

FADE IN

EXT. OPEN OCEAN - DAYBREAK

SUBTITLE: SOMEWHERE IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC

A calm sea is illuminated by warm pre-dawn light.

A seagull swoops into view, soaring over the surface of the glistening, rolling water.

NARRATOR

On September 2, 1945, Japanese Foreign Minister Mamoro Shigemitsu. Surrendered in a formal ceremony aboard the USS Missouri to Allied General Douglas MacArthur and Admiral Chester Nimitz, thus ending World War II in the Pacific Theater.

A brilliant ray of sun breaks on the horizon as a tattered raft drifts into view.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

In spite of the unilateral surrender, chaos existed. Many warriors in the tradition of their ancestors refused to surrender and lay down their arms. This, in spite of the devastation from the bombing of both Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the emperor's declaration of peace.

Closer on the raft -

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

In mid-September, the old WW I minesweeper, Albatross, was hobbling its way back to Pearl Harbor where it would be decommissioned, and more than likely scuttled, having served her country long and well.

The raft in full view is occupied by a lone survivor. Emaciated and drawn, he sleeps in a fetal position. Seemingly lifeless but for his shivering body.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

It's crew of 35 weary, homesick sailors were on their way back to warm beds, hot meals - and loved ones awaiting their return to homes across America.

(a beat)

But fate was on a different course.

The sailor's charred leg shows third-degree burns as well as blisters from days exposed to relentless sunlight.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Eight days have passed since the minesweeper Albatross was sunk by a renegade Japanese submarine. All but a handful of the crew perished. Many were bitten and devoured by sharks. Others mercifully drowned. They may have been the lucky ones.

The sailor turns as he wakes. His scalp is singed, leaving only clumps of hair. He coughs and groans in pain.

He reaches into his shirt pocket, extracting a pair of Rosary beads. He kisses the cross, blesses himself, and closes his eyes to pray, his lips barely moving.

The NARRATOR introduces himself -

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

My name is Santino Thomas Bonetti. I was 17 years old, nick-named "T-Bone" by my friends back home in Bayonne, New Jersey, where my parents owned the local diner across from the shipyard.

A flash of sunlight reflects from the oval St. Christopher medal he wears around his neck.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

In 1943, the war was raging in Europe and the Pacific. My friends and I phoned-up documents so we could enlist, underage. It was important that we "do our bit". Get over there and kick some ass. We were proud to serve our country!

The seagull descends and rests on the end of the raft. It ruffles its feathers, and stills.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

I wasn't so proud now. I was simply scared to death, and very near to it. All I wanted to do was survive. All my bravado went down with the ship. I wasn't so much interested in kicking the enemy's ass now - as just saving my own.

His eyes open, squinting in the sunlight.

His POV -

The silhouette of the seagull against the bright sunlight on the far end of the raft.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

One day, a seagull lands on the gunnel of the raft. It just sat there, starin' at me. I moved my hand, expecting it to fly away.

The seabird remains still, cocking its head to and fro as birds do when contemplating something of interest.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

It just sat there. Motionless ...

SLOW DISSOLVE
TO:

INT. DESERTED BEACH - SUNRISE

(SUBTITLE) 1997 LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA - 50 YEARS LATER

TIGHT on T-Bone's weathered face. He is now 67 years of age. He wears an old drab green navy jacket, baggy khakis, and an Dodgers baseball cap that's seen more than a few seasons.

T-Bone leans on the railing of a municipal pier as a jogger in the distance lumbers towards the pier. Waves crash as foamy surf rolls in and recedes.

He tosses a handful of bread scraps as a flock of seagulls descend, a cacophony of screeching and hollering as they vie for chunks of bread in the air and on the ground.

He whistles and talks to the flock of gulls.

T-BONE

Cha-cha-cha! There now, settle down. It's just a fella joggin'. He means you no harm. Cha-cha-cha!

As the jogger nears the pier, the congregation of birds scatter while continuing to peck in the sand for scraps.

The sun-bleached railing is marred with bird droppings and ancient gouges from cutting bait and gutting fish.

T-Bone clutches the empty burlap sack and sticks it under his arm. He looks down over the railing.

