

WHEN BROKEN GLASS FLOATS

A TRUE STORY

Written by

CHANRITHY HIM

Based on her internationally acclaimed, award-winning memoir,
When Broken Glass Floats: Growing Up Under the Khmer Rouge

Chanrithy Him

Authorchanrithyhim@gmail.com

(PAu 4-070-191)

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Under an assemblage of palm trees, ATHY, 13, spirited yet downtrodden in dark worn-out clothes, sobs near a grave.

Her GRANDFATHER, SIBLINGS, and a LOCAL MAN stand beside her, watching the outpouring of grief with muted empathy.

ATHY (V.O.)
I'm sorry, Chea. I couldn't help
you. I wish I knew medicine like
Pa. If I survive, one day I'll
become a doctor...

Athy weeps harder.

ATHY (V.O.)
Because I don't want to feel so
powerless ever again.

Suddenly, the ethereal spirit of CHEA, Athy's sister, rises up from the grave like the steam rising from a kettle, embracing Athy.

ATHY (V.O.)
If I die, I'll be one in the next
life...

EXT. HUT #2 - BACKYARD - DAY

Outside a humble hut, Athy compulsively tills the soil with a foot-long knife.

Succumbing to her emotions, she drops the knife, kneels on the dirt, and presses her hands together against her chest.

NOTE: Dialogue written in brackets henceforth denotes that it is being spoken in Khmer with English subtitles.

ATHY
[God, doesn't the world know what's
going on in Cambodia? Doesn't it
want to help? If I die, when I am
reborn, let me be born to Pa and
Mak again. If Cambodia has peace.
If she doesn't, please let me be
born in America. Please, God.]

Athy looks skyward, tears streaming down her cheeks.

CHANRITHY (V.O.)
But I knew so little about America.

EXT. CAMBODIA - DAY

We soar above the verdant, once-gentle land.

CHANRITHY (V.O.)
It would be two years later when my
prayer was answered.

As we GLIDE over Siem Reap province, home of many iconic,
ancient Buddhist and Hindu temples, the distant SOUND of a
haunting LULLABY played on a flute is heard.

CHANRITHY (V.O.)
I have been reincarnated with a new
body but with an old soul. It lives
symbiotically inside me.

TITLE UP: "WHEN BROKEN GLASS FLOATS"

EXT. PACIFIC NORTHWEST - DAY

Now we soar over the terrain of rural Oregon, passing
mountains dense with pine and fir, timber-flanked valleys,
and cold, clear streams.

CHANRITHY (V.O.)
Oregon is my new home, as lush and
rich with life as the land I left,
but different in many ways.

INT. PORTLAND HOME - CHANRITHY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

The walls are lined photos and posters of all of numerous
international events, galas and keynote addresses at which
CHANRITHY HIM, 40, has appeared.

They tell a tale of a world-traveling renaissance woman,
known for telling her inspirational story, as well as
performing Cambodian classical dance.

CHANRITHY (V.O.)
Here is the country I dreamed of
fleeing to, a country where my
father promised there would be
freedom.

Pulling away from the walls, atop the already made-up bed is
Chanrithy herself, in a fuchsia kerchief, black sleeveless
turtleneck and pants. She stirs in her sleep as if afflicted
by a nightmare.

CHANRITHY (V.O.)
And yet, this is also the very
nation that was directly involved
in propagating the horrors that my
countrymen and I endured since I
was only three years old.

A suitcase, a carry-on, a purse and a laptop are perched at
the edge of the bed. All stand upright, ready to go.

CHANRITHY (V.O.)
Who could have ever guessed that
thirty-five long years later I
would stand face to face with one
of America's most powerful leaders?

ENTER FLASHBACK:

INT. BALTIMORE CONVENTION CENTER - BALLROOM - DAY

SUPER: US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's Plenary
Speech. May 26, 2004.

Chanrithy, in a gold top and sage pants with a white gardenia
on her hair, stands behind a microphone in an aisle, flanked
by five thousand attendees. Visibly fighting nerves, she
shifts her body as she holds a document in her hand.

From the podium, the stately MADELEINE ALBRIGHT, here 67, in
a red suit, knits her eyebrows. Her face looms over the crowd
on a series of large TV screens.

ALBRIGHT
I thought the next question should
come from this aisle.

Chanrithy takes a deep breath. Gradually becomes calmer.

CHANRITHY (V.O.)
Chea and the others are with me. I
feel them guiding me along, holding
me up...

Chanrithy begins to speak:

CHANRITHY
I'm sorry, Madam Secretary. I
haven't slept for days. Ever since
I learned of chairman Henry Hyde's
prevention of a House Resolution
from reaching the House floor for a
vote.

Chanrithy raises her hand to signal a pause.

ALBRIGHT
Take your time.

CHANRITHY
Thank you. You might regret saying
that.

Sparse chuckles from the waiting crowd. Chanrithy takes deep breaths, breathing through her mouth. Magnified on the TV screens, Albright's gaze focuses on her.

Now standing regally, Chanrithy returns her attention on Albright.

CHANRITHY (CONT'D)
You see, maybe it's serendipity
that I also speak at this
international conference today. You
lost your relatives in the German
concentration camps.

ALBRIGHT
It's a very personal matter for my
family.

CHANRITHY
So I believe you can understand my
predicament. My name is Chanrithy
Him. A child survivor of the
Cambodian genocide.

Chanrithy takes another deep breath.

CHANRITHY (CONT'D)
You're aware that the Khmer Rouge
murdered an estimated two million
Cambodians.

ALBRIGHT
Unfortunately, I am. And I'm also
aware that the Clinton
Administration ordered the State
Department, along with other
departments, to put provisions in
place for the arrest and trial of
Pol Pot in 1998.

CHANRITHY
(nodding grimly)
April 9th of that year. He
mysteriously died six days later of
a heart failure.
(MORE)

CHANRITHY (CONT'D)

Spared the languishing pain which
he inflicted upon others...

(beat)

And yet, three US administrations
supported him secretly. Spanning
from Presidents Jimmy Carter,
Ronald Reagan to George H.W. Bush.

ALBRIGHT

... What is your question for me?

CHANRITHY

I'm getting to that.

Executive Director of NAFSA MARLENE JOHNSON, 40s, abruptly
walks toward the podium, annoyed at Chanrithy's gumption.

MARLENE

(sotto)

Madame Secretary has a book signing
after this. And there are others
waiting to ask her questions.

CHANRITHY

I understand that, Director
Johnson. And believe me when I tell
you I respect both the Secretary's
time and her wisdom. But you heard
what our plenary speaker said to me
earlier...

Albright turns to Marlene with a nod. Marlene sits back down.

CHANRITHY (CONT'D)

My question is this: why did the US
keep Pol Pot alive for eleven years
if he was an abomination, as
national security adviser Zbigniew
Brzezinski said? Did it have
anything to do with the Vietnamese
occupation in Cambodia?

QUICK FLASH TO:

ARCHIVE FOOTAGE from the 1990 documentary film "*Cambodia: The Betrayal*." Australian journalist JOHN PILGER interviews
congressman CHESTER ATKINS from Massachusetts.

ATKINS

There is a small group of people at
the top and the State Department,
and the national Security Council,
who are still fighting the Vietnam
War.

Pilger stands by the Harry S. Truman Building, the headquarters of the US State Department.

PILGER

We've now learned that last April, a policy decision was taken to keep the whole question of Cambodia's future and for American support of the Khmer Rouge off television.

ATKINS

This is a policy which cannot stand the light of public scrutiny. This is a policy which is a cancer on the body politics of America.

BACK TO:

INT. BALTIMORE CONVENTION CENTER - BALLROOM - DAY

Chanrithy tries control her anger.

CHANRITHY

Cancer metastasizes. America's foreign policy spread across Europe and Asia. Nefarious leaders from the UN, China, Malaysia, West Germany, Great Britain, Singapore, and Thailand aided the US government. In feeding, arming and training the Khmer Rouge and Pol Pot to return to power -- to fight a proxy war for America. While the UN refused to give Cambodia development aide, many Cambodian children continued to die.

A beat. Chanrithy stares straight toward the podium. Fiery indignation reddens her face.

CHANRITHY (CONT'D)

Madam Secretary, are you aware of the House Concurrent Resolution 399?

ALBRIGHT

No, I am not.

CHANRITHY

I've got a copy for you.
(raises it above her head)
(MORE)

CHANRITHY (CONT'D)

It's a request for support and for the money that was allotted for the Khmer Rouge tribunal. Now, Mr. Hyde is playing a game with justice for me, my fellow survivors, and those who have no voice. Yet, this man has been praised for being the greatest hero of the pro-life movement in America. But is he really?

Chanrithy visibly shakes with indignation.

CHANRITHY (CONT'D)

Madam Secretary, I appreciate you allowing me the opportunity to talk.

ALBRIGHT

... We thank you for making us listen. I'll look into the Resolution.

Chanrithy turns to her fellow attendees.

CHANRITHY

Thanks so much, everyone.

END FLASHBACK.

OVER BLACK:

PRE-LAP: THE SOUND OF KNOCKING.

FADE IN:

INT. CHANRITHY'S BEDROOM - MORNING - PRESENT

Chanrithy tosses and turns on her bed, in the throes of a nightmare.

ENTER VISION:

INT. INTERCONTINENTAL HOTEL - CHANRITHY'S ROOM - NIGHT

In a plush hotel room, we find Chanrithy, in a chic white blouse and cream pants, on her knees crying near a large mirror hung near the door.

Abruptly, she turns around.

CHANRITHY

[Pa?]

Chanrithy looks up, listens.

CHANRITHY (CONT'D)

[Pa? Is it you?]

PA (V.O.)

[Athy, don't worry about Pa,
child.]

She becomes calm as the translucent form of PA, her father, appears and embraces her.

The SOUND OF KNOCKING becomes LOUDER AND URGENT. It's practically as if the door is about to be bashed in as we --

CUT BACK TO:

INT. CHANRITHY'S BEDROOM - MORNING - PRESENT

Where Chanrithy continues to wrestle with the nightmare. RY, 44, Chanrithy's sensible and kind older sister, in a black blouse and jeans, rushes into the bedroom.

RY

Athy?! Wake up!

Chanrithy springs awake! Her strong, intelligent eyes quickly focus on her older sister.

CHANRITHY

Gee, Ry! Have you heard of a gentle shake? I nearly lost my spirit!

RY

I knocked for a long time! I thought you died in your sleep or something. It happens, you know.

CHANRITHY

You've watched too much
Investigation Discovery.

(beat)

Pa... he came to me. It was surreal.

RY

In a dream?

CHANRITHY

Yeah, the one you just interrupted.

(beat)

But I swear, it was more like a vision, which I had before. It felt like I was three again.

RY

Didn't sleep well, I guess?

Chanrithy shakes her head.

CHANRITHY

Been so wound up recently...

RY

I don't know what to say.

CHANRITHY

Then don't say anything. It's just so taxing. I've had nightmares. Every time. Just got back from Australia, Canada, Denmark, Georgetown. Now I'm on the road again.

RY

That's your life, Athy. You choose to live it this way.

CHANRITHY

I inadvertently asked God for it. So if I'm going cuckoo, then it's His fault.

Smiling, Chanrithy pulls the suitcase. Ry helps her with the carry-on.

INT. HALL - CONTINUOUS

The sisters talk as they go downstairs.

RY

I can't believe you're going.

CHANRITHY

How do you think I feel? First, I was thrilled. Honored when I got the invitation to speak. But it didn't sink in me what it means to go back.

RY

You want to cancel the speech?

CHANRITHY

Please. I can't just call my sponsor and the University and say, "oh, by the way, I've got cold feet." I've got to face the past.

INT/EXT. PLANE (IN FLIGHT) - MORNING

With her memoir, *When Broken Glass Floats*, on her lap, Chanrithy sits at the window seat next to THEARY, 40, beautiful and intelligent, wearing a nice red blouse.

CHANRITHY (V.O.)

A year after my confrontation with Secretary Albright, I got to go home. Twenty six years after my escape...

THEARY

What time is your talk?

CHANRITHY

I'll be speaking at 8:30 AM if you'd like to come. Afterwards, they're going to screen this documentary called *The Will To Live*. I'm featured in it with Archbishop Tutu and Dr. Juan Almandares of Honduras.

THEARY

Look at you! A regular dignitary.

CHANRITHY

Don't flatter me. I'm so nervous just thinking about facing the pain...

THEARY

I'll be there. You know, I cried like a baby when I got to Cambodia the first time. But now I live here with my husband and our daughter, Emily. She's three.

(beat)

It will be easier for you when you come again.

CHANRITHY

Maybe. Maybe not. Both of your parents survived, right?

THEARY

And my three siblings.

CHANRITHY

Not many of us are that blessed.

THEARY

I want to pay it forward, as they say. That's why I got a law degree from Columbia. I'll be involved with the Khmer Rouge Tribunal.

CHANRITHY

Really?! You think the UN will allow the Khmer government to set up the Tribunal soon?

THEARY

I hope so. Just waiting to hear from Mr. Annan.

CHANRITHY

Right, waiting. Twenty-five years since the Khmer Rouge were ousted. What harm can three more decades do. Damned UN.

THEARY

I understand your frustration.

CHANRITHY

Honestly, Theary, I don't know that you can.

A loaded beat.

THEARY

Well then, can I at least see your book?

Chanrithy raises her memoir in the air. Theary takes it, opens it --

ENTER FLASHBACK:

EXT. TAKEO HOME - EVENING

SUPER: TAKEO CITY, CAMBODIA, 1969

In a suburb of Takeo city stands a two-story stucco home with a balcony, hanging houseplants cascading from its ceiling.

Tall pine and coconut trees dance gently in the soft wind. Behind them are swings situated below shaded mango trees near the fence.

Tropical flowers are in full bloom around the house. Birds chirping melodically lend a sense of safe haven to this Cambodian abode.

EXT. BALCONY - EVENING

PA, 30s, handsome and composed, sits shirtless, wearing a silk sarong and reading a newspaper. A stack of other newspapers lies next to his feet.

Sitting on the floor close to him is ATHY, here 3, in a ruffle dress, intelligent and precocious. She is busy linking colorful rubber bands from a large plastic bag into a rope.

MAK, early 30s, quick-witted, pregnant, barefoot in a flowered sarong and a blouse, knits her eyebrows as she arrives at the door to the balcony.

MAK

[Athy?!]

Athy shoots her a frown, then focuses on her rubber bands.

MAK (CONT'D)

[Time to eat. Get your brothers and sisters for Mak.]

ATHY

[Mak, I can't see them in the orchard.]

PA

[Child, do you know what your name means?]

ATHY

(frowning)

[Chanrithy means Moon Power. You've told me.]

PA

(pointing to his temple)

[Then use it.]

ATHY

[But they are on the guava tree!]

MAK

[You found them yesterday. And the day before. Hurry. Your Aunt Cheng, and great grandmother are waiting. It's been a long day for them. Go, child.]

ATHY

[I don't want to. Why don't they sit close to Pa like me?]

PA

[Athy, listen to your mom.]

ATHY

[Pa, they eat guavas again. Like birds.]

Mak grins. Pa chuckles behind the newspaper. Mak leans closer to Pa.

MAK

[Father's little girl, I see.]

Pa looks above the newspaper. Mak motions her head toward Athy, then leaves. Pa puts the newspaper down.

PA

(lovingly)

[Athy, get your brothers and sisters. Tell them Pa's --]

ATHY

(grinning to herself)

[Hungry. I know.]

She pulls the rubber-band rope off her toes, runs into the house. Pa looks delighted, but his smile fades as he resumes reading the newspaper.

EXT. ORCHARD AND POND - CONTINUOUS

Athy anxiously searches among trees bowed with fruits as her dogs -- a big reddish Lab, Akahom, and a black-spotted Border Collie, Akie -- follow her.

