

Life Through the Lens
Pilot
(The Camera Eye)

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OVER BLACK

REMY (O.S.)

It's said a photograph can stop time. I believe it's more of a time machine, transporting us back to a moment in our lives - reviving a memory that allows us to see who we were and influencing who we will become.

FADE IN

SUPER: Horn of Africa, Somalia. 1993.

EXT. SOMALIA - DESERT - DAY

Thick morning mist shrouds gently rolling hills. A warm glow in the sky. Only the sound of wind.

A silhouette of someone approaching with rhythmic, purposeful strides.

The figure draws closer, as the "hills" come into focus.

They aren't hills in morning mist. They are piles of HUMAN SKULLS being pounded by blowing sand.

The MAN walks past the mound of humanity where he sees...

Shiny empty cans strewn across the sand, emblazoned with the American flag and "USA Drinking Water," rocking back and forth in the wind.

The cans crackle from the pelting sand. The trail of cans leads to a reaching HAND.

It's a CHILD (6). Skin and bones, barely alive. Not far away, the child's MOTHER sits in the dirt next to their mud and grass hut holding a BABY.

Their eyes, distant and vacant. A striking contrast to...

The BLUEST EYES you've ever scene. Blinking in the bright sun. We see the man now - news photographer REMY WALLACE (50s). Chiseled, model face, lean and unshaven. He runs his hand through thick, blonde hair - a nervous tick.

He scans the horrific scene, studying for a moment.

He wears a weathered vest packed with lenses, 35mm film, a pen, and notebook. Press credentials for the Los Angeles Times and National Geographic dangle from his vest.

From his shoulder, Remy removes a worn Nikon 35mm camera, its black edges revealing the brass underneath from heavy use.

He brings the camera to his left eye and slowly exhales.

CAMERA LENS POV: With the water can in the foreground, the child's outstretched hand comes into focus, from her frail body. She looks up, gaunt and desperate.

CLICK!

INSERT: INSIDE the CAMERA the shutter opens for a brief moment, light moves through the lens and fills the chamber, then the negative image of the young girl appears on the unexposed film for a split second, then it's dark.

An image transferring to the film takes the blink of an eye, but here it happens ever so slowly.

The tragic moment, frozen in time. A memory now.

TITLE: LIFE THROUGH THE LENS

TITLE SEQUENCE: MONTAGE OF NEWSPAPER PAGES TURNING TO DIFFERENT PHOTOS, EACH CAPTURING A KEY MOMENT IN HISTORY, IT ALL FADES TO THE FRONT OF A 35MM LENS, PUSHING THROUGH IT INTO THE EYE OF THE PHOTOGRAPHER.

EXT. SOMALIA - DESERT - DAY

Remy moves carefully, almost stalking. Crouched, he snaps another image.

CARRIE NEWTON (30s) moves in and comforts the young girl. The deep-set, tired eyes reveal Carrie's lived through plenty of horrors as a U.N. aid worker.

Carrie sits the dehydrated child up and gives her water, then moves to the woman and her baby. Remy watches with intensity.

REMY

Are they going to make it?

CARRIE

Her name is Dahbo. She's lost four children to the militia. Dozens in this village have been killed.

(beat)

CARRIE (CONT'D)

It's dangerous for anyone to be here.

REMY

Yet, here you are. Why?

CARRIE

If they can have hope, so can I.

EXT. SOMALIA - U.N. COMPOUND - DAY - LATER

Under an orange sky, Tents marked "U.N." dot a landscape barren of anything other than hard, chalky dirt and a few white trucks emblazoned with black "U.N." letters.

INT. SOMALIA - U.N. COMPOUND - TENT - DAY

Remy uses a metal pan as a makeshift mirror for a dry shave. Water is too precious to use for grooming.

Dozens of red dots mark his face as he scrapes the razor across an unshaven section of skin.

Remy notices the fractured reflection of Carrie standing behind him.

CARRIE

You fly out tomorrow?

REMY

That's the plan.

Carrie turns to leave, then stops and again looks at Remy.

CARRIE

You could stay. There's more to this story.

Remy stops shaving and watches her wondering - is she wanting him to stay because there's a connection between them? It wouldn't be the first time that happened.

REMY

I've got what I need. Time to go home and tell this story.

