retraced my steps back to my car. The snow on the walk was tramped hard from the evening's coming and going, but still glinted in the slanting light. How much time had passed? How many lifetimes had we used up that evening? I scrapped the ice off the windshield of my car, slid behind the wheel, but didn't start the engine. I sat with my head resting on my arms and cradled the steering wheel. In the sharp cold I allowed myself to consider for the first time what might have happened. *What if the State Police had been alerted?...After all, a shotgun and threats had been involved.…If they had circled the house, gray-blue uniformed shadows.…If they had removed the family and occupied the living room themselves, lined the stairway, clustered in the hall outside Eddie's room.…If they had failed to talk Eddie out (and they would have failed).…If Eddie had raised the bedroom window to look out, his shotgun now forgotten in his arms, visible from the ground.… If a young trooper who fancied himself a sniper had felt threatened…and fired.…*I opened the car door, leaned into the crystalline morning and vomited on the pristine snow. After a few hours sleep, I would go to Chelsea.

MUSIC

The hospital lay in a labyrinth of dull gray Navy Base buildings. I threaded my way through the maze of roads until I found the building housing the psychiatric ward. Two of the nurses who had collected Eddie were still on duty. They greeted me warmly and took me to Eddie. I found him on his bunk jammed into the corner of a small pale-green room. His knees were drawn up tight against his chest. Like a trapped animal, he was trying to make himself as small as possible.

He was a tight ball of tension. His head was bowed and he chewed without ceasing on the frayed lapel of his robe. With his left hand, he clasped his collar tight about his chin.

Without looking up he pushed himself further into his corner when I walked into the room.

EDDIE:

I told you they would lock me up.

SWINTON:

And that was all. It was clear Eddie was not going to say anything further. If he couldn't kill himself with the shotgun, maybe there was another way. If he could withdraw enough into his corner, make himself small enough, perhaps he could just disappear.

I sat with him for a few moments to offer a presence, a link to another world, then found my way out. Muttering an oath of anger and frustration, I drove through the labyrinth of tedious nondescript buildings and thought to return to my old dispensation.

MUSIC

The fall New England sky was a pastel blue of striking clarity. The trees were russet and I was sitting in my study thinking about another place. Alice Fay and I were leaving Barton. Alice Fay had been selected for a fellowship to study in Baltimore and once again she was taking me in tow. I didn't mind. I was ready for a new life and if Alice Fay was ready to go, then that was fine with me.

As I pondered my new life in Baltimore a young Private First Class in a starched Army uniform appeared in the doorway. Standing stiff and straight as a Prussian officer was Eddie Falcone.

EDDIE:

"Do you have a minute, Reverend Swinton?"

SWINTON:

Eddie. Come on in. Sit down. You look great. I know you've been around but what's it been, almost a year now?

EDDIE:

I can only stay a minute Reverend. I'll stand if that's okay. I just came by to thank you for all you did that night. I don't remember much of it frankly, but my mother said you did just the right thing. She's very grateful….I just wanted to let you know that I'm clear with the Army now and I've re-upped for another tour. I've volunteered to go back to Vietnam.

SWINTON:

You're going back! Christ, Eddie, haven't you given enough?

EDDIE:

I've been doing a lot of thinking , Reverend, You know, I was only in the hospital a few weeks, well about three actually, and the Army dropped the AWOL charges. After that I kicked around here for a while and decided to re-up and go back to Nam….Things just aren't working out here. I can't find a job. My father's on my back all the time now. To tell the truth, well, I just don't fit in here anymore.

SWINTON:

"Eddie, of course you do."

I remembered the eyes and looked closely at Eddie. He was a smart looking soldier: sharp; uniform perfect, standing straight, both hands nervously folding and unfolding his garrison cap. It was the same way his worried mother had constantly folded, unfolded, and balled up her handkerchief. Eddie's face was flat, matter of fact, somewhat hard. His eyes were unsettling like they had been that night: gray, cold, empty.

EDDIE:

Everything I know, Reverend Swinton, was taught me in the military, and most of that I got in Vietnam. What I learned, what I'm good at is useless here. I can't make the change. Here things go in a straight line. I mean, everything starts somewhere and goes somewhere. You get a girlfriend, get married, have kids—things are predictable, dependable.
SWINTON:

I watched this boy, he was still a boy to me, standing army stiff slowly reach out and almost imperceptibly put three fingers on the edge of my desk to steady himself. He looked straight ahead, his expression not changing.

EDDIE:

You get a job, work your way up, everything fits together. I mean, there are rules to play by. Play by the rules, everything's okay. I'm not made for that anymore. Plan for the future, that's what my father keeps saying. Eddie, plan for the future. (*Agitated now*) I can't do it. I can't do it. I can't make it here and I know I'm in trouble if I stay.

SWINTON:

There had been some trouble. I had heard little things, Eddie making threats, a pushing and shoving incident at the local bar but nothing really serious yet.

EDDIE:

Remember that strip of ribbon thing we talked about once, *(calm now*) where it looks like there are two sides but there's really only one?

SWINTON:

The Möbius strip?