CHANRITHY (V.O.)

I was Pa's angel. The older ones in my family called me, "Athy." Short for Chanrithy.

She runs to the bank of the pond, whereupon lies a makeshift bunker ringed with bags of sand. She puts her hands on her waist, peers at the trees.

ATHY
[Everybody, Mak says: time to eat!]

The sound of children LAUGHING is heard for a beat, then stifled.

ATHY (CONT'D)
[Come on out! Everybody! Pa's hungry.]

WHISPERS become audible. Athy looks annoyed, thinks for a moment. Then, she throws a rock into the pond.

ATHY (CONT'D)
[Chea! Great Grandmother had a long day. Time to eat!]

SOUNDS of branches from one of the fruit trees erupt.

Athy turns, waits. And waits. No response. She throws more ROCKS one after another into the pond.

PLONK! PLONK! PLONK!

CHEA (O.S.)
[Athy! Moon Power. Stop!]

Athy grins. Her siblings hop off the tree like falling overripe guavas.

CHEA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
[Not supposed to throw rocks in the pond. But I was never one to follow the rules.]

Now CHEA, 13, feisty and vibrant, in a white shirt and pants, heads toward Athy, followed by her sisters RA, 11, RY, 8, wearing elastic pants and shirts, and her brothers THA, 10, and THAN, 6. Both in red and blue shorts.

CHEA (O.S.) (CONT'D)
[Pa's gonna be mad at you. Catfish, lily and lotus in there --]

Running back toward the house, Athy yells out to Chea.

ATHY
[I didn't hear them cry!]

Chea bursts out laughing, along with her other siblings.

INT. DINNING/LIVING ROOM - EVENING

THE HIM FAMILY now looks solemn. They sit on a mat instead of at the dining table. The house is tastefully furnished with a China cabinet, TV, stereo, couches, expressive wooden carved statues of Apsara, and Angkor Wat paintings.

The great grandmother, YIEY TOT or YIEY, 92, in a white blouse and black folded sarong, is blind with shaved head. Her beauty still radiates from beneath decades of wrinkles.

She sits next to Athy, Pa, and AUNT CHENG, 25, sweet and unassuming, with a mane of thick black hair.

The food is barely touched. The adults' expressions grim.

ATHY

[Pa, what does "relief" mean?]

MAK

[Your child asks a lot of questions.]

Athy shows two fingers to Mak.

PA

[Child, it means: Pa is not too worried, not anxious about your great grandma. And about --]

YIEY TOT

[Don't talk about it. Or it will come true.]

PA

[Yiey, whether we talk about it or not, America, South Vietnam, and the Viet Cong are already in our backyard. Didn't you hear what Yom say today when I picked you up?]

YIEY TOT

[I tuned him out like I always do.]

PA

[Tuning father out doesn't make war go away.]

Athy wrinkles her forehead at the word "war".

YIEY TOT

[His talk reminded me of those planes bombing us a few years ago.]

Yiey Tot is visibly shaken. Pa observes her sadly.

MAK

[Please forgive me, Yiey Tot.]

YIEY TOT

[Nothing an old grandmother can forgive.]

MAK

[What did your father say today?]

PA

[He talked to a villager who witnessed the Viet Cong moving supplies inside our country.]

MAK

[Why didn't Sihanouk do anything?]

PA

[He has. He asked foreign diplomats and dignitaries to respect our country's neutrality.]

MAK

[But no one wants to?]

PA

[Americans certainly won't. They're promoting a fear of communism. Creating another great monster.]

MAK

[And we are expendable?]

PA

[It appears so.]

MAK

[Sihanouk already has problems at home.]

PA

[But the Khmer Rouge are only a small group of insurgents.]

Athy's face turns sour.

CHEA

[Pa, who bombed Cambodia?]

PA

[American government. The year Athy was born -- 1965. Then Sihanouk broke relations with them.]

ATHY

[Mak told me not to hit other kids. Why don't American government moms and dads tell them to be good?]

Wide-eyed, Pa and Mak share look of amazement.

THAN

[Athy, stupid question.]

ATHY

[Pa!]

MAK

[Than, be nice! Your sister is just curious.]

Pa puts Athy on his lap.

PA

[What did your mother teach you about hitting other kids?]

ATHY

["If you hit other kids first, Mak will spank you. Do you hear me?"]

She cranes to look at Pa.

ATHY (CONT'D)

[But that boy hit me first.]

PA

[Was he one of the kids you let in to watch our TV the other day?]

ATHY

[No, Mak did. But I didn't get rubber bands.]

Chea chuckles.

AUNT CHENG

[What was that all about?]

MAK

[She charged the neighbors' kids four rubber bands to watch our TV.]

AUNT CHENG

(amused)

[Who told her to do that?]

Decisively, Athy points to herself.

ATHY

[I told me.]

CHEA

[She lost her rubber bands to me.]

THA

[We all did.]

RY

[Chea told Athy to ask Pa for money, so she can sell Athy her rubber bands.]

Chea beams, amused at her own brilliant idea.

MAK

[A few nights ago, Athy asked her father for money at dinner. What did you ask her?]

PA

[What does a little kid need money for?]

MAK

[Apparently, Achea told her what to say. The next evening she blurted out to her father: "for cake."]

Yiey Tot chuckles.

YIEY TOT

[Only a sprout, but already figured out how to survive. That will serve you well in this world.]

EXT. BALCONY - NIGHT

The family gathers around in the cool night. Athy chases after fireflies with her brothers. Pa tracks their movements.

PA

(yelling)

[Be careful with the fireflies. Don't hurt them!]

ATHY

[We are not! Just want to see.]

PA

[Such a curious child.]

MAK

[She asked me about the Viet Cong posters at her school.]

PA

[How did she take it?]

MAK

[She shivered while her teacher showed her class the posters along the fence. And on the trees.]

QUICK CUTAWAY:

Various propaganda caricatures, wearing black pajamas and sandals with big teeth, carrying rifles, standing next to large bell-shaped pots atop human heads and surrounded by flames on all sides.

BACK TO:

PA

[What a thoughtless thing to do.]

Athy runs to Pa with a firefly cupped in her palms.

ATHY

[Pa, Pa. Look...]

She opens her palms. Pa and Mak share a smile.

PA

[Good job. Now release it.]

Athy raises her arm up. The firefly stretches its wings, glowing as it flies away. She claps in victory.

INT. YIEY TOT AND AUNT CHENG'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Yiey Tot looks lost in a new environment. She sits on mat a few feet away from a bed, above which mosquito netting is tied in a knot.

PA

[Yiey, don't sleep there. There's no netting.]

Aunt Cheng tries to lift Yiey Tot up, but she pulls away.

YIEY TOT

[Don't argue, my grandson. Sleeping on the floor will humble one's soul. Besides, mosquitos don't like an old lady's blood anyway. Cheng can sleep on the bed.]

Yiey Tot lowers her head to the pillow. Pa holds her hands, gazing at her compassionately.

PA

[I only have one grandmother. To revere. To protect.]

Upon hearing this, Yiey Tot releases soft, ragged sobs.

YIEY TOT

[Get some candles and incense for Yiey. Will you?]

Troubled, Pa exits.

After a beat, Athy shows up with a framed picture of Buddha sitting on the lotus flower beneath the banyan tree. She sits next her great grandmother.

ATHY

[I've got Buddha for Yiey.]

Yiey Tot chuckles. Then, Pa appears carrying a small silver platter with three incense sticks, two candles, a box of matches, and a tin can, in which is rice, to hold the incense.

Yiey Tot sits up as Pa places Buddha's picture on a stance next to her pillow. He puts the silver platter next to the picture, lights the candles and incense.

Athy holds Yiey Tot's hand.

YIEY TOT

[Yiey will tell you the good deeds your father did for me.]

ATHY

[What's that?]

YIEY TOT

[I asked him to be a monk. And he honored it when he turned thirteen.]

ATHY
(innocently amused)
[Pa, a monk? How come, Yiey?]

Athy glances at Pa.

YIEY TOT
[If Yiey has sinned, your father
becoming a Buddhist monk will bring
Yiey merit.]

ATHY
[What's merit?]

YIEY TOT
[It cleanses my honest sin. The sin
of killing animals for food.]

Athy takes this in, perplexed.

AUNT CHENG
[She can't understand everything
Yiey says.]

Athy frowns at Aunt Cheng.

PA
[Let her be with her great
granddaughter.]

ATHY
[Yiey, was Pa a good boy?]

YIEY TOT
[Very good. Now you go to bed. And
let Yiey be with your father for a
moment. Go, great grandchild.]

Athy shakes her head at the abrupt dismissal, stares at Yiey.
Pa guides her to Aunt Cheng, who puts Athy on her lap.

PA
[Yiey doesn't have to say
anything.]

Pa gazes at Yiey Tot fervently as he holds her hands.

YIEY TOT
[You're the kindest, most obedient
grandson I could ever hope for.
Very caring, even to strangers.]

PA
[That is how it's supposed to be,
Yiey. We're the human family.]

YIEY TOT
[During my remaining days, you're
still by my side.]

PA
[We have a bunker near the pond,
Yiey. We'll be okay.]

Pa raises his pressed hands to his forehead as he bows three times to Buddha. Athy gets up from Aunt Cheng's lap and follows his movements.

INT/EXT. PA AND MAK'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Mak stares out of the window at the starry night with a look of great yearning.

MAK
[Look, Father of the Children. Lots
of stars...]

She turns to her husband, who is already asleep inside the mosquito netting next to AVY, 2. When she returns to the skies, her jaw drops.

She opens the mosquito netting, shakes Pa gently.

MAK (CONT'D)
[You have got to see this!]

Pa gets out of bed, stands next to Mak near the window. Mak points to the sky. His eyes widen.

PA
[Let's wake the kids up. Come on.]

Pa grabs Mak's hand, quietly leads her out of the bedroom.

MAK (O.S.)
[Children. Everybody. Come!]

INT. BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

Fireflies still hover around hanging houseplants when Mak and Pa hurry out with their semi-sleepy children in pajamas.

ATHY
[Mak, what is it?]

PA
[Don't tell her.]

MAK
[It's a bird eating guava.]

ATHY
[No way. What is it really, Mak?]

MAK
[You'll find out.]

Mak leads her children to the right of the balcony. But some of the herd rushes with Pa to the left.

MAK (CONT'D)
[No. Go right, right...]

The whole herd comes back together, now heads to the right.

INT. YIEY TOT AND AUNT CHENG'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Aunt Cheng is asleep, but Yiey Tot gestures as she prays.

YIEY TOT
[Dear God in heaven. I raise my ten fingers, carefully placing them on my head. I prostrate myself beneath your feet... in devoted veneration. I implore you to protect my grandson and his innocent family.]

EXT. BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

Everyone crowds at the railing, craning to see. Athy sits on Pa's shoulders. Then, they all spot it --

A pulsing, glowing COMET stands out among twinkling stars. Mak smiles.

THA	CHEA
[Amazing.]	[Wow!]

Athy moves her head, still searching for the comet.

PA
[See? Right there.]

ATHY
[Ooh. Wow! Mak? How come we never saw it before?]

A long beat. Mak becomes silent, looks at her husband.

MAK

[There's an old folk superstition.
The elders said, "When the tail of
the comet points to a country...
Cambodia will be drawn into war
with that country."]

Mak's tone takes on a dark tenor. Pa is at a loss for words.
Their silence puts a spell on the kids.

Except Athy, who can see what her family can't...

ATHY'S POV: other invisible tails in the sky that point to
various areas of the globe. Particularly, Vietnam, US, and
China.

ATHY

[Mak, what is war? And what is
country?]

MAK

[Athy, you're too young to
understand those words.]

ATHY

[But I want to know. I want to
understand!]

Pa pretends to perk up, attempting to distract Athy.

PA

[Let's see who gets in the house
first?]

He hurries into the house, Athy giggling on his shoulders.

INT. YIEY TOT AND AUNT CHENG'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

The incense and candles dimly light the room. Streams of
smoke from the burning incense travel out of the open window.
Yiey Tot continues praying with her hands raised to her head.

YIEY TOT

[Please help us. Save us from
evil.]

INT. PA AND MAK'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Inside their mosquito netting, Mak and Pa sleep with Avy.

YIEY TOT (V.O.)
[If the enemy comes before us, make
it pass over. If it comes behind,
make it vanish.]

EXT. BALCONY - NIGHT

Akahom and Akie whimper. Listening. Then, they BARK!

Suddenly, all hell breaks loose. Deafening SOUNDS of GUNFIRE shatter the night air. A BOMB drops nearby, then another and another, impacts seeming to rumbling the earth itself.

CHEA (O.S.)
[Mak! Pa! Viet Cong... Viet Cong
are invading our country!]

ATHY (O.S.)
[Pa, help me!]

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The lights come on, revealing Athy and her frightened brothers and sisters running about frantically.

Standing by the light switch are Pa and Mak, who holds Avy in her arms. They are obviously in distress.

Athy grips Pa's hand, but he shakes her hand off. She grows petrified as she watches him grip Chea's shoulders.

PA
[Achea, take your brothers and
sisters and hide in the bunker.
Hunch when you run.]

Chea freezes at the SOUNDS of war and Pa's instructions.

PA (CONT'D)
[Hurry, Father's child!]

Chea stretches her arms out, herding Ra, Tha, Ry, and Than toward the double doors.

Pa runs from one window to the next, sticking his head out and listening.

Shell-shocked, Athy runs to clench Mak's hand. Her body rattles with each volley of gunfire.

Carrying Avy and holding on to Athy, Mak hurries to the doors. But she can't move fast due to her pregnancy. When a BOMB explodes not far off, Athy bursts into tears.

Mak grabs her hand tightly. She glares at a frantic Pa. SHOUTS across the room.

MAK

[What are you doing?!]

Pa flings another window open.

PA

[I need to know where the gunfire is coming from!]

MAK

[You'll get shot! Don't be foolish! Help me with Athy!]

Pa can't hear her and Mak pulls Athy closer to her.

MAK (CONT'D)

[Child, wait for your father here! I am going to take Avy downstairs. Okay?]

All alone, Athy cries hysterically without releasing any sound as she watches Mak and Avy disappear out of the doors.

When a BOMB EXPLODES closer than ever, she jumps up and down! Hands reaching out to Pa --

ATHY

[Pa!]

Her frenzied voice somehow reaches him amidst loud rumbling cacophony. Pa runs to her, holds her tight against his heart, and bolts out the doors.

EXT. BUNKER - CONTINUOUS

Chaos unfurls. GUNFIRE. BOMBS exploding. ROCKET FLARES fired up in the black sky. Pa, with Athy in his arms, runs toward the bunker.

He puts her in the bunker while everyone looks skyward, frightfully hypnotized as the pathways of the flares light up the sky.

PA

[Achea?! Tha, come with Pa!]

Fearful, Chea and Tha look at Mak for help, but she gestures with her head for them to go.

ATHY

[Pa!]

PA

[Stay with your mother! I'm going to get Yiey Tot.]

The flares and GUNFIRE continue to puncture the night.

As Pa, Chea, and Tha depart, Athy peers at her father's silhouette in the dark.

ANGLE ON: Moments later, Pa emerges again with Yiet Tot in tow, carrying her with Achea and Tha as bullets WHIZ overhead.

PA (CONT'D)

[Tha?! Achea! Hunch! Don't you hear?]

Yiey Tot GROANS.

PA (CONT'D)

[Don't worry, Yiey. We won't drop you.]

Flares erupt again like lightning. Pa, Tha, Aunt Cheng, and Chea try their best to carry Yiey Tot through this dark, violent night.