CARRIE

You need to KEEP telling this story from HERE.

(beat)

I want you here.

Confirmed. This makes him smile, but...

REMY

I can do more good back in the states.

Discouraged, Carrie turns just as...

CB radios SQUAWK loudly in the background.

CARRIE

Get to the trucks!

Half shaven, Remy grabs his vest and cameras and SPRINTS out of the tent behind Carrie and other U.N. WORKERS.

EXT. SOMALIA - VILLAGE - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The U.N. trucks speed into the makeshift grass-hut village they were in earlier as dust clouds follow.

Smoke bellows from the grass hut roofs and burned bodies.

U.N. WORKERS pile out of their trucks, hastily looking for anyone alive. Remy winces at the smell of burning flesh and pulls a scarf up over his mouth and nose.

CARRIE

The Militia!

Dahbo sits cradling the charred bodies of her daughter and infant son.

Remy unflinchingly brings up his camera and shoots.

REMY

Why didn't the militia kill her?

CARRIE

They leave someone alive to tell other villages. It's a warning to others not to accept help.

Remy peers into the dark, sad eyes of Dahbo. She wants to give up. There's nothing left for her.

She holds out her hand to him. Remy, hesitates. Carrie nods.

In true news photographer form, he snaps a photo of her outstretched hand and pained face.

Carrie looks on, mystified that Remy dismissed the outreach for help and a little kindness. She crouches down and wraps Dahbo in her arms.

A harsh cough overtakes Remy, which becomes a violent hack.

CARRIE

Two years of pre-med tells me
that's not a cold.

REMY

I'm fine. Just this dust and smoke.

CARRIE

I'd get that looked at when you get
back, if I were you.

EXT. SOMALIA - VILLAGE - DAY - LATER

Dirt flies out of a semi-shallow hole in the Earth. The U.N. TEAM finishes digging graves for the bodies.

Remy steadies himself. His eyes sharpen as he focuses the lens to capture the tragic moment.

Swaddled in soiled cloths, Dahbo carefully places each body into the grave then collapses to the ground in a heap.

She looks up to the heavens and releases a horrific SCREAM.

Remy approaches and holds the camera over her...the moment flashes into...

INT. L.A. TIMES - DARKROOM - DAY

Red light showers Remy as he works a tray, gently moving it to agitate the liquid over the photo paper inside.

The image comes to life.

Closer, it's the image of Dahbo, lying on the ground next to the grave filled with the bodies of her children. Her pained face frozen into a scream of FIERCE rage.

Remy applies a deft touch to the tray, as the image continues to build contrast and detail.

He carefully removes the photo, runs a squeegee over it and clips it to a line above, where several more dry.

Remy moves down the row of haunting images in the quiet of the room.

-Dahbo's daughter.

-Grass huts burning.

-Charred corpses on the ground.

- Dahbo in a fetal position on the ground, Carrie and other U.N. workers each with the hands on her for comfort.

Remy studies each image, then stops at one in particular. A photo of Dahbo's hand reaching toward him. The deep impact of it catches him off guard and he struggles to reign in his emotions.

Remy steels himself, unclips the photo, and exits through the revolving darkroom door into...

INT. L.A. TIMES - NEWSROOM - DAY

The Los Angeles Times newsroom purrs with the sounds of tapping keystrokes, the shrill chirp of digital phones, and police scanner chatter.

Remy squints in the bright light as he surveys the landscape.

Some REPORTERS riffle through notebooks for quotes as others make calls or chat, sharing stories of the day. Remy smiles at this. He's back home.

He walks toward a MAN sitting at a computer who seems to be having some problems.

INT. L.A. TIMES - PHOTO DESK - DAY

A section of the newsroom corrals the photographers. Purposefully set aside, as if keeping them away from the "real journalists."

Most desks are piled high with camera gear, stacks of 35mm film and boxed Kodak photo paper. No one sits at these desks since the photographers are all out in the field capturing images.

But, a couple of the desks hold only an overly large computer monitor, computer, and attached keyboard.

KIT KING (70s), a humble, round man with graying temples, who lives in sweater vests like your favorite uncle wore, eyes the computer screen at his desk, moving his cheaters up and down over his eyes. Remy watches him a moment, smiling at the scene.