T-BONE'S POV - as the jogger runs up the wooden stairway from the beach below.

The jogger, KENNY BARNES, 28, is a freckle-faced redhead. Out of breath, he does not appear to be the athletic type.

KENNY

Sorry I'm late ...

T-Bone extends his hand with a grin.

T-BONE

Acht! No matter. It's feedin' time around here.

(motions to the birds)

Coffee?

KENNY

'Love some.

They meander down the pier towards the local coffee shop.

CUT TO:

INT. - BONETTI'S SHIPYARD DINER - DAY

(SUBTITLE) BAYONNE, NEW JERSEY, 1944

Bonetti's Diner is a small family eatery that might qualify as a "greasy spoon" except for the impeccable tidiness.

The white marble countertop shows years of wear, but everything else sparkles, as do the chrome stools stationed along the counter.

Fancy pastries are featured under clear plastic domes flanked by the red ketchup and yellow mustard plastic squeeze bottles. A hefty round glass sugar canister.

A row of red naugahyde booths against the front window overlook the busy highway the Bayonne Naval Shipyard in the distance beyond.

"T-Bone" is 16 years old. He wears a stained apron over a white T-shirt and chews a big wad of bubble gum while polishing glassware.

His shiny St. Christopher medal hangs from his neck more like a status symbol than a religious one.

LUIGI "PINKY" RIZZOLO, also 16, sits across from him wearing a open-collar blue shirt with his own gold crucifix neckwear on full display.

T-Bone slides an order of french fries to him.

PINKY

Thanks, T.

Pinky plucks and dunks a french-fry into his coffee mug.

Next to him, JOHNNY SIEMANSKI, 17, sips a chocolate egg cream through a straw, while working on a crossword puzzle.

JOHNNY

Six letters for "feeble-minded"...

PINKY

How 'bout "stupid", stupid?

T-Bone grins while chewing gum. He blows a bubble.

A squeaky ceiling fan whirls above trailing orange fly paper strips dotted with unfortunate, feckless flies.

T-Bone's bubble bursts with a crisp POP!

JOHNNY

Nah ... stupid ain't gonna work.

PINKY

Then try "idiot", idiot.

JOHNNY

Does "idiot" have two 't's?

The conundrum is interrupted by the tinkle of bells above the diner's door.

Three giddy bobbysoxers bounce in and slide into a booth.

The arrival of dazzling dames is evidenced by intense stares.

PINKY

Awright now, HERE we go!

He wets his fingers and primps his pompadour.

T-Bone grabs a few menus -

T-BONE
Lessee what we got here ...

As he heads off to meet-and-greet them, Pinky warns -

PINKY
Try not to drool on 'em, heh?

AT THE BOOTH -

T-BONE
Hiya dolls - how ya's doin'?

He pulls the pencil from behind his ear and wets it on his tongue, adding a flirtatious wink.

T-BONE (CONT'D)
What can I get for ya's?

They focus at their menus, without readily answering.

BOBBYSOXER #1
(nonchalant)
Uh, jus' get us some french fries
and three cherry cokes, okay?

She hands him the menus.

T-BONE
(perky)
Sure! Comin' right up!

He shuffles off.

One of the girls gets up to approach the colorful Wurlitzer juke box at the end of the diner.

TIGHT INSIDE THE JUKEBOX as it whirls into action.

We HEAR Frank Sinatra's "Night and Day". She smiles and walks back to her friends.

BACK AT THE COUNTER -

PINKY
(annoyed)
Aw fuh crissake!

T-BONE
(to Pinky)
Whaz a' matta wit you?

As Pinky smolders, Johnny answers with a thumb to the jukebox.

JOHNNY

He don't like Sinatra. 'Says he's a sissy.

PINKY

(explodes)

An' a coward!

T-Bone shrugs.

T-BONE

Whaddya tawkin' about?

PINKY

I heard he ain't goin' into th' army 'cause of a bad ear or some bullshit. Fuckin' guy's a singer - an' he can't hear? A bum ear - my Sicilian ass!

JOHNNY

(winks, to T-Bone)

He's jus' jealous, that's all.

PINKY

Jealous? I wish I had bad ears so I don't hav'ta listen t' dat friggin' Sinatra stugats all over town.