FADE TO:

INT. DINING ROOM - MORNING

The radio is on. The still-rattled family sits around the dining table and couches, having just finished breakfast. Everyone looks dazed, exhausted. On the RADIO, a MALE NEWSCASTER intones:

MALE NEWSCASTER (O.S.)

[The Viet Cong came very close to Takeo City. Many people died. Houses burned. Tanks crossed over into Cambodia. Prince Sihanouk charged today that Vietnamese Communists were increasingly infiltrating into Cambodia.]

(MORE)

MALE NEWSCASTER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

His Royal Highness showed newsmen a detailed map drawn by his general staff, showing Communist implantation in Cambodia.]

Leaning against Pa, Athy watches him shake his head. He guides her to the side.

PA

[Pa has to go to work.]

ATHY

[No. You can't.]

PA

[Pa has to.]

Athy turns to Mak.

ATHY

[Mak, tell Pa.]

MAK

[During a time like this?!]

PA

[I need to make sure everything at the office is in order.]

MAK

[Athy is gonna keep asking me when you'll be home.]

PA

[I have a duty to other PMs. Our government.]

MAK

[Shouldn't our family come first?!]

PA

[Don't worry. Everything will be alright.]

Mak isn't convinced. Nor is Athy.

EXT. BALCONY - CONTINUOUS

Athy intensely watches Pa ride the scooter out of the driveway. Deeply troubled.

PRE-LAP SFX: Gunfire rumbles distantly. WHISTLING precedes --

EXT. TAKEO HOME - PATH - NIGHT

A BOMB dropping. Then another and another. FLARES erupt, illuminating the dark sky.

Mak pulls Athy's hand as she hugs Avy to her chest while darting haphazardly for the bunker.

Chea, Tha, Ra, and Aunt Cheng lag behind as they carry Yiey Tot. Ry hunches low as she holds Than's hand.

EXT. STREET - MORNING

It's overcast. A blue bus with belongings atop the roof waits on the street in front of Athy's home.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - MORNING

Akahom and Akie sit sadly beside Athy. She waits anxiously for Mak, who slowly carries Avy down the stairs. Behind Mak are her weary older siblings, carrying suitcases.

ATHY

[Mak? When Pa comes home, we not home.]

MAK

[... You'll see Pa.]

ATHY

[Akahom and Akie come with us?]

MAK

[No. They won't let us bring dogs on the bus.]

ATHY

[But who's gonna feed them?!]

MAK

[Athy? Child! Run to the bus.]

Athy looks to the ground, deflated.

INT/EXT. BUS (MOVING) - DAY

A beautiful tropical landscape passes by on the freeway. Athy's morose face is reflected in the window as she observes the beauty of her country.

Then, as if driven by an unseen sense, Athy walks to the bus driver. Through the front windshield, she recognizes a man riding a scooter toward the bus from the opposite direction.

ATHY

[Pa! Pa!]

(to the driver)

[Uncle! My Pa, my Pa!]

Startled, the driver reacts to Athy's excitement. He HONKS repeatedly as Pa approaches the bus.

Pa shoots the bus driver a frown. Athy jumps. But Pa whizzes past the bus like a bullet.

Everyone on the bus is awakened by the honks and the bouncing three-year-old, especially Mak.

MAK

[Athy, what are you doing over there? Come back here!]

Athy turns to Mak's commanding voice, but she points to Pa.

ATHY

[Pa, Pa!]

Everyone in Athy's family gets up, follows her finger.

ATHY (CONT'D)

[Pa goes home! We not home!]

Athy sadly walks back to her seat with Chea and Ry.

MAK

[Everybody sit! He'll look for us at the garrison.]

Kneeling on the seat, Athy stares sadly at her father as he disappears down the roadway.

INT/EXT. BUS (MOVING) - DAY - LATER

Athy leans her head against Chea's shoulder. She's on the verge of tears. Chea pats her head.

Suddenly the increasing sounds of a SCOOTER HONKING approach the bus. Athy turns around along with everyone in her family. She leans out the window to see --

Pa riding the scooter after them, waving frantically. Athy waves back, grinning from ear to ear.

EXT. PHNOM PENH SKYLINE - MORNING

PLANES circle overhead. Blasting SIRENS in the background.

INT. MILITARY GARRISON - GARRISON APARTMENT - DAY

Aunt Cheng, Yiey Tot, and Athy's family sit nervously on a mat in an empty, sterile apartment. They peer out the windows, looking at the planes clipping by overhead.

Athy cringes, observing her parents' distressed faces.

MAK

(to Pa)

[What are they doing?]

PA

[Surveillance planes, searching for the Viet Cong. That's why everyone has to stay inside.]

MAK

[Is that what your brother flies?]

PA

[Seng flies reconnaissance missions.]

Athy shakes Pa's arm.

ATHY

[Pa, pee.]

Athy holds her loins, looking desperate.

PA

[Child, why are you holding it in?]

Athy points toward the planes.

PA (CONT'D)

[Achea? Take Athy...]

Achea complies, less than thrilled.

EXT. TAKEO HOME - FRONT YARD - DAY

SUPER: ONE MONTH LATER

The home is in ruins. The once-lush vegetation around the home is now burnt beyond recognition. Even the gate lies on the ground. The swings, too. And there's no sign of the dogs.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

The roof is gone. A deep crater has been bored through the ceiling. Pa stares at it. Athy stands behind him. Shocked. Crushed.

Then, they hear the SOUND of a dog WHIMPERING. Pa grabs Athy's hand and together they carefully walk through the debris.

EXT. BACKYARD - CONTINUOUS

Skinny Akie WHIMPERS, lumbering slowly toward Pa and Athy.

ATHY

[Akie!]

PA

[Where is Akahom? Your buddy.]

Athy just looks at them blankly. Pa and Athy pet him sadly.

They stare at the dead, dried-up pond and fruit trees. Athy tugs at Pa's hand.

ATHY

[Pa fix our home?]

A beat.

PA

[No. We have to stay at Kong Houn's.]

ATHY

[But... but it has ghosts.]

PA

[I know your aunt's and uncle's spirits are still there. Pa's not afraid of ghosts.]

ATHY

[I am. I feel them. See them. They don't like me and Ry when I went up there. One took Tha's voice.]

PA
 [That's different. Tha accidentally
 peed on a grave. They took his
 spirit. But Yiey Tot can teach you
 to chant, to ward off bad spirits.]

Athy takes this in, less than comforted.

FADE TO:

INT. KONG HOUN'S HOME - FIRST FLOOR - DAY

Pregnant Mak pats Tha's head as he groans in bed. He looks
 ghastly pale and thin.

Pa holds Athy's hand as the two of them and Akie appear by
 the bed. Athy grabs Tha's hand.

ATHY
 [Mak, how come Tha cry?]

MAK
 [Your brother's in pain.]

Pa pats Tha's perspiring forehead.

PA
 [Did he pee at all?]

Mak shakes her head.

MAK
 [We can't just let him suffer.]

PA
 [What can we do? There's not a
 doctor around. And no pharmacies
 open.]

ATHY
 [How come no doctors?]

PA
 [War makes them go away, child. Now
 go to your sisters. Play by the
 river. Let Pa talk to Mak.]

Pa nods to Chea, Ra and Ry. Chea comes to get Athy. Tha
 groans pitifully.

INT. KONG HOUN'S HOUSE - FIRST FLOOR - LATER

Chea brings Athy and her siblings inside. Everyone rushes to Mak and Pa sitting on an empty bed.

Mak sobs as she reaches out to Athy.

ATHY
[Mak, stop. You have to!]

Athy wipes Mak's tears, but Mak pulls her hand away.

MAK
[Yes. Yes...]

Mak forces a smile as she wipes her own tears away.

FADE TO BLACK.

PRE-LAP: VOICES of American civilian OFFICIALS at the US Embassy. Though their words are jumbled and not entirely clear, the point gets across:

They are illegally collaborating with the American military during the bombing of Cambodia.

Loud explosions rumble the sound-scape.

MAK (O.S.) (CONT'D)
[Mercy!]

FADE IN:

E/I. KONG HOUN'S HOUSE - SECOND FLOOR - NIGHT

From a window overlooking the Bassac River, Athy, her head barely above the window sill, stands with her family and Aunt Cheng, transfixed by the gigantic swaths of fire and smoke which subsume the landscape in the distance.

ENTER SERIES OF
SHOTS:

INTERCUT between "Supper" targets in various villages as they are pounded by Nixon's illegal bombing operation.

SCAN PAST an artless Operation Menu with secret code-names: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner, Snack, Supper, and Dessert.

An inferno rages. Gigantic tongues of fire from napalm and cluster bombs engulf houses, palm trees, coconut trees, and innocent villagers in bunkers. All dead. Incinerated.

Save for a lone woman on fire, terribly traumatized, running out of a burning thatched house with her crying son and daughter. The children's backs and heads are alight as they scream in horrific pain.

BACK TO:

E/I. KONG HOUN'S HOUSE - SECOND FLOOR - NIGHT

Athy and her family watch the silhouettes of B-52 bombers loop in the darkness with sequins of light pouring from them.

These sequins dissipate in the bushy shadows of distant trees, then erupt in enormous explosions of bright fire across the earth, followed by the shaking of the house.

Mak winces with each strike. She holds her protruding stomach, pushes her children away from the window.

Mak gestures to Chea and Ra to help her to her bedroom. When Aunt Cheng sees them move away, she, too, peels herself from the sight of destruction.

But Pa is spellbound by it. Can't look away. Seeing Pa standing alone, Athy hurries back to him.

Pa trembles silently. Athy looks up at Pa, shakes him.

ATHY

[Pa?]

Silence. He's rendered speechless.

Nearby, Aunt Cheng crawls into the mosquito netting where she and Yiey Tot share a bed. When she sees Yiey Tot twitching, stuck in a mumbling prayer, she becomes hysterical.

AUNT CHENG

[Yiey Tot! What is wrong!?!]

Athy hears her aunt, shakes Pa again.

ATHY

[Pa, Yiey Tot!]

TIME FADE:

Pa comforts Yiey Tot, deeply traumatized by the bombing.

PA

[It's far away, Yiey. We are safe.]

No response. Yiey Tot is in a state of shock. Aunt Cheng cries silently.

ATHY
[Pa, is Yiey okay?]

PA
(unconvincing)
[She will be.]

ATHY
[Who's gonna pray with me when I'm scared of ghosts?]

Athy cries.

CHEA (O.S.)
[Pa, Pa?! The baby... Bosaba!]

Pa turns, horrified.

PA
[Cheng, hold Yiey's hands. Tell her she's safe.]

EXT. CEMETARY - DAY

Athy and her family look somber as they pay their last respect to three graves beside one another.

The first is for Yiey Tot, the second for Athy's lost baby brother Bosaba, and the last for Tha.

EXT. KONG HOUN'S HOUSE - SIDEWALK - MORNING

Athy anxiously stands with her siblings and their belongings. She keeps looking to her left toward the Bassac River where the SOUNDS OF MOTORBOATS are jarringly loud.

The remaining few neighbors stare at them sadly. Everyone looks weary. Casualties of war.

Two taxis pull up near Athy and her siblings. Chea walks to them while Athy watches her.

CHEA
[Please wait. My parents...]

Chea chokes up. The drivers nod. Athy's siblings are too preoccupied, giving her a window to sneak away.

EXT. BASSAC RIVER PIER - DAY

ATHY'S POV: Standing behind a row of trees, she holds onto the railing tightly as she peers out to the river.

MOTORBOATS stuffed with families glide up to the boat launch. Weary passengers disembark as bystanders approach them.

An OLD MAN, 70s, sallow-skinned and pale, hurries to a Younger Man with a little girl in his arms.

OLD MAN
[Where did you come from?]

The Man glances at the Old Man, his face expressionless.

The Old Man scurries over to a Boat Driver, skinny with sad, empty face. He helps an old woman off the boat.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)
[Where are these people from?]

The Boat Driver glances up. Too sad to talk, too tired to care.

OLD MAN (CONT'D)
[I wonder where those planes came from?]

Being a precocious child, Athy perks up. She runs to the old man, addresses him with a respected title as her culture demands:

ATHY
[Grandpa, grandpa, B-cinquante-deux, my Pa said. B-cinquante-deux from America.]

OLD MAN
[What do you know? You're only a kid.]

ATHY
[But I heard my Pa say with other uncles. This morning.]

OLD MAN
[Go back to your mother.
(scoffing)
[Kids.]]

Athy narrows her eyes. Just then, a HAND grabs Athy's arm from behind!

Startled, she whirls around to find it's only Chea.

ATHY

[Chea, that grandpa doesn't believe what Pa said.]

CHEA

[I know.]

(approaching the Old Man)

[Grandpa, B-cinquante-deux is a French word. It means "B-52". B-52 is the name of the plane. American word.]

The boat driver perks up. The old man narrows his eyes.

OLD MAN

[Americans can be that vicious?]

CHEA

[Grandpa should have talked to my Pa, but we're leaving Takeo Province.]

Chea glares at Athy.

CHEA (CONT'D)

[And you -- you've scared us! Don't ever leave like that again.]

Athy points to more MOTORBOATS speeding toward the pier.

ATHY

[Chea!]

Chea stares at the crafts, swelling with dread, then back at Athy.

CHEA

[Everyone is waiting. Let's go!]

Chea holds Athy's hand tightly as they hurry along the row of trees, from which yellow leaves fall on the ground.

EXT. HIGHWAY - DAY

It's the dry and hot season. The taxis follow Pa's scooter. Than sits behind Pa. Athy stands on the front foot-rails. She glances up at Pa as the wind blows her hair.

ATHY

[Pa sad?]

PA
[Child, don't you worry about Pa.]

ATHY
[Pa, I miss Yiey Tot. And Tha,
too.]

Silence. Athy glances up at him again.

ATHY (CONT'D)
[Yiey Tot sat by the mosquito
netting last night. She was looking
at me, but... she wasn't really
there. I was scared of her.]

PA
[Do you think she misses you, too?]

Athy nods.

PA (CONT'D)
[Athy? Achea said you told a
grandpa about B-cinquante-deux.
When did you hear Pa say?]

ATHY
[I watched Pa, Kong Houn, and the
other uncles talk.]

PA
[Downstairs?]

Athy nods.

ATHY
[And Pa told Mak and Chea
upstairs.]

PA
[Such an inquisitive child. I
should have known.]
(beat)
[We have to live in Phnom Penh. So
Uncle Seng will stay with us in our
new home.]

ATHY
[I want Uncle Seng to buy me Paté
sandwiches again.]

Athy's smiling face morphs into --

INT. PHNOM PENH HOME - COVERED FRONT PORCH - DAY

SUPER: PHNOM PENH CITY, 1975.

The same smiling face at nine years old. Time has passed and her family has grown bigger. Athy's siblings: VIN, 4, and Avy, 7, Chea, 18, Ra, 16, Ry 14, and Than, 11 are all smiles to greet Uncle Seng. Mak holds her new baby son, MAP, 1.

UNCLE SENG
[Athy? Where is she?]

Athy hurries to UNCLE SENG, late 20s, handsome and confident, who stands by the door with one hand behind his back.

UNCLE SENG (CONT'D)
[I haven't seen you for a long time. Look at you!]

Uncle Seng produces a golden baguette with slices of cucumber and green onion sticking out.

ATHY
[You remembered. Thanks, Uncle Seng.]

Uncle Seng pulls it away, then gives it to her.

MAK
[You're spoiling her.]

ATHY
[But I pull out his gray hair, Mak.]

UNCLE SENG
[It's a fair trade.]

Uncle Seng pats her head.

UNCLE SENG (CONT'D)
[Don't worry. There are more, Than.]

Than runs into the house. Athy follows.

EXT. ALLEY - EVENING

The sound of children PLAYING gets louder. The game of kick-the-can is in full swing between Athy, Than, and his friends.