KIT

There's like a one millionth of an inch tolerance between the screen in focus and out of focus.

He tosses the cheaters on the desk and leans in closer to the screen, hoping that helps.

REMY (O.S.)

Miss the good ol' days with a light table and loupe, don't ya?

KIT

HEY, REMY! I sure as heck do. Welcome back!

Kit slowly stands, aching from years as a photographer. The two men hug.

KIT

I didn't want to bother you in the darkroom.

REMY

Just finishing up a few photos from Somalia.

KIT

We're running these Sunday with the AP piece on the famine. And by the way don't get too attached to that darkroom.

REMY

What are you talking about?

KIT

Things have changed a little.

Remy scans the office, and notices a computer on most desks.

KIT

Moving on to new technology. Darkroom changes are next. Enlargers out in two weeks. Gonna put something called servers in the darkroom now.

Kit points to the monitor, which Remy turns away from, disinterested. Kit pushes on anyway.

KIT

And this is will be the darkroom.

Kit watches Remy for a moment, studying him.

KIT

Heard it was pretty gruesome over there. Take some time easing back into things here if you need to. It's been seven years since you've spent any real time in the newsroom.

Remy tosses the photo of the Dahbo's outstretched hand onto the desk.

REMY

I'm fine.

Kit is taken aback by the image.

KIT

There's no hurry.

Remy nods, not wanting this conversation to continue.

KIT

This can be a tough gig on the mind.

REMY

You've always said get the shot, then get out. I got the shot.

KIT

OK, but I'm wiser in my old age.

REMY

What's your advice now?

KIT

Take care of yourself first.

Kit points to a certificate on the wall.

INSERT: Scanning the certificate **"Columbia University, The Los Angeles Times, Pulitzer Prize in Photojournalism. Kit King."**

Next to it, a framed black and white image of a man straddling a woman on the ground with a knife to her throat. She's screaming in terror, eyes wide with panic. In the background, another man holds a revolver pointed at the man with the knife.

BACK TO SCENE

Kit's eyes stay on the photo. Still pained by it.

KIT

I could barely focus the camera I was so scared. The camera click made the kidnapper look over my way. I was sure he was going to kill us all. The kidnapper was the only one who died that day, but it could have gone so differently.

He closes his eyes, burying any emotions he still has about that experience.

KIT

I didn't do what I'm telling you to do now. Take time to process all you've witnessed. You've seen a lot in the last few years.

Remy looks around, completely uncomfortable. Finally...

REMY

So, how'd the reporters take the switch over?

Kit sighs.

KIT

Ahh, reporters. They don't give a crumb what they type on. I do miss the old clack of the typewriters around here. It's so quiet now.

Remy surveys the new landscape, again shaking his head at what he's seeing.

REMY

This is nonsense. The artistry of our work is now being handed over to some box on a desk.

Kit looks at Remy's photo again, marveling at the capture.

KIT

It's really good to have you back. Seven years abroad, two Pulitzer nominations. Not too shabby.

Remy looks on, now kinda pissed.

REMY

But zero wins.

Kit shakes his head in disbelief.

KIT

You were AP photographer of the year for the Gulf War photos. The Pulitzer nominations alone are more than most have in a lifetime.

Remy stands, quiet. Kit doesn't understand why Remy won't embrace his successes.

KIT

Anyway, you've got two weeks to get up to speed, then the darkroom is gone and your film cameras will be replaced with digital.

Remy looks up and sees...

Photographer JIMI LOTT (60s), slim, a face lined with years of experiences - not all of them good - and arms tattooed in a tapestry commemorating former girlfriends and bad decisions.

With Jimi stands LINDSAY JORDAN (20s), a striking blonde with fierce blue eyes, dripping with confidence.

She sees Remy and scowls as she removes cameras from around her neck. There's clearly a history here.

JIMI

The prodigal son returns to enlighten us all!

Lindsay runs her fingers through her thick, long hair, pushing it out of her eyes. She glares at Remy.

JIMI

While you've been running all over the fucking world, we've been here changing the news industry.

REMY

Digital? Not for me.

JIMI

Look around. We're changing, man. It's happening with or without you.

Remy shakes his head no. Jimi looks to Kit.

JIMI

I don't have time to hold this joker's hand through this.