He dunks another french fry, this time with a vengeance as coffee splashes.

T-Bone wipes up the coffee and dumps fries into the fryer.

JOHNNY

(to T-Bone)

He's been seein' Rita Gianuzzi. Rita an' her friends went to the Paramount last week, and they got so close, Sinatra actually brushed up against her tits. She says he even winked at'em!

T-BONE

Her tits?

JOHNNY

NO! At Rita an' her friends. She's been wearing the same sweater for a week 'cuz she says it smells like Sinatra's after-shave.

Johnny finishes his egg cream with a gurgling slurp.

PINKY

That sweater's startin' smell like
your mama's sauerkraut!

T-BONE

(grins)

Well ... I like Rita.

JOHNNY

An' let's face it. She does have a
great set a' knockers, Pink ...

Pinky's temper explodes. He reaches out, grabs Johnny's
shirt, and cocks his fist

PINKY

You're gonna be facin' my fist, you
degenerate!

T-BONE

Alright, alright calm down. Here -
lemme fill up yer coffee.

T-Bone pours Pinky a fresh coffee, and slides the glass sugar
canister over.

T-BONE (CONT'D)

C-mon, settle down. Enough, now.

After a beat-

JOHNNY

I still need six letters for
"feeble-minded".

Pinky sugars his coffee as T-Bone pulls the fries out of the
fryer to drain.

PINKY

Shut the fuck up, dimwit.

JOHNNY

D-I-M-W-I-T ... hey - that works!

PINKY

Thank Christ!
(slurps coffee)

From O.S., down at the booth, a bobbysoxer yells -

BOBBYSOXER #1

Hey - where's our fries?

T-Bone rushes the fries and cokes down to the booth. Johnny goes back to the crossword.

JOHNNY

Three letters for feline -

Pinky changes the subject -

PINKY

Jesus, would you knock it off with that crossword puzzle shit. We need t' start thinkin' about joining up and doin' our bit.

JOHNNY

Yeah, but ya gotta be 18.

T-Bone returns to join the conversation.

PINKY

Not if ya know how t' pull some strings.

He looks to each side as if someone were eavesdropping.

PINKY (CONT'D)

Look, youse knuckleheads. I know a guy over in Jersey City can fake up a birth certificate that would make your mama scratch 'er head.

After a long pause ...

T-BONE

I dunno know, Pink. My ma's been talkin' about the seminary again. Y'know ... becomin' a priest - like my cousin Michael.

The seminary idea thuds. Johnny breaks the tension.

JOHNNY

T'ree letters for "feline". What's a feline?

Pinky explodes again, slamming his hand down on the counter.

PINKY

It's a PUSSY! Like the two a' youse if you don't wanna shoot some Jerries or a coupla Japs after what they done at Pearl Harbor.

He jumps up, and swigs down the rest of his coffee.

PINKY (CONT'D)

Look - you ladies wanna sit around here an' bullshit, it don't mean nuthin' to me.

Jumping up, he grabs his coat off the coat rack and turns the collar up.

PINKY (CONT'D)

There's guys dyin' over there while we sit here on our asses flirting with a bunch a' floozies 'what's flipped for that Frankie faggot.

He walks over, and rips the door open as the transom bells tinkle again.

PINKY (CONT'D)

(with authority)

T' tell ya th' truth, I'm ashamed a' myself an' you guys oughta be too - the hell with ya's!

He storms out. T-Bone exchanges blank glances with Johnny.

T-BONE

Cat.

JOHNNY

Huh?

T-BONE

Try "cat" - it's a feline.

"I'll Never Smile Again" wafts from the Wurlitzer.

T-Bone takes Pinky's cup, and wipes the counter clean.

JOHNNY

C - A - T Shit... I should a got that. My sister's even got one.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. - CHUCK'S COFFEE SHOP - DAY

ESTABLISHING SHOT: "CHUCK'S COFFEE SHOP/ HOME OF THE WEASEL"

Chuck's is a breakfast institution. Local fisherman, finished with their day's work, guys in shirt and ties just starting, sit at the counter.

Innocuous "Today Show" chatter on a TV overhead.