Athy maneuvers quickly to avoid competitive boys and kicks the tin can to her winning side. She HOLLERS, throws her hands up in victory and triumphantly looks at Than. He just glares back.

THAN
[I'm gonna tell Mak.]

Athy shoots him a daring face as she races him home.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Athy passes Mak, who sits on the sofa folding clothes and Pa at his desk, busy organizing his medicine. Than rushes in.

THAN
[Mak, she played with boys! I told her not to, but she's stubborn.]

MAK
[Why didn't you listen, Athy?]

ATHY
[His friends didn't say I couldn't play. Only Than told me not to! Why shouldn't I play kick-the-can with his friends? He's just angry that I won!]

Than glares at her and she responds in kind.

MAK
[Do not gloat.]
(to Pa)
[And you, listen to your children. No worries about the encroaching war.]

Athy looks at Pa. He grins. Athy cheerfully skips away. Pa smiles at Mak. Than fumes.

INT. COVERED FRONT PORCH - DAY

The radio plays. Mak sits on the deck making sweet and sour sauce while Vin and Map play near her.

Ra, Ry, Than, and Chea prepare rice batter, slice cucumbers, clean peanuts and wash mint and lettuce as Avy watches them.

As Pa pulls a chicken from the boiling water, Athy eagerly reaches to pluck it. He blocks her from the steaming chicken.

PA
[Achea? Turn it up.]

Chea increases the radio volume as the MALE NEWSCASTER speaks:

MALE NEWSCASTER (O.S.)

[The Khmer Rouge's terrorist activity is escalating in the city of Phnom Penh. Plastic explosives have been planted in movie theaters and markets. Casualties mount --]

MAK

[Than, did you hear? You see what I've been telling you. Stay home.]

Athy glances up at Pa as she listens to the radio.

MALE NEWSCASTER (O.S.)

[Many Cambodians flood the gate of the American Embassy...]

CHEA

[Pa, why are they there?]

PA

[The American government's pulling out. Those people want to live in America. They have freedom there. And Democracy.]

ATHY

[Pa, Uncle Seng knows a captain in America. Can we go?]

PA

[I wish it was that easy, child.]

Pa plucks the chicken, deep in thought.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Uncle Seng looks distressed as he carries a camouflage bag, striding swiftly past Athy, who smiles at him.

INT. SENG'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Athy stares at Seng, but he doesn't acknowledge her. He pulls his clothes from the hangers, shoves everything in the bag and barrels out.

ATHY

[Uncle? Uncle?!]

No response. Athy rushes to exit the room.

INT. PARENTS' BEDROOM - DAY

Athy pushes the door open. It BANGS against the wall. Pa and Mak are startled.

ATHY

[Pa! Mak!]

MAK

[Athy, why didn't you knock?!]

Athy talks fast:

ATHY

[But Mak! Uncle Seng's acting strange. He put all his clothes in a bag, didn't talk to me, and now he's leaving. Go look at him.]

Pa drops the documents that he was reading. Athy runs out. Her parents bolt after her as Pa yells out:

PA

[A-Seng! A-Seng!]

INT/EXT. COVERED FRONT PORCH - CONTINUOUS

They catch up with Seng just as he is about to close the gate behind him.

PA

[Where are you going?!]

UNCLE SENG

[Leaving Cambodia. I've had enough.]

Uncle Seng looks at the ground.

PA

[Aren't you even going to see Yom?! Your own father!?!]

UNCLE SENG

[Please, do not try to make this about him!]

PA

[It's too late for that. You haven't gone to visit him *once* since they captured him and now you run out on us!?!]

UNCLE SENG

[Elder brother, I'm not going to stay here to see their faces looking down on me. The Khmer Rouge are my first enemy...]

Athy's siblings abruptly converge on the scene. All stare at Uncle Seng.

CHEA

[Where is Uncle going?]

UNCLE SENG

[Hopefully, America.]

MAK

[Achea, don't you see your father's talking to your uncle?!]

Chea turns to Mak's sour face.

They hear a MOTORCYCLE REVVING UP on the road. Uncle Seng turns to the motorcycle as it rides up to him through the gate.

SURG, 20s, in Air Force uniform, dismounts and presses his hands together to formerly greet Pa and Mak, but they don't return the greeting. Instead, they frown at him.

SURG

[Sorry, Seng, but they are not gonna wait for us.]

UNCLE SENG

(to Pa)

[Elder Brother... I am sorry. But I have made my choice.]

Uncle Seng gets on the backseat of the bike. With the revving of his engine, Surg drives Uncle Seng away from Athy and the family.

ATHY

[Uncle!]

INT/EXT. ROAD - CONTINUOUS

Athy watches her uncle disappear.

Pa looks through the gate. At a loss for words. Everyone is shocked, devastated.

PRE-LAP: The WHIRRING of UH-1 Huey Helicopters.

EXT. KOMPONG CHHNANG AIR FORCE BASE - NIGHT

SUPER: KOMPONG CHHNANG AIR FORCE BASE, CAMBODIA

Armed ground troops are being unloaded from the military trucks. As soon as they hit the ground, they run toward airplanes.

A Huey helicopter comes in for a landing, only to CRASH to the tarmac, sending fire streaking into the dark sky.

Another one lands safely. Uncle Seng and many pilots bolt out, run toward the C-123 cargo plane.

But Surg races toward a T-28 plane, parked next to the others. Uncle Seng does a double take, runs after him.

UNCLE SENG
[Ride with us!]

SURG
[Got my plane. See you at the
base.]

Surg salutes Seng as he gets into his T-28. Seng awkwardly returns the gesture as he runs to the C-123.

The ground troops close in, but the C-123 speeds up on the runway, carrying precious cargo towards the sky. Just then --

A piercing EXPLOSION echoes out. Seng turns to find that Surg's T-28 has combusted before take off.

Seng stares at the burning wreckage from the window, mouth agape.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Ry, Than, Avy and Athy sit atop Pa's medicine desk, playing a game of cards.

BOOM! An explosion hits behind their home. It shakes the foundation. Shrapnel SHOWERS the roof. The kids are horror-stricken, staring at the ceiling.

Mak runs from the kitchen, pulling Map and Vin with her toward the desk. Chea and Ra scream from their bedroom.

CHEA & RA (O.S.)
[Mak, Mak!]

MAK

(to Ry)

[Take your brothers! Get under your
Uncle's bed! Achea, underneath your
bed!]

Ry grabs Vin. Athy grabs Map. They rush after Than and Avy.

INT. SENG'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Athy and her siblings frantically crawl under Seng's bed.
More BOMBS drop. The house shakes and so does Athy. Something
dawns on her. She fixates on Ry.

ATHY

[Ry, my school. They're bombing my
school! Wounded soldiers stay
there.]

EXT. SANTEU MOOK ELEMENTARY - NIGHT

The school buildings roil with flames. An ARTILLERY SHELL
explodes at the front doors, blasting through the shelters
and sending soldiers flying like rag dolls. The few who
remain alive scramble out on fire, screaming in agony.

INT. SENG'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Huddled close to her siblings, Athy presses her hands
together.

ATHY

[If the enemy comes before, make it
pass over. If the enemy comes
behind, make it vanish... Yiey Tot,
please watch over us. Over Pa. God,
protect my uncle. Please.]

Athy closes her eyes and, gradually, the sound of bombs fade
away until there is only SILENCE.

INT. ATHY'S BEDROOM - MORNING

SUPER: APRIL 17, 1975.

Athy is sound asleep. A crude MALE VOICE wakes her.

KHMER ROUGE (ON RADIO)(O.S.)
 [Surrender! Phnom Penh has been
 taken over!]

Athy leaps out of bed.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Mak, Chea, Ra, Ry and Than nervously listen to the radio,
 where a Khmer Rouge spokesman lectures them:

KHMER ROUGE (O.S.)(CONT'D)
 [Give up your weapons. Display a
 white flag.]

Mak abruptly gets up from the sofa, growing frantic.

MAK
 [Chea, all of you, Ra, make a flag!
 Hurry!]

ATHY
 [Mak? Did Pa come home last night?]

Mak barely glances at Athy and hurries into her bedroom. Athy
 runs out of the house.

EXT. ALLEY - CONTINUOUS

Athy anxiously observes frantic people coming out of their
 homes. Men and women ask each other questions.

Athy runs farther up the alley, hears the sound of a SCOOTER
 running. More people stride to a MAN in the middle of the
 crowd, obscured from our view. Others carefully listen to him
 from the balconies.

A WOMAN, in a tank top and sarong, shouts to the man from a
 balcony.

BALCONY WOMAN
 [Sir! We don't have a white flag.
 Where can we get one?]

MAN (O.S.)
 [Just use anything white! A sheet,
 even!]

BALCONY WOMAN
 [Thank you, sir!]

Athy recognizes the man, runs to him. It is none other than PA.

ATHY

[Pa! Pa!]

Athy pushes her way in to reach Pa. He is shocked to see her.

PA

[Athy, why aren't you at home?]

ATHY

[I'm looking for you, Pa!]

PA

[Go back home, child. Pa's coming.]

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Dresser doors hang open. Clothes in disarray. Everyone crowds around Pa on the sofas and chairs.

PA

[We're in trouble. Lon Nol already left for America.]

MAK

[Where else would he go? They were the ones who corrupted him and his supporters.]

PA

[The Khmer Rouge got Lon Non and his family.]

Pa sighs.

PA (CONT'D)

[They've no mercy, even for civilians...

(beat)

[Let alone the brother of the President.]

MAK

[Why didn't you come home last night? Athy kept asking about you.]

ATHY

[Pa, I couldn't sleep.]

PA

[We were not allowed to leave our offices.]

(beat)

[Did anyone put a white flag in front of the house?]

CHEA

[Not yet.]

PA

[What are you waiting for?!]

MAK

[I told them to make a flag.]

PA

[Get a white pillowcase! Hang it up where it can be seen-]

Just then, two armed KHMER ROUGE soldiers, in black uniforms and checkered scarves, appear at the door. Everyone freezes in their seats, but Pa walks up to them.

PA (CONT'D)

[May I help you?]

KHMER ROUGE #1

[Get your family out of the city. The Americans will soon bomb us again.]

PA

[But this is our last home. Where would we go?]

KHMER ROUGE #2

[We don't care where you'll go. Just stay two miles from the city. You want to be blown to pieces?]

The soldiers bolt out. Pa absorbs this, rocked.

MAK

[Will the Americans bomb us again?]

PA

[It's a ploy because they don't want us to come back. We have to go to my parents' in Year Piar.]

MAK

[Your brothers and sisters, too? And their families?]

Pa nods, gazes at his speechless children.

EXT. PHNOM PENH - MAIN STREET - DAY

Cambodia is under siege. Over two million people slowly move along under the punishing sun. Motorbikes and cars are being pushed. Frenzied dogs WHIMPER. Pigs SQUEAL incessantly.

Athy's family is bottle-necked at a bridge under which the river carries a smattering of human and animal corpses along with a large amount of debris.

Akie whines at people's feet. Athy keeps turning to look for him. Pa pulls her closer to him.

On the shoulders of the street, armed Khmer Rouge patrol the slow human river from their tanks, jeeps, and trucks.

EXT. FREEWAY - DAY

The avalanche of humanity slowly rolls on the freeway as far as the eye can see.

In the field, on the right side of the freeway, armed Khmer Rouge soldiers force blindfolded men, in green camouflage and civilian clothes, into military trucks with their hands tied behind their backs.

Pa nervously steals glances as he walks the scooter. When his family gets closer to the check point, he hunches, trying to blend in with the crowd; most are shorter than he. Athy watches Pa sadly, along with Chea and Mak.

INT. GRANDPARENTS' HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

SUPER: YEAR PIAR VILLAGE

Anxiously, Athy, her family and other relatives gather around as Chea fumbles for the Voice of America's frequency. The STATIC gets louder. Pa knits his eyebrows.

PA
[Achea, turn it down!]

AMERICAN ANNOUNCER (ON RADIO) (O.S.)
This is the Voice of America from
Washington. The following broadcast
is in Khmer.

The faint, brassy strains of the INSTRUMENTAL to "YANKEE DOODLE" plays and then fade out.

KHMER BROADCASTER (O.S.)
This is Washington, the radio of
the Voice of America. I am Chen
Khen. Ladies and gentlemen, please
listen to the events that have
taken place in Cambodia.

Pa sighs. Mak frowns nervously.

MAK
[Achea, turn it off!]

Chea glances at Mak, but does nothing. Mak reaches to turn the radio off. Pa raises his hand to shield the radio.

PA
[Not yet.]

GRANDFATHER, 70s, stooped and grave, shirtless, in black pants, peeks through the door.

ATHY
(sotto)
[Pa? Grandfather.]

Grandfather nervously points at the floor.

GRANDFATHER
(sotto, to Pa)
[Son, informant is beneath this
room. Listening.]

As Pa struggles to digest what his father just said, Mak quickly turns off the radio.

Fast FOOTSTEPS storm inside. BOY INFORMANT, 15, pompous, in black uniform, intrudes on the family's private gathering.

Everyone moves away from the radio. Without a word, he grabs it. Athy tussles with him.

BOY INFORMANT
[It's the High Organization's.
You'll learn. All of you new
people.]

Athy glares daggers at the Boy as he yanks it away. She is about to lunge at him, but Pa pulls her away.

ENTER MONTAGE:

1) Life is now reduced to mundane farming and hard labor. Even still, Athy dresses in her best navy blue skirt and chic white blouse.

2) In the muddy field, she awkwardly plants rice seedlings among local kids in ragged old clothes. Pa, in his casual spring clothes toils with various Uncles and other men labor in the hot sun to build the Khmer Rouge irrigation canals.

3) Chea, Ra, and Ry work among other young women in a different section of the canal.

4) Mak, Athy's aunts and other women pick up cow dung dropped in the village, carry them on their heads in woven baskets, then dump them in the rice fields.

END MONTAGE.

EXT. GRANDPARENTS' HOME - DAY

A peaceful home is surrounded by lush papaya, tamarind, pineapple and banana trees. Thriving Asian gourds cluster on the trellises.

The family gathers on the solid oak bed, a heavy slab of wood which has been transported outside near the stairs. Athy wheezes as she watches Pa.

PA

(sotto)

[They're ignorant dolts...]

(shakes his head)

[In this era, all you need to do to pass an exam is know how to dig dirt.]

Athy and relatives join in with light laughter, but Mak looks around, shoots Pa her patented look of disapproval.

MAK

[Your father is careless. If they've heard what he just said, we would all be in trouble. Joking without thinking. Then who would be the "dolt"?]

Mak's words erase all the surrounding smiles.

PA

[Mak is right. Let's stop talking. Nowadays, walls have ears.]

Athy holds Pa's hand.

ATHY

[Pa, do we have to go to their meeting tomorrow? I can't breathe out there.]

Pa touches her head.

PA

[Yes. It's for us city people. Stop getting sick. Okay? Pa doesn't have any more asthma medicine for you.]

Pa gives a weak smile.

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Wheezing and struggling to inhale air, Athy arrives with Pa and her siblings at the mandatory meeting, behind a mile of dressed-up tribal gathering -- a trip back in time.

ATHY

(shakes Pa's hand)

[Pa, look.]

Hundreds of so-called "new people" squat or sit on plastic material or cloth in the hot sun.

PA

[Pa knows.]

Pa squats, sitting on his heels while Athy stands by him and squints defiantly at the Khmer Rouge's makeshift stage -- a deck covered with gray roofing with two beams in front, each mounted with bell-shaped loudspeakers.

Pa signals to Athy to sit down, but she answers him with a single sharp shake of her head.

The loudspeakers squawk, followed by a Khmer Rouge BRAINWASHER, 40s, lanky and rodential, in a black uniform and checkered blue scarf.