EDDIE:

Yeah, that's it. You start out in one place, make a lot of twists and turns, do anything you want, but you always wind up back in the same spot. That's what Vietnam is. You go on patrol, kill people, blow things up, go on R and R, and when it's all over, you're back in the same place. All they want to know is how many people you killed. How many bodies you saw. Nothing's changed except more people are dead and more stuff is blown apart. Then what do you do? You do it over again and over again until they get you. When you're one of the bodies they count, then it's over.

As though to confide a dark secret, Eddie leaned slightly forward, his hands on my desk. I edged back in my chair.

EDDIE:

It's simple Reverend Swinton. There are only three rules back there: support your buddies, try to survive, and remember that this is the only world there is. A lot of guys over there talk about

‘the world.’ They mean home. ‘Back in the world,’ they say. But Nam in our world and if you think you can go back to the world you left, you’re already dead. The strip only has one side.

SWINTON:

He straightened up and put on his garrison cap. Once Again he was the clean, crisp soldier. By appearance, enough to make any mother proud.

EDDIE:

Like I said, Reverend, doing the same thing over and over again, that’s what I’m good for now, doing what I was taught to do: hunt, kill, rest, and then do it again. My buddies back there understand that. We support each other. We can talk to each other. As nasty as it is, there is something clean and uncomplicated about it, Reverend. No deceit, no hypocrisy, no pretense. So I’m going back where I fit in. Nam is my world. That’s home now….Well, I better go. I just want to say thanks again for everything.

SWINTON:

Something, I wanted to say something, anything to bring Eddie back. I wanted to say, “You are home Eddie.” I wanted to say,” Thanks you for your sacrifice.” I wanted to say, “I’m glad you’re alive.” But nothing came. I stood and did the only thing I knew to do: take his hand in both of mine, look into his eyes, then allow Eddie to slowly slip his hand away. I walked him to the door and watched him drift away into that fine fall morning.

MUSIC

That was six years ago. Now Alice Fay and I were back in Barton to participate in the two hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of the church. We hadn’t visited in the intervening years but had kept in touch with several close friends including the postmistress, Margaret Camion. Dinner our last night in town was hat her house and the conversation turned to people we had known, “back then.”

MARGARET

“Eddie, that Falcone boy, you remember him, don’t you. Well he went back to Vietnam, you know. Everybody asked why….He didn’t have to. Well, what I heard is that one night on patrol, when the group stopped for a rest he just disappeared in the jungle. Can you imagine that? I mean, Eddie’s brother talked to one of his buddies who was there. He said he was talking to Eddie, looked around and when he looked back, Eddie was gone. Just like that, gone. His pack and his rifle gone too.

SWINTON:

My hands were trembling. I put my coffee down carefully, deliberately. My jaw clinched involuntarily. Under the table, I pressed my hands into my lap so Margaret wouldn't see them shake. Alice Fay gripped my arm and I took her hand and held on. In the bright light Margaret's dining room began to turn. I was sliding into a dark hole in a flow of anger, guilt, and frustration. Tell me, dammit… What could I have done, different for Christ's sake? What could any of us have done? I clung to Alice Fay's hand and stared out the window looking for the New England darkness, longing to see into the blackness. But there was no penetrating the window glass, only Alice Fay and I on the surface of the squared panes, looking back at each other—vertiginous madness, our arms under the table holding on, and I descending none the less. *Is that what we are now, reflections trapped on a glass?* A darkness not to be found outside filled the brightly lit dining room and I closed my eyes before its terror. Then ….*You! All my life I searched for you. All through my ministry, I searched for you. In the darkness and the light, I searched for You. In the eyes of others, I searched for You. In city streets and alleys…in words and in deeds, I searched for You. And where were You? Where?...Now…now in this pit, You show up behind me, put your hand on my shoulder and…offer nothing, no radiance, no release, no explanation…nothing…only Your presence.*….Framed in the window, now circumscribed by our glass world, I looked at Alice Fay. Her sad smile held me fast, solid now….Eddie… *You were there when he picked up his pack and his rifle and gave up to the bush, weren't You? You were the desire and the desired…the longing and the longed for, weren't You? You were the thought that moved him and the tall grass that gathered him in….Yes,"* a voice said, and it was my own.

MARGARET:

Well when it was time to move and Eddie wasn't there, they looked for him for a little bit. Said they couldn't find him anywhere. Nobody said how long they looked. I don't think it could have been very long. But it is the jungle. Like a shadow, they said, poor Eddie, he just melted away into the bush. Nobody's seen or heard of him since. I mean, for all anybody knows he might still be out there. Of course Ms. Falcone was informed he was missing. Then his letters stopped. Well, she was shattered. Can you imagine, Alice Fay, your son? I didn't see her at the post office anymore. They said she went down fast after that. I don't think she really ever looked too good after he went back anyway. She's in the Meadow View Nursing Home now—that's over on Marquette Hill. Stands in the foyer every day, they say, straight and tall in her black dress with its white collar. She still wears her hair, it's gray now, pulled back in that bun. They say she twists a hanky in her clasped hands and keeps watch out the front door. Tells the nurses she wants to be there—to see Eddie up the walk when he comes home.

MUSIC