BRAINWASHER

[Comrades, now we are all equal.
There are no longer rich and poor.
We are equal. We all wear black uniforms.]

Athy narrows her eyes toward the Khmer Rouge, then looks at her clothes -- a cute ruffle white blouse and a navy blue skirt.

BRAINWASHER (CONT'D)
 [We fought the American
 imperialists with our bare hands,
 and took victory over them. We were
 brave! Long live Democratic
 Kampuchea. Long Live...]

The Khmer Rouge on stage join him, chanting "long live, long live" with their fists stabbing upward into the air. The new people sitting close to the stage begin to haltingly chant like them, followed by the ones behind them.

BRAINWASHER (CONT'D)
 [Down with the American
 imperialists. Down with...]

The new people have to join him again, chanting and fist-pumping. But Athy glares at them, stands defiantly near Pa. A seed of defiance sprouting within her.

ATHY
 (sotto)
 [Stupid Khmer Rouge. We're not
 American imperialists.]

EXT. GRANDPARENTS' HOME - NIGHT

The night is lit dimly by an oil lamp. By now, Athy is wheezing harder, struggling to breathe while lying on the oak bed next Pa and her grandfather.

Two MALE and one FEMALE KHMER ROUGE INTERROGATORS, 20s-30s, sit on the corner of the bed like coiled cobras.

WOMAN INTERROGATOR
 (to Pa)
 [Comrade, the High Organization is
 interested in your previous
 profession.]

Pa notices Athy intensely focusing on the woman.

PA
 [Athy, you're sick. Go back to
 sleep, child.]

Athy closes her eyes, then opens them again.

WOMAN INTERROGATOR
 [What was it, comrade?]

PA
 [I served our country as a PM.]

Male Interrogator #1 turns to Grandfather.

MALE INTERROGATOR #1
[Where is your other son, the
pilot?]

GRANDFATHER
[I don't know why Seng hasn't come
home...]

Male Interrogator #2 glares at Grandfather, who turns to Pa.

PA
[We were separated during the
evacuation.]

MALE INTERROGATOR #1
[Then comrade and other men from
the city need to attend an
orientation. To our new
government.]

Male Interrogator #1 exchanges a look with the Female
Interrogator. Grandfather clocks it.

EXT. RECEDING LAKE - DAY

Ra and Ry stand in a lake, awkwardly scooping in the milky
water with a slapdash fishing net fashioned from the mosquito
netting.

Athy holds a basket with a small catch of little fish and
prawns as she wades slowly after her sisters.

ATHY
[I'm tired of following you. The
lake doesn't have much fish.]

RA
[But you're feeling better. And we
need someone to hold the basket.]

RY
[Athy, there's no market.]

ATHY
[But why can't Than help? He's
older than me.]

RA
[He's also a boy.]

ATHY
[He eats food, too, doesn't he?]

Athy cringes, lifts her leg out of the water.

ATHY (CONT'D)
[Ah! What's on my leg?]

Ry looks down to find a dark creature, the size of a string bean, clinging to Athy's shin.

RY
[Ra! Leech, le--leech. Ow, ow...]

Ry shudders, drops the mosquito netting in the water. Then runs, lifts her legs, one after another, checking for leeches. Athy panics, a mirror image of Ry.

ATHY
[Ow, ow!]

She lifts her legs. Eyes becoming saucer-sized when she sees the leech is still there.

ATHY (CONT'D)
[Ry, help me! Get it off!]

Athy runs toward Ry for help. Ry runs away from her.

RY
[Get away from me with that thing!]

Athy huffs in irritation, runs toward Ra.

ATHY
[Help! Take it off me. Hurry! I've got to see Pa.]

RA
[Stop moving! Stay still!]

EXT. ORCHARD - DAY

Athy hastily rinses her legs with the water from a bucket sitting near a well.

She runs through the orchard, full of banana trees and pineapples.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Mak anxiously watches Pa, in a short sleeve cream color dress shirt and pants.

He, Uncle Seurg, a burly former boxer/PM, and Uncle Sorn, wispy in spring casual attire, head toward the door. Mak turns to the other relatives sitting on the mat.

MAK

[Has anyone seen Athy?]

CHEA

[I thought she went fishing with Ra.]

MAK

[She needs to see her father.]

Chea looks for Athy. Grandfather frowns hard at Mak.

GRANDFATHER

(irritated)

[They're waiting.]

Pa and Mak share a nervous look. Pa steps out the door, followed by the two uncles.

EXT. FRONT YARD - CONTINUOUS

Athy obliviously emerges from the orchard toward the back stairs to the kitchen.

ANGLE ON: Meanwhile, three armed Khmer Rouge, in black uniforms, meet Pa and her uncles at the bottom of the front stairs.

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Athy anxiously scans the room for her father with a bowl of food in her hand. She talks with food in her mouth.

ATHY

[Mak! Where is Pa? Where is he?!]

MAK

[He had to leave.]

ATHY

[No! No!]

She runs for the door.

EXT. OX PATH - CONTINUOUS

She waves to the caravan of ox carts speeding away.

ATHY

[Pa! Wait! Wait for me!]

Pa stands up, gestures vigorously at Athy to go back.

VOICES of the drivers command forcibly as the whips fly up over the oxen.

Athy bends down in pain, her face crumbled. As Pa disappears in the shaded path, she bolts --

EXT. DRIVEWAY - CONTINUOUS

Sprinting past Chea standing by the stairs, helplessly watching Athy's pain.

EXT. ORCHARD - CONTINUOUS

Athy runs through the groves of pineapple and fruit trees.

EXT. BANANA GROVE - CONTINUOUS

She cups her face in her hands. The food bowl lies on the ground next to her.

ATHY

(sobbing)

[Pa, come back. Come back to your child.]

The tears come flowing out. Then, a beat of tenderness:

ATHY (CONT'D)

(softly)

[Pa left so soon.]

TIME CUTS:

With sorrow comes anger. The banana tree is Athy's punching bag. She tears at the wilted, papery layers along the trunk, yanking them loose, striking the tree with her fist.

Later still, she leans on the beat-up banana tree, rests her head on her knees.

EXT. BENEATH GRANDPARENTS' HOME - EVENING

Sitting on Pa's scooter, Athy fits her small hands onto the rubber handles over the imprint of his larger hands.

She stares at the tachometer. The red needle is aligned at the zero mark. Athy breaks down.

Chea rushes to her.

CHEA
[Athy! Are you okay?]

ATHY
[My spirit is leaving me, Chea. I
need Pa.]

Chea massages Athy's head.

CHEA
[I know. I miss Pa, too. Very
much.]

Athy touches the tachometer.

ATHY
[Chea, this is it. This is our
lives... Zero.]

Chea sadly looks at the tachometer, lifts Athy's face up.

CHEA
[Don't say that. You can't think
that way.]

ATHY
[What else can I think as long as
he's gone? How can we get Pa back?]

CHEA
[I don't know. I wish I did.]

Chea hugs Athy, who just cries harder.

CHEA (CONT'D)
[My beloved sister. You need to
eat. Let's go upstairs.]

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

As Mak hurries along an alley surrounded by huts, she hears the RUSTLE of a sarong behind her as if someone is in a terrible rush.

Mak turns with a scowl on her face. SOM, 30s, skinny and plain, in black uniform and checkered scarf, stops in her tracks.

SOM
[You remember me?]

MAK
[... Som! You worked for my father in-law. Now you're with *them*, I see.]

SOM
[I did what I had to do. Nothing more.]

MAK
[What do you want? I'm late to a meeting.]

SOM
[About that meeting. When they ask if you want to go work with your husband in the office...]

Som nervously glances around, her body shakes.

SOM (CONT'D)
[Say you'd rather work for the High Organization.]

MAK
[Why should I trust you? Or your husband?]

SOM
[I don't blame you for being suspicious, but you'll have to take my word for now.]

She hurries away. Mak looks perplexed, overwhelmed.

A LOCAL MAN, 50s, in a short sleeve cream color dress shirt and a worn-out cotton pants, walks into view in front of Mak.

His clothes catch her eyes, so she does a double take. She catches up with him.

MAK
[Where did you get that shirt?]

The man is baffled at this abrupt confrontation.

LOCAL MAN
[They gave it to me.]

Mak stares at him with fierce indignation.

MAK
[Who?! It's my husband's.]

The Local Man abruptly turns and hurries away. Mak furiously turns around.

EXT. SOM'S HUT - DAY

Emotions churning, Mak approaches and shakes the thatched wall.

MAK
[Where did your husband take him?]

Som appears at the door-less entrance.

SOM
(sotto)
[Not out here. Come in!]

INT. SOM'S HUT - CONTINUOUS

Som faces Mak, now fuming with anger.

SOM
[A remote field. Along with other city men. They will not come back. All their clothes were given to poor villagers.]

MAK
[Why didn't you help him? And my brothers in-law?]

SOM
[I couldn't... Your family, your relatives should not have come back here.]

MAK
[Where do you think we could have gone? And why should I care about what you told me to say?]

SOM
[Your father-in-law was kind to my family.]

MAK

[To this whole village. And others.
That's who he is and so is my
husband.]

SOM

[He also owns a lot of land and
cattle.]

MAK

[What? Now it's a crime to own land
and cattle? He and his father
worked for their wealth.]

SOM

[And your brother-in-law, Seng, a
pilot...]

MAK

[What does Seng being a pilot have
to do with anything? You're
irritating me.]

Mak abruptly gets up. Som grabs Mak's arm.

SOM

[All the city women who said they
wanted to go with their
husbands...]

(beat)

[Their children, their parents also
went with them. None came back.
Only their clothes --]

Mak gets out the hut.

SOM (CONT'D)

[Please be careful. The walls have
ears.]

EXT. GRANDPARENT'S HOME - SHACK - NIGHT

A blanket of darkness surrounds the orchard, as well as
Grandparents' home and shack, now occupied by Athy's family.
The shack is dimly lit. An informant pads to it, gently lifts
up a panel and looks inside.

INT. SHACK - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS

The oil lamp barely lights the shack. On the bamboo deck,
Athy's family eats dinner: a meager meal caught in the lake
and scanty rice rations.

Mak gazes at her hungry children. She looks at Athy.

MAK
(sotto)
[Pa will not come back.]

ATHY
[Mak, why?!]

Mak looks down at her plate, avoiding Athy's devastated expression.

ATHY (CONT'D)
[... That can't be right. They said
Pa will come back in thirty days.]

MAK
[He will *not* be back.]

ATHY
[No! I don't believe t --]

CHEA
(sotto, pointed)
[Athy!]

Mak motions her head to the thatched wall. Athy focuses on Mak's face, realizing she's speaking for the informant's benefit.

MAK
(sotto)
[We still can breathe, child.]

Mak picks up a wilted vegetable beside her, shows it to Athy.

MAK (CONT'D)
[Tomorrow, pick it for Mak.
Pigweeds, too, if you see them.
Your grandparents' orchard is
depleted. His storages have been
confiscated.]

ATHY
[I don't know where to find it.]

INT. SHACK - NIGHT - LATER

Lying on the mat with her family, Athy holds Pa's dress shirt to her mouth to muffle her weeping.

EXT. YIEY CHEA'S HOME - FRONT YARD - DAY

Athy picks the vegetables, shoves them into the pouches of her scarf.

A number of women climb down the stairs of the house. An ANGRY WOMAN, 50s, in a black blouse and sarong, sits at the doorless entrance of the house.

ANGRY WOMAN

[Who else dropped the bombs? It was him.]

Athy becomes distracted and looks for the source of the voice.

ANGRY WOMAN (CONT'D)

[If it weren't for him, our families would still be here...]

QUICK FLASH:

Craters and bunkers in which desperate villagers hide are disintegrated.

BACK TO:

ANGRY WOMAN (CONT'D)

[...When he comes --]

The Angry Woman looks at YIEY CHEA, 60s, who carefully holds onto the railing as she climbs the stairs.

YIEY CHEA

[When Aseng comes, we don't have to kill him. We'll pee on his head until he drowns.]

ATHY

(sotto)

[What? Uncle Seng?]

Yiey Chea notices Athy listening in.

YIEY CHEA

[City kid! Whose kid is she?]

Athy trots away.

EXT. BARREN FIELD - RAILWAY - DAY

Waves of heat are visible as the train pulls into view. Athy's family and hundreds of other people jostle to be closer to the rail.

MAK

[Hold hands. Hold tight!]

ATHY

[Mak, where is Grandpa? Grandma?]

MAK

[I don't know. Just hold tight.]

The train stops. Armed Khmer Rouge soldiers hop off the freight cars. Some open the freight doors. Others point the rifles at the long crowd to get in.

The crowd jostles Athy's family, but luckily they are able to get into the same car. Other families are forced into different ones. Mothers and children CRY, hands reaching for each other in vain.

EXT. DAAKPO VILLAGE - DAY

The sun beams down as Khmer Rouge informants, in black uniforms, shake the walls of the newly built thatched huts nestled in the woods.

Athy, her family, and other city people rush out of the huts. They merge into a dusty path with others.

EXT. PREAHNETH PREAH VILLAGE - EXECUTION SITE - DAY

Under the canopy of tall shade trees, Athy and other children stand sadly before the adults. All "city people."

In front of them, a refined-looking pregnant woman, 20s, in cotton blouse, is blindfolded and tied to a pole.

About twenty feet from her, a blindfolded man, 20s, nicely toned and tall, in a shirt and cotton pants, is tied to another pole.

Across from them stand the Khmer Rouge leaders sit at the tables, guarded by armed soldiers. Spades and hoes lean against a short pole.

KHMER ROUGH LEADER #1, 40s, with a pinched face and nasally voice, gets up.

KHMER ROUGE LEADER #1
[These comrades are our enemies.]

Mean-looking KHMER ROUGE LEADER #2, muscle-bound and loutish, 40s, rises from his chair.

KHMER ROUGE LEADER #2
[They have betrayed the High
Organization.]

KHMER ROUGE EXECUTIONER, 40s, a stocky brute, picks up a hoe, tests its weight, puts it back. Picks up a spade, tests its weight. It looks heavier.

KHMER ROUGE EXECUTIONER
[They love each other without the
High Organization permission.]

He rushes to the man, raises the spade above his head.

KHMER ROUGE EXECUTIONER (CONT'D)
[Bend your head! Now!]

The man bends his head. Athy looks away, shaking as --

The Executioner swings the spade toward the man's nape.

A sickening *THWACK* resounds.

EXT. RECEDING POND - DAY

Chea and Athy carry a bucket of milky water up the bank. Athy looks pensive.

ATHY
[Chea, how come good doesn't win
over evil? Why did the Khmer Rouge
win if they are bad people?]

Chea is surprised by Athy's questions.

CHEA
[Loss will be God's, victory will
be the devil's...]

Chea and Athy set the bucket on the bank.

CHEA (CONT'D)
[When good appears to lose, it's an
opportunity for one to be patient,
and become like God. But not long,
young sister.
(MORE)]

CHEA (CONT'D)

It has been said in a Cambodia
proverb that, Good is symbolized by
a gourd. And evil...]

Chea glances over her shoulder.

CHEA (CONT'D)

[... Shards of broken glass. Now
the gourd sinks. Broken glass
floats. But broken glass will not
float long.]

Athy's eyes become bigger.

CHEA (CONT'D)

[Soon, the gourd will float
instead, and then the good will
prevail. It will happen. You'll
see...]

ATHY

[When will they send you and Ra to
the camp?]

CHEA

[Tomorrow. You look after Mak.
Okay?]

Athy hugs Chea tightly. Chea pulls her away, looks over her
shoulder again.

ATHY

[I'll miss you, Chea. I pray broken
glass sinks soon.]

CHEA

[Me too, my beloved young sister.
I'll cherish one more night with
our family.]

INT. ATHY'S HUT #1 - NIGHT

The WIND rattles the walls. Athy's family cuddles close to
keep warm, except Vin, 5, who sleeps alone in the corner
without a blanket, only a sarong.

VIN

[Mak, I'm cold. I want to sleep
next to you.]

MAK

[My son, I don't want you to make
everyone sick. Please sleep there.]

VIN

[Mak, only one more night. I go to the hospital tomorrow.]

CHEA

[Mak, let him! Only one night.]

MAK

[Achea, didn't you hear what I said?]

Vin CRIES.

MAK (CONT'D)

[My son, Ry will look after you at the hospital. I'm sorry, child.]

ATHY

[Vin, please stop, young brother.]

CHEA

[We love you, Vin.]

Vin stifles his emotions.

INT. ATHY'S HUT #1 - DAY

In the hut Athy, Avy, and Map have despair etched upon their faces. Mak sits across from Athy, desperation in her eyes.

MAK

[Athy, they said the children's camp is near here, and there's lots of food to eat. Bring some for Mak.]

ATHY

[But I'll miss you. I don't want to go.]

MAK

[If you stay here, you'll be like Vin. Sneak out to see me at night, but don't stay here. They barely give us food.]

ATHY

[I'll find crickets. Toads, Mice. I'll be okay, Mak.]

MAK

[They won't let you stay, child!]

ATHY
[I won't go!]

EXT. MT. KAMBOUR LABOR CAMP - MAKESHIFT HUT - EVENING

With her head bowed, Athy sits with CHENG, 10, wearing an old T-shirt and cotton pants, under tall trees near which a few hundred children crowd together in and around the hut.

A few children cry, calling out for their mothers. The collective cries rise to a crescendo as the Informants harangue them:

CRYING CHILDREN (O.S.)
[I want my mommy, I want my mommy.]

INFORMANTS (O.S.)
[Shut up! Stop, stop!]

A chorus of WAILS drowns out the Informants.

As soon as COOKS set black pots of rice and watery soup on the ground. A river of children quickly flows out of the makeshift hut, surrounding the cooks.

Athy and Cheng run to join them. Every kid holds out a plate for rice. The stern RICE COOK, 30, puts one scoop of rice into a girl's plate. She waits for more.

RICE COOK
[Comrade, one ladle. Move!]

More children quickly inch forward.

RICE COOK (CONT'D)
[Sit in circles for soup. Sit!]

Athy and Cheng sit in the same circle. A hand drops a plastic bowl in the middle. A black ladle pours cloudy broth containing a few little fish with heads still intact.

Spoons collide; small hands grab the fish. Athy grabs hers, and so does Cheng.

In seconds, the little fish are gone, leaving only cloudy broth. A SAD GIRL, 9, in ragged clothes, becomes teary. She stares at the broth.

When another ration of soup pours into the bowl, spoons collide in the bowl.

SAD GIRL
[Don't take all the fish!]

Spoons freeze in the bowl. The Sad Girl spoons out her share. Miraculously, Chea appears cautiously, squats by Athy.

CHEA

[Athy, you shouldn't have come.]

Athy is transfixed by Chea's presence. Her face and body have become wan, rail thin. She has visibly declined since we last saw her.

ATHY

[But... they told Mak there's lots of food here.]

Chea shakes her head, tears in her eyes.

CHEA

[They lied. Now who's gonna look after Mak? The older children are all gone.]

Athy looks guilty and deeply sad.

ATHY

[But Chea... I'm only ten.]

CHEA

[You're too young to build irrigation canals.]

ATHY

[How can I go back to Mak, Chea? Help me.]

Chea notices a brigade leader coming toward her.

CHEA

[May you encounter only good things, Athy. I'll look for you.]

She hurries away among shelters. Athy tears up, forgetting about the food.

EXT. LABOR CAMP - DAY

Athy and hundreds of children labor under the hot sun, gaunt like walking skeletons. Athy struggles to carry the dirt-filled baskets on her shoulder.

Cheng steals glances at the brigade leaders and the informants nearby who keep an eye on the children.

She walks up to Athy.

CHENG
[Athy, I sucked on this long
grass...]

Cheng swallows.

CHENG (CONT'D)
[Tastes like sugarcane. Want to go
try it?]

Now Athy swallows, too. Her eyes glaze over. She nods.

CHENG (CONT'D)
[Ask that lazy dog after me.]

Cheng glares at a female BRIGADE LEADER #1, 20s, plainly imperious and rangy, in black uniform and scarf who stands with an informant in the canal.

ATHY
[How do you know she's lazy?]

CHENG
[She preaches to us about hard
work, but that dog goes back to
sleep after she wakes us up in the
morning. I saw her.]

Cheng exchanges a glance with Athy as she gets off the dam.

EXT. DISTANT GRASS FIELD - DAY

Athy and Cheng suck hungrily on crisp stalks. Each has a pile lying on the ground in front of them.

ATHY
[We should go back. They'll notice
that we're gone.]

CHENG
[Not yet.]

ATHY
[Cheng! Life is already tough. We
don't need any more problems.]

CHENG
(softly)
[Just a bit longer. It's okay, I've
done it before.]

ATHY
[But it was just you then.]

Cheng cuts more stalks. Athy quickly finishes hers.

ATHY (CONT'D)
[Hurry, Cheng!]

Cheng drops her hoe to the ground, hungrily sucks on the stalk, ignoring Athy. Athy picks up her hoe.

BRIGADE LEADER #1 (O.S.)
[Comrades, is this how you pee?!]

Athy and Cheng spin around, freeze, horrified to see the Brigade Leader and the informant standing beside her.

BRIGADE LEADER #1 (CONT'D)
[Reform them!]

The informant pulls Cheng forward. The enraged Brigade Leader yanks Athy's arm and shoves her forward, sending her sprawling to the ground. Athy GROANS.

EXT. ENTRANCE TO SHELTERS - NIGHT

Athy and Cheng are tied to a tree stump among a grove of trees. Athy desperately gasps for air, wracked with pain. She tries to move her body, groaning.

ATHY
[So tight. My body is numb, Cheng.
I pray it will be okay.]

CHENG
[Don't say that, Athy.]

ATHY
[I wish I was somewhere peaceful.
Anywhere at all...]

CHENG
[I should have listened to you. I'm
sorry.]

ATHY
[Cheng, I miss my mom. I've prayed
that I see her again.]

CHENG
[I miss my mom, too.]

EXT. ENTRANCE TO SHELTERS - DAY

Light breaks. Athy's and Cheng's bodies are slumped forward.

Children march out of the grove of trees to the work site.
The last girl in line stops and stares at their bodies.

EXT. ENTRANCE TO SHELTERS - NIGHT

Later, hands untie Athy and Cheng from the tree. Their limp bodies tip over. A faint GROAN.

Obscured by shadow, the person who freed them disappears in the grove of trees.

A girl sets two plates down by Athy and Cheng, then leaves.

EXT. SHELTERS - DAY

Seen from above, the small, makeshift grass shelters are built side by side near a stretch of newly built dam.

Sounds of children GROANING inside the shelters mix in with the buzzing of green-eyed flies. We GLIDE IN towards --

Athy and Cheng's shelter, where Athy's pair of old cotton pants is hung to dry.

Athy lies motionless on a worn-out piece of palm mat. Her bottom is wrapped with her scarf.

Cheng crawls in, sets Athy's food ration near her.

CHENG

[Athy?]

Athy shakes as she tries to get up. Frail and weak.

CHENG (CONT'D)

[We must leave this place.]

ATHY

[Don't you think I want to? I asked my sister Chea to help me, but she hasn't come back like she said she would.]

CHENG

[You've got dysentery. So do other kids. Now I do, too.]

ATHY
 (irritated)
 [Because we drink from the same
 stream we bathe in. Stupid Khmer
 Rouge!]

CHENG
 [And they let us rot in here.
 That's why we need to leave this
 place, or you'll never see your mom
 again.]

Cheng looks into Athy's eyes. They share a knowing glance.

CHENG (CONT'D)
 [If I stay here, I'll die. I might
 not die if I escape.]

ATHY
 [I want to see my mom, but how
 should I choose how I might die,
 Cheng?
 (beat)
 [How can I go with you? No energy
 to walk. And we can't escape in the
 open. This time, no reform for us.
 Remember? To keep you is no gain,
 to destroy you is no loss.]

CHENG
 [I know. I know. But there's a line
 of trees! We just have to get
 there. To block us. I'll help you
 walk. We'll go tomorrow, Athy. We
 have to.]

Athy stares in space. Her pondering face morphs into --

INT. ATHY AND CHENG'S SHELTER - AFTERNOON

Her nervous face, later. She holds her plate and spoon,
 waiting.

Cheng crawls in, looking anxious.

CHENG
 [Athy, are you ready? They're
 lining up for food.]

ATHY
 [Ready...]

Athy wants to say something to Cheng, but changes her mind when she notices Cheng shaking.

CHENG
[Your plate.]

Cheng grabs Athy's plate and spoon, slips them under her jacket. She nervously secures the drawstring on the bottom.

ATHY
[If they ask, tell them you went to
help me poop. Okay?]

Cheng nods as she kneels to put Athy's arm around her shoulders. Then she grabs a hoe, holds it up.

CHENG
[In case we get caught.]

EXT. STRETCH OF OPEN FIELD - DAY

The girls rush toward the only line of defense -- a row of six trees. Cheng drops the hoe on the ground and grips Athy's hand tighter, pulling her forward.

CHENG
[Athy, walk faster.]

Cheng and Athy look over their shoulders. They walk, then run -- an awkward, hobbled hopping.

EXT. OPEN FIELD - CONTINUOUS

The girls emerge between the trees that temporarily shielded them. Athy looks relieved. She releases herself from Cheng's hand.

ATHY
[I... I feel so free.]

Athy pauses, raises her hands above her head.

CHENG
[Athy, what are you doing? Keep
running!]

ATHY
[I've got energy, Cheng.]

Athy runs. Cheng is baffled.

Then, insidiously, Men's VOICES approach them.

Cheng and Athy sprawl on the ground like soldiers listening for enemy voices. They look at each other, horrified.

Propelled by her newfound power, Athy runs to the bushes ahead. Cheng swiftly follows her.

As the VOICES get closer, both girls stifle their gasping breaths.

As always, Athy is curious, peeks over the bushes. But Cheng pulls her down. Athy gives Cheng a look: "I need to know." Athy pulls back and peeks again.

ATHY'S POV: she sees a man carrying a fishing net on one shoulder, a rusty bucket on the other. Then another man walking right next to him.

Athy points to the men, Cheng hesitantly takes a peek.

After the men pass by, Athy and Cheng run across the open field toward the distant woods.

EXT. WOODS - NIGHT

Among shadows of trees, Athy and Cheng face each other.

CHENG

[If I don't see my mom, tell her
that I escaped with you.]

ATHY

(nodding)
[Still remember where your hut
is...]

Cheng and Athy part in different directions toward the village. Cheng turns to study Athy briefly.

After a beat, Athy turns and runs through layers of darkness after Cheng, who whirls about to face her.

ATHY (CONT'D)

[Thank you, Cheng, for helping me.
For all you've done.]

CHENG

[Remember how I got us in trouble?
Now I've made it up to you. Hope
you'll see your mom.]

With that, they part ways.

EXT. ATHY'S HUT #1 - NIGHT - LATER

Mak, who also looks malnourished, sits by the cooking fire with her back to the surrounding trees. Then, Athy comes rushing in from the darkness and passionately hugs a surprised Mak from behind.

MAK
[Child, they let you come back!
(gropes for words)
[You... you're finished?]

ATHY
(sotto)
[Mak, not too loud.]

Athy whispers into Mak's ear. Mak pulls away, mortified.

MAK
[Go inside before that ugly
informant sees you.]

Athy hurries into the hut.

EXT. RICE FIELD - MORNING

Mak stoops rhythmically with a group of women as they plant rice seedlings in the muddy paddy.

When she looks up, she is shocked to see CRANGE, 15, an ugly, hunchbacked, freckle-ridden teen boy in black clothes, standing next to Athy on an elevated pathway.

CRANGE
[Now work with adults. I will keep
an eye on you, comrade.]

Athy steps into the muddy rice field. Mak glares at the informant as he walks away.

MAK
(sotto)
[The ghost will take your soul,
bastard.]

Athy cringes in pain.

MAK (CONT'D)
[What's wrong?]

Athy lifts her leg up, wipes the mud off the top of her foot. Blood flows from a gash. Athy fishes out a dead tree branch.

MAK (CONT'D)
[Oh, child. It will get infected.]

INT. ATHY'S HUT #1 - ALCOVE - NIGHT

Athy thrashes around in the alcove, bangs on her right leg.

ATHY
[Mak, help me, please. Oh, Mak...
It hurts!]

Mak comes to rub around Athy's infected wound. Athy calms down. Mak goes back to sleep with Map and Avy.

Athy jolts, thrashes around, bangs her foot and hands against the floor to cope with the pain.

MAK
[Athy, stop! You'll wake everybody
up.]

ATHY
[It's so bad, I can't sleep.]

MAK
[Try, child. Try.]

ATHY
[But the pain shoots up my thigh.
My whole body. Wakes me up!]

MAK
[I need sleep, child. I'll find
sour leaves for you tomorrow.
Please try, do it for Mak.]

Mak goes back to sleep again, but Athy thrashes around again, suppressing her cry until her body gives in.

INT/EXT. ATHY'S HUT #1 - DAY

Athy wakes up alone in the hut. She slowly sits up, looks at the red, infected oval-shaped wound, the size of a quarter, caked with pus and dry blood.

She tears up as she removes the dry blood, causing her foot to jerk.

She picks up the scarf from the floor and slowly climbs out of the hut.

EXT. YUCCA FIELD - DAY

Athy anxiously picks wild sour leaves and shoves them into the pouch of her scarf.

Behind her stand young yucca plants about twelve inches tall, fenced off by thorny branches and trees. She crawls through them.

GUARD (O.S.)
[Comrade, are you stealing?!]

Startled, Athy turns to see a tall, skinny GUARD, 40s, with a long, curved knife on his shoulder.

ATHY
[No, I'm picking sour leaves for my foot. It's infected]

GUARD
[How stupid do you think I am?!]

The Guard grabs her by the arm, drags her along the ground.

ATHY
[Ow! Please don't hurt me. If you just look in my scarf...]

Under a tree, he pushes her down on her knees and ties her to it.

ATHY (CONT'D)
[Please, why don't you believe me?]

He yanks the scarf from her neck, throws it on the ground. The sour leaves spill out on top of the yellow dried leaves. Athy looks at the leaves, then at the yucca plants.

ATHY (CONT'D)
[How can I steal when there's no root?]

GUARD
[Not another word. I'll make an example out of you. Cut your head off at sunset.]

The Guard walks away. The SOUNDS of his footsteps crunch on dry leaves. Athy cries silently to herself.

ATHY
[Mak, I'm so sorry. I couldn't wait for you. I wish I could have seen you longer...]

Athy's ragged sobs become softer, weaker.

TIME FADE:

Later. The SWISH of a KNIFE cutting against the tree trunk. Athy slumps to the ground. The Guard appears near her.

GUARD

[Comrade, I set you free. No need to thank me. But don't do that again.]

He unties the rope from Athy's arms. She grabs her scarf, tries to get up to walk, but she can't. She crawls away.

EXT. ATHY'S HUT #1 - DAY - LATER

Mak sadly lets go of Athy's hand as Crange roughly yanks at Athy's arm.

MAK

[Don't hurt my daughter!]

Athy reaches out to Mak with her other hand.

ATHY

[Mak!]

MAK

[Go, child, so they won't hurt you.]

Athy limps away, struggling in vain to pull free from the informant's grip.

EXT. MT. SRAIS LABOR CAMP - IRRIGATION CANAL - DAY

Hundreds of malnourished children toil in extreme heat. Athy looks as if she is about to pass out. She holds a hoe in her hands to support herself. Three girls squint, waiting for her to fill their baskets with dirt.

Athy drops the hoe and sinks to the ground. She puts her hand over her eyes.

GROUP LEADER, 14, slight but pugnacious, wearing ragged clothes, arrives with some empty baskets.

She sees BRIGADE LEADER #2, 20s, domineering and willowy, in a black uniform and red checkered scarf, striding to the group. The Group Leader picks up Athy's hoe, breaks the dirt, then scoops it into the baskets.

Brigade Leader #2 walks up to Athy with a look of disdain.

BRIGADE LEADER #2
[What do you think you're doing?]

Athy looks up and squints, dazed.

GROUP LEADER
[That comrade is sick.]

Brigade Leader #2 turns to the Group Leader.

BRIGADE LEADER #2
[You dig the dirt.]
(turns to Athy)
[And you! Carry the dirt.]

EXT. MT. SRAIS LABOR CAMP - DAM - DAY

Athy struggles up the slope of the dam, weighed down by heavy baskets.

When she turns and realizes that she's far away from everyone in the canal, she prays under her breath:

ATHY
[Pa, help me. God, please, help me.
I can't go on...]

Tears roll down her face. She gives in.

Suddenly, the sky becomes overcast. Athy cranes skyward to see clusters of big clouds moving in, turning day into night in seconds.

Periodic lightning streaks violently across the dark sky, threatening to strike the ground nearby.

Athy sees Brigade Leaders run for their lives, abandoning children who become disoriented and scared.

Thunder rumbles angrily. Dense drops of rain beat down. Children frantically run about and cry to themselves.

Athy drops the carrying stick. She raises her hand to shield her eyes.

ATHY (CONT'D)
[Please wait for me!]

Her voice is barely heard. She limps behind groups of children in the drenched, muddy field.

Some cling to one another, covering their heads with scarves. Others trudge by themselves in the muddy irrigation canal that stretches miles away.

Athy reaches out to a clump of girls. She holds onto one.

ATHY (CONT'D)
[Please, let me...]

AREE, 10, a city girl from Athy's village, cries out.

AREE (O.S.)
(choking)
[Help me! I fell. Help me, Athy!]

Athy shudders, her teeth chatter. She looks around.

ATHY
[Ar... Aree! Where... are you?]

AREE (O.S.)
[In the water --]
(chokes, coughs)
[Help me.]

ATHY
[I'm coming.]

Athy makes slow SLOSHING SOUNDS through the waist-deep water. Finally, she comes upon Aree, mired in the mucky downpour.

AREE
[Pull me, Athy...]

ATHY
[I'm co-cold...]

Athy tries her best to yank Aree free, but the water is too strong. Athy falls on Aree with a SPLASH. They choke and cough.

A MALE RESCUER's voice rises over children's CRIES and WHIMPERS.

MALE RESCUER (O.S.)
[I'm coming, I'm coming!]

FADE TO BLACK.

PRE-LAP: Whimpers of PAIN lead us into --

INT. MAKESHIFT CLINIC - DAY

A female DOCTOR, 30s, short hair, in black uniform, sits beside Athy on a bamboo deck. She exudes intelligence and warmth.

She winces at Athy's swelling, hollow wound covered with thick pus.

FEMALE DOCTOR

[How long has young sister had this wound?]

A ray of sun breaks through. Athy manages to smile at the Doctor.

ATHY

[A long time. Why doesn't elder sister call me "comrade" like the others?]

FEMALE DOCTOR

[You're different. And, if I might say, so am I...]

The Doctor glances over her shoulder.

ATHY

[You remind me of my older sister Chea. I miss her. Does elder sister have penicillin?]

The Doctor smiles, tickled by Athy's request.

FEMALE DOCTOR

[You know about penicillin?]

ATHY

[My father knew medicine. Always had some in his desk drawers. When he ran out, he asked me to bike to Neang Nareth pharmacy and buy it for him.]

FEMALE DOCTOR

[In the previous society, we trusted kids and welcomed them to do that. No problems. Let me check if I have it.]

The Doctor walks into a cubicle nearby.

FEMALE DOCTOR (O.S.) (CONT'D)
 (sotto)
 [Hmm, where did I see it? Oh, here
 it is.]

The Doctor returns with a vial of penicillin.

ATHY
 (wide-eyed)
 [It looks just like the ones Pa
 used.]

FEMALE DOCTOR
 [Yes, it is quite rare during this
 era... This is all I have.]
 (opens the vial)
 [It'll sting.]

ATHY
 [I know, Elder sister.]

The Doctor taps on the vial above the wound and a good amount
 of the penicillin powder spills into it. Athy bites her lip,
 scratches around the wound.

FEMALE DOCTOR
 [There we are. What a brave child
 you are.]

EXT. OPEN FIELD - FOOD AREA - DAY

From a BIRD'S EYE VIEW, we see Athy running among hundreds of
 children in a barren field, converging with young adults from
 different brigades.

CHEA (O.S.)
 [Athy! Athy!]

Athy turns, searches for the familiar voice.

ATHY
 [Chea?]

Chea pushes through the crowd from the opposite direction.

ATHY (CONT'D)
 [Chea, Chea.]

Finally, Chea emerges.

CHEA
 [Athy, where are you staying?]

ATHY
[I stay --]

Chea looks closer at Athy's eyes.

CHEA
[Your eyes! There are white lines!]

ATHY
[Before, my foot, now this. No sanitation here, Chea. And no medicine.]

Chea lifts Athy's eyelids. Indeed, the eyelashes are caked with white-yellow substance.

CHEA
[Athy, you could go blind!]

Athy pulls back, stares at Chea. Scared.

ATHY
[Don't say that!]

CHEA
[You'll be okay... Pee in a leaf, then drip it into your eyes.]

ATHY
[Pee?!]

CHEA
[Pee is sterilized.]

Chea touches Athy's shoulder.

CHEA (CONT'D)
[Save some of your food rations. We'll come and get you tonight.]

Chea turns around, rushes away through the crowd. Athy looks hopeful, runs toward children's lines.

INT. ATHY'S SHARED SHELTER - NIGHT

Athy drips pee in her eyes from a leaf. Excess pee rolls down her face.

ATHY
[Ew... ew...]

She grimaces and bears it.

INT. ATHY'S HUT #1 - NIGHT

The midnight moon wanes. Chea, Ra and Athy sit across from Mak, Avy and Map, whose bodies have grown swollen from edema due to malnourishment.

When Athy, Chea and Ra open their scarves, Map is excited to see what's inside.

MAP

[Mak, rice... Rice.]

MAK

[Achea, aren't you afraid they will catch you?]

CHEA

[We have to see you. Don't worry. We came with two locals.]

RA

[They know the secret paths.]

Athy gestures for her young siblings to eat. They, along with Mak, hungrily eat the rice with their fingers.

MAK

[They've told us to move to another hut. Achea, look after Athy. She's small. If they hurt her, Mak --]

ATHY

[Mak, we'll see you again.
(turns to Avy)
[Is it delicious, young sister?]

Avy swallows her food.

AVY

[Yes. Very delicious.]

MAK

[God, it's sweet. Eating rice is like going to heaven... If it weren't for Avy, Mak wouldn't know what to do. I can hardly walk.]

Avy gazes at Athy. Even though her eyelids are swollen, there is a glint of happiness that shines through her gaze.

ATHY

[You pick water hyacinth for Mak?]

AVY
[Yeah, and it was not easy. There
are lots of leeches --]

Athy shivers, making Avy chuckle.

AVY (CONT'D)
[But I just pulled them off my
legs.]

Avy slowly demonstrates with her edematous arm.

ATHY
[When I go with you, I'll wait on
the dry land.]

Avy again chuckles softy. Mak smiles proudly at her. Chea pats her head as Avy eats more rice.

CHEA
[Mak, Avy's edema looks bad. She
needs to go to the hospital. Ry is
there.]

Everyone gazes at her. Avy stops eating rice. Her swollen face morphs into --

INT. PREAHNETH PREAH HOSPITAL - OPEN HALL - DAY

-- Avy's lifeless, bony face. Her rail thin corpse rests on a rusty cot on a dirty floor.

SUPER: ONE MONTH LATER

Ry is numbed. Stares at the fluid that oozes out of the burst skin of Avy's edematous feet. Ants crowd together, feasting on the webs of her toes.

RY
[Avy, I'm sorry. One day, in a
better time, please be born to me.
I'll take better care of you, young
sister --]

Two hospital workers come to collect Avy's body in a burlap bag.

EXT. PREAHNETH PREAH HOSPITAL - DAY

Ry watches Mak squatting underneath a tree as she embraces Map.

MAP

[Mak, don't go.]

MAK

[It's not up to Mak, child. The ugly-hearted informant makes Mak leave. I'd rather be with you.]

Ry tears up.

MAK (CONT'D)

[Ary, take care of your baby brother and each other. I don't know when I'll see all of you again.]

RY

[We will, Mak. Please don't worry.]

MAK

[I've asked God for one more year. Just one more year...]

Tears spill forth from Mak's edematous eyes. Map wraps his arms around her neck, crying forcefully.

When two black-uniformed strangers get off a horse cart, Ry pulls him away from Mak.

MAP

[Mak, don't go! Don't go!]

INT/EXT. ATHY'S HUT #2 - MORNING

SUPER: THREE MONTHS LATER

Map sadly sits at the entrance of the hut, facing tall rows of corn, mounded rows of yams and thick bushes of pumpkin plants. Everything is ready for harvest.

Athy scoots out of the hut, noticing Map's teary eyes.

CHEA

[Athy, don't go to work. Go see Mak. Bring her some corn and yams. She's the one who planted them. Take Map with you.]

ATHY

[Chea, what if they see us?]

CHEA

[You're only taking food to Mak,
not to an enemy of the High
Organization.]

ATHY

[But I don't know where Choup
hospital is..]

CHEA

[Ask. I'll talk to the village
leader if any informant gives you
problems.]

Chea pats Map's head.

CHEA (CONT'D)

[Tell Mak that I miss her. Will you
remember to do that?]

Map nods, wiping away tears. Chea leaves for work.

EXT. GRITTY ROAD - AFTERNOON

Athy and Map visibly suffer as they stride along the hot,
scorching road without shoes. Waves of heat undulate in the
air.

ATHY

(stifling her voice)
[I said walk some! I'm tired.]

Athy pushes him down her waist, but Map clings on to her leg
and releases a PIERCING CRY.

CARING WOMAN'S VOICE (O.S)

(shouting)
[Carry your little brother!]

Athy startles, stands up straight, fears in her eyes. She
struggles to pick Map up, walks on her heels then on her
toes.

When they get close to a hut, Athy spots the CARING WOMAN.
50s, wearing black cotton pants and a blouse, standing in a
shaded path near her hut. She hands Map cool water in a
coconut shell.

CARING WOMAN

[Drink.]

ATHY

[Thanks so much, Great Aunt.]

Map gulps the water, his eyes on the woman.

CARING WOMAN

[My God, you're only a baby.
(turns to Athy)
Where are you taking him?]

ATHY

[To see our mother at the Choup
hospital... if I can find it.]

Map hands Athy the water. The woman motions her head for Athy to drink it.

CARING WOMAN

[Don't worry. You're almost there.]

As soon as Athy is done drinking, the woman steps out of the shaded path, waves to Athy and Map to follow her.

EXT. ROAD - DAY - CONTINUOUS

The woman points.

CARING WOMAN

[Just go straight a little bit.
Then you'll see a path on your
left. That's when you turn.]

Athy carries Map on her hip. He rests his tired head on her bony shoulder as she turns to look behind her.

INT. OLD BARN - AFTERNOON - LATER

This is what the Khmer Rogue call a hospital -- a dusty, dimly lit barn.

Athy holds Map's hand. Both are on the verge of tears as they see patients crammed into the aisle between bare, rusty cots on the black earthen floor.

Flies swarm over runny feces under the beds as well as patients' faces.

ASREY, 8, haunted eyes and ragged clothes, stands by a cot. She watches Athy and Map as they go back and forth down the aisle.

MAP

[Thy, where's Mak?]

ATHY
[I don't know.]

Map begins to cry. Asrey walks up to Athy and Map.

ASREY
[Elder sister, I live close to your
hut. I'm with my mom.]

ATHY
[Asrey! Have you seen our mom?]

ASREY
(pointing)
[There's your mom.]

Athy stares at a severely edematous woman. She sits on a bare-rusty cot. Her face pale. Eyelids swell immensely. It's Mak, unrecognizable except her faded, flowered blouse.

MAP
[... Thy, Mak?]

Athy releases Map's hand. She is stunned.

Mak slowly raises her head. Tears roll down her pale cheeks when she recognizes her children.

MAK
[My daughter. My beloved son. Come
to me.]

Map holds Mak's arm, gazes at her with deep sadness.

MAP
[Mak?]

Mak tries to embrace Map with her edematous arm, but it lacks strength and drops. She leans her head against Map's, mournfully stares at her children.

TIME FADE:

Later, Athy and Map stand by the bed, ready to leave.

MAK
[Athy, ask the cooperative leader
to let you take care of Mak.]

Map touches Mak's face.

MAK (CONT'D)
 [They haven't given Mak water for days. Tell Chea to help you. Please don't forget, my daughter.]

ATHY
 [I'll come back soon, Mak.]

Athy holds Map's hand as they walk out the door. Mak strains to hold her head up to see her children.

MAK
 [I love you, my little son. Hurry, come to see Mak again.]

Map turns to see Mak one more time.

MAP
 [Mak, Chea misses you.]

But Mak can't hear him, flitting in and out of consciousness. Map trembles.

INT. OLD BARN - THE NEXT DAY

Two Khmer Rouge, in black uniform with scarves around their necks, roughly put Mak on the stretcher.

Mak groans, tries to see through her swollen eyes as they abruptly take her away.

MAK
 [Where are you taking me?]

Silence. Mak struggles to get off the stretcher.

Wide-eyed, Asrey watches them from her mom's cot.

EXT. OLD BARN - CONTINUOUS

When the men take Mak toward a grove of trees, Asrey follows them, hiding from one tree after another.

FADE TO:

EXT. WOODS - CANOPY OF TREES - DAY

SUPER: ONE MONTH LATER

People disperse from the Khmer Rouge mandatory meetings. Athy hurries to another indoctrination meeting.

Asrey runs after her.

ASREY
[Elder sister? Elder sister?]

Athy turns around, perplexed.

ASREY (CONT'D)
[Your mom...]

Asrey tries to catch her breath. Athy frowns in anticipation.

ATHY
[What about my mom?]

ASREY
[They...]

She is still out of breath.

GIRL
[They threw her in a well.]

Athy's world comes crashing down around her.

ATHY
[No... No!]

Athy takes off running as hard as she can.

EXT. WOODS - DUSTY PATH - CONTINUOUS

She collapses to the ground.

ATHY
[Mak, I'm so sorry. It was your
life or mine. Chea couldn't allow
it. Oh, Mak... Please forgive me?]

Athy wails, covers her face with her hands.

INT. LABOR CAMP - SMALL SHACK - MORNING

The sun's rays penetrate through the cracks in her straw shack. Athy curls up on a pile of hay, stares at the fine particles of dust that drift through the morning light.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

DAY 2: Athy curls up, staring into space.

DAY 3: Athy fixates on the drifting particles in the sun rays.

DAY 4: The children's brigade leader, THORE META, 20s, chubby in a black uniform, sticks her head into Athy's shack.

THORE META
[Comrade? It's time to work.]

Athy glances at her, then away, as if nothing sinks into her mind. Thore Meta leaves, a hint of sadness on her face.

Then, a soft, ephemeral VOICE becomes audible. Athy listens.

VOICE (V.O.)
[Athy, stay alive. Eat, my child.]

She sits up, ponders. We hear her thoughts:

ATHY (V.O.)
(softly)
[Why is the day bright, yet it seems so dark? My life has no meaning. I haven't done anything important. Why do I feel so empty, so sick inside? Was this how Mak felt after they took Pa away?]

Athy presses her hands together in prayer.

ATHY (V.O.)
[God, stop letting people die. Stop our suffering. How much do I have to endure? Do you even care?]

A silhouette crawls into Athy's shack. She quickly turns to her, stares hard. Speaks louder than she intended.

ATHY
[Ra?!]

REVEAL: Ra kneels opposite her.

RA
[Yeeh, not too loud.]

Ra quickly gives Athy something from her scarf.

RA (CONT'D)
[Here, rice crust. Eat. We'll cross a river tomorrow.]

ATHY
[Why?]

Ra leaves. Athy stares at the rice crust.

EXT. RIVER BANK - DAY

Ra climbs down the bank alone. Behind her, Athy just stands still, in awe as she stares at the beautiful tropical vegetation on the other side of the river, a liquid ribbon with shimmering ripples.

RA
(turning)
[Yeeh, look at you! Just standing there. Hurry, before they see us.]

ATHY
[Ra, I'm weak and I can't swim! I see a bridge over there.]

Athy points. Ra glares at her.

RA
[You want to die before we can beg for food? The soldiers are near there.]

Athy quickens her steps down the bank.

ATHY
[Wait for me, wait for me.]

Athy slides off the steep bank. Ra reaches out to steady her as Athy hastily climbs down.

RA
[I don't know how to swim either.]

Ra gets in the river. Athy nervously stares at the moving current. She picks up a long stick, follows after Ra.

The water rises to Athy's chest. She looks alarmed and turns to Ra, who only looks ahead.

Athy abruptly sinks deeper. The water spills into her mouth, ears, and nose. Her head is barely above water. Her eyes grow wider.

She lets go of the stick, pinches her nose, tilts her head, kicks her legs. Spits out water.

ATHY
[Ra!]

Ra turns, frightened, pulls Athy forward from the deep spot.

EXT. ZONE 3 - BRICK WAREHOUSE - DAY - MOMENTS LATER

Hidden behind tall stacks of brick, Athy and Ra, still in wet clothes, squat on the concrete floor.

Across from them is POK ("father"), 50s, earnest and quiet, in a black uniform.

He dishes out steamed rice from the pot, piles it up on the plate then presses the spoon down on the heap.

POK
(to Athy)
[Can you eat it all?]

Athy nods, salivating. Pok hands her the rice plate over a bowl of pumpkin blossom soup, a plate of broiled fish, and a saucer of golden fish sauce with fresh red chili.

Athy gorges herself on the food, unaware of Ra staring at her. Pok looks at Ra.

POK (CONT'D)
[You must be careful when you take
her back. Eat, then hurry back.]

Ra picks up the spoon from her rice plate.

RA
[Pok, how about you?]

POK
[I have to go back to work. Take
whatever is left with you.]

Pok hurries away.

ATHY
[He's nice. Not like other locals.
Ra, can we come again?]

RA
[Don't wait for me. You know how to
get here. And whatever you do,
don't cross the bridge.]

Athy nods.

FADE TO:

EXT. RIVER BANK - DAY - LATER

Athy squats on the bank, staring hopelessly at the swelling and energetic river. She turns to look at the bridge. Conflicted.

EXT. BRIDGE - DAY

Athy nervously steps onto the bridge. Then, she hears VOICES of men talking in a patrol booth nearby.

ATHY
(sotto)
[Pa, please watch over me. God,
please protect me.]

As she reaches the end of the bridge, she slides down the steep bank into the woods. She moves from tree to tree.

INT. WAREHOUSE - DAY

Pok talks to SUNN, 20, and SOTHY, 18, in long sleeved gray shirt and black pants.

Athy peeks in through the side door. The men turn, very surprised. Pok strides over.

POK
[Who else is here?!]

ATHY
[Just me.]

POK
[God, you're so daring!]

Pok glares at Athy. She looks down at the floor.

POK (CONT'D)
[How did you get here?]

ATHY
[The bridge.]

POK
[The bridge! How could you?!]

Pok shakes his head, his right hand on his hip.

POK (CONT'D)
[Aren't you afraid of the soldiers
in the patrol booth?]

ATHY

[I'm starving, Pok. I was careful.]

POK

[If they caught you, they could think that you're a spy. For the Vietnamese.]

ATHY

[But I'm just a kid. Look at me.]

POK

[Have you heard that the Vietnamese are invading Cambodia again?]

Athy nods.

POK (CONT'D)

[So crossing to our zone can mean you're one of them. Those soldiers will torture you. Even kill you. And you could implicate me. You understand?]

ATHY

[I'll go back. So sorry.]

Athy turns around to leave, pained and guilty.

POK

[Eat first.]

Athy shakes her head, keeps on walking. Pok grabs her arm.

POK (CONT'D)

[You've already come all the way here. Now eat first before you go. High-level Khmer Rouge come here soon to check on the brick production. So don't ever come back.]

ATHY

[I won't. They'll send me to another camp tomorrow anyway.]

Pok calms down. He turns to Sunn and Sothy.

POK

[Hurry, take her to the small hut. Absolutely no talking.]

INT. SMALL HUT - DAY

The hut is nestled among a grove of trees. Athy, Sunn and Sothy sit in the dark, eating food.

POK (O.S.)
[How are you, comrades?]

Athy slowly puts her spoon down, incredibly nervous.

HIGH-LEVEL KHMER ROUGE (O.S.)
(stoically)
[How is the production?]

Sunn and Sothy motion their heads for her to eat, but Athy shakes her head.

POK (O.S.)
[We have no problem with the new orders, comrades. You'll be very pleased.]

Pok's and the High-Level Khmer Rouge's voices trail away. Sunn picks up Athy's spoon, hands it to her.

SUNN
(sotto)
[Eat.]

Athy puts it back down, then abruptly gets up.

SUNN (CONT'D)
[Take some food with you.]

Sunn gets up, too.

SOTHY
[Wait. We need to check if you can go now. I'll wrap you some food. We'll be back.]

INT. SMALL HUT - DAY - LATER

In the dark, Athy squats by the door, hugging herself, paralyzed by fear.

Rapid footsteps on the stairs shake the hut. Athy half-stands, half-squats. Holding her breath.

SUNN (O.S.)
(sotto, urgently)
[Hurry, get out. Hurry!]

Athy freezes in her tracks as the door cracks open. As if Sunn senses her fears, his voice softens.

SUNN (O.S.) (CONT'D)
[Come, follow me. It's okay.]

Athy slips out the door.

EXT. SMALL HUT/WOODS - DAY

Behind a tree, Sunn hands Athy the food wrapped in banana leaves. She quickly ties it in her scarf, then snakes it around her neck.

SUNN
(sotto)
[They're still at the warehouse.
Sothy is over there near a tree.]
(nods towards the
warehouse)
[He'll give me a signal. When I
nod, run after me. Don't cry if you
trip.]

Athy shakes her head, focuses on Sunn, anticipating a signal.

Sunn nervously nods, then runs from tree to tree, thicket to thicket, followed closely by Athy.

When they get to a grove of tall trees, he stops.

SUNN (CONT'D)
[I can only help you this far. May
God bless you in the next camp.]

Sunn turns around, disappears among trees. Athy wipes away tears of both gratitude and fear. On her knees, she presses her hands together.

ATHY
[Pa, Mak, all ancestors, please
watch over me. God, please protect
me.]

Athy cautiously hikes through the woods. When she gets close to the bridge, she squats by a tree, listens for danger, but hears only BIRDS chirping nearby.

She climbs up the bank onto the bridge. Walking on it, Athy looks at the swelling river, clutching the food in her scarf. She attempts to remain casual in her demeanor.

INT. LABOR CAMP - RICE PROCESSING HUT - DAY

The harvest season is here. Women are busy sifting rice creating white hills of processed rice in front of them.

Stealthily, Athy snatches a pinch of rice and puts it in her mouth. When she pinches it again, the other children follow.

COMRADE MURN, 50s, chunky and strong, glances at them.

COMRADE MURN

[If you keep it up, you'll have
diarrhea.]

A RICE SIFTING WOMAN, 20s, gets up from her post, rushes out the door.

RICE SIFTING WOMAN

[I can't hold it anymore.]

COMRADE MURN

[Who stops you?]

Comrade Murn chuckles and so do other women.

Athy jumps into the empty winnowing spot, begins to sift like a pro.

Suddenly, the sifting around her stops. All eyes on Athy. Comrade Murn stares at her natural ability with fascination.

COMRADE MURN (CONT'D)

[Look! Look at her! So young, yet
she sifts like an adult. Better
than some of you. And not even a
farm kid. How did you learn to do
this?]

ATHY

[I watched my mom. And other
adults. I've learned very fast.]

COMRADE MURN

[You miss your mom?]

ATHY

[Very much. She...]

Athy trails off, sifts even harder.

Comrade Murn gazes at Athy with a hint of sympathy..

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Oxcarts parked along a reddish road. Behind one are Athy and TA BARANG, 60s, gray-haired with sad, pensive face.

Athy cautiously hands him a small bag and a sealed tin can. Quickly, he hides them in his oxcart under a pile of hay. Then turns around, looks over his shoulder.

ATHY

[So glad you're here, Ta Barang.
Why aren't you in the village,
making palm sugar?]

TA BARANG

[I've been reformed. Demoted. An
outcast.]

ATHY

[I'm sorry. I remember you would
let Chea and me take some palm
sugar home. We were so grateful.]

TA BARANG

[That was my crime. Too friendly.
Too generous... Such is the world
we live in.]

ATHY

[Thank you for taking the rice and
fish to Chea. I miss her. I haven't
seen her for a long time.]

TA BARANG

[But the children will be released
soon after the harvest.]

ATHY

[Not soon enough. I count each day
until I see my brothers and sisters
again.]

EXT. DUSTY ROAD - MORNING

A sunny morning. Athy tiredly marches among a column of exhausted children and brigade leaders.

INT. ATHY'S HUT #2 - NIGHT

The hut is dimly lit by the fire hole beneath the open floor. Athy anxiously appears at the entrance.

She freezes in shock upon seeing Chea, skin and bone, lying on the floor with her eyes closed. Athy's heart sinks as she watches Chea's shallow breathing.

ATHY

[Chea? Chea? My brigade leader let me come home to see you.]

Silence. No movement from Chea. Ra, Ry and Map weep.

RY

[Chea stopped talking.]

Athy looks closer at Chea.

ATHY

[No, she can't. She can't. I just got here.]

Athy breaks down, tears dripping as she stares at Chea.

Then, Chea miraculously reaches out to Athy. She chokes as her eyelids quiver, trying to gather any available energy.

ATHY (CONT'D)

[Please talk to me, Chea. Please. I need you to talk to me.]

Chea's eyes roll beneath the eyelids. Still no response.

Athy climbs out of the hut.

EXT. PATH - CONTINUOUS

Athy wails as she runs in the dark along a path that snakes through the village.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

A devastated Athy kneels near a grave under palm trees. Her grandfather, siblings, and a local man are with her.

We hear her thoughts:

ATHY (V.O.)

[I'm sorry, Chea. I couldn't help you. I wish I knew medicine like Pa. If I survive, one day I'll become a doctor...]

Athy weeps harder...

ATHY (V.O.)
[Because I don't want to feel so
powerless ever again.]

Chea's translucent spirit rises up from the grave like the
steam rising from a kettle to hug Athy.

ATHY (V.O.)
[If I die, I'll be one in the next
life...]

INT. HUT #2 - NIGHT

Athy and her siblings sleep next to each other, but Athy is
still grieving.

ATHY
[Ra, I can't stop seeing Chea --]

RA
[I don't want to talk about it. I
want to sleep. I haven't slept
since she...]

Ra turns away from Athy, who closes her eyes. Tears stream
down her face.

FADE TO BLACK.

ENTER DREAM
SEQUENCE:

EXT. SOME CELESTIAL LEVEL - DAY

Athy awakes, surprised to find herself floating amidst layers
of gleaming clouds.

Freely, her body ascends through them, soaring to the next
layer -- a flat surfaced floor made of clouds.

She frowns, then sees men and women dressed in white clothes
lining up. One by one, their arms open to welcome someone. A
white carpet magically rolls over the floor.

When Athy looks up to the higher layer of clouds, a figure
descends.

It's Chea! Her back is to Athy. The mysterious people
encircle her, then fade away behind the clouds.

ATHY
[Chea, wait! Wait for me.]

CUT TO:

INT. HUT #2 - NIGHT

Athy tosses and turns. Ry notices.

RY
[Athy, Athy. Wake up!]

Ry comforts Athy.

EXT. HUT #2 - BACKYARD - DAY

Athy compulsively tills the soil with a foot-long knife.

She drops the knife, kneels on the dirt and prays with her hands together against her chest.

ATHY
[God, doesn't the world know what's going on in Cambodia? Doesn't it want to help? If I die, when I am reborn, let me be born to Pa and Mak again. If Cambodia has peace. If she doesn't, please let me be born in America. Please, God.]

Athy looks skyward, tears streaming.

FADE OUT.

OVER BLACK:

FLIGHT ATTENDENT (O.S.)
Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Phnom Penh International Airport.

FADE IN:

INT. PHNOM PENH INT'L AIRPORT - TERMINAL - MORNING - PRESENT

Chanrithy, Theary and other passengers go through the passport check point. Chanrithy grows emotional.

CHANRITHY (V.O.)
 Soon after the Vietnamese invasion,
 my surviving siblings and I escaped
 from Cambodia. We made it to
 America on November 11, 1981. And
 Uncle Seng was our sponsor. Now
 that I'm here, I'm reminded of his
 own breakout.

QUICK FLASHBACK:

EXT./INT. U-TAPAO U.S. AIR FORCE BASE - NIGHT

SUPER: U-TAPAO U.S. AIR FORCE BASE, THAILAND, APRIL 17, 1975

The C-123 cargo plane touches down.

Aboard the craft, the jolt reminds everyone of what they have
 just left behind. They exchange tearful glances.

CHANRITHY (V.O.)
 Thank God he and his pilot friends
 got to the Base safely.

Among forty pilots, Uncle Seng looks wilted like a leaf that
 has been scorched by the sun.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. TERMINAL - MORNING - PRESENT DAY

Theary hugs Chanrithy who is obviously overwhelmed by the
 sights and sounds of her country. The ladies in the group
 each hugs her.

CHANRITHY (V.O.)
 Before the US immigration approved
 our entry, we had to survive five
 more refugee camps in Thailand and
 the Philippines for two years.

THEARY
 You'll be okay. I'm sure.

CHANRITHY
 I know I won't be, but I'll fake it
 until I make it.

The ladies laugh.

THEARY

That's the American way. But are you sure you don't need a ride to the Intercontinental?

CHANRITHY

No, thanks. My mom's sister is here.

Chanrithy points to AUNT SRIN, 60s, slightly guarded but smiling broadly, in flowered blouse and black pants, holds a sign with Chanrithy's name on it.

CHANRITHY (CONT'D)

She trusts everyone so much that she'd rather take me to the hotel herself.

THEARY

I can't blame her. This is your first trip back. But we'll see you at the University tomorrow.

INT/EXT. CAR - DAY

Chanrithy cries behind her sunglasses as she looks out the window, seeing food carts, pedicabs, fruit stands and bustling activity in the city.

INT. INTERCONTINENTAL HOTEL - CHANRITHY'S SUITE - DAY

Chanrithy sets the luggage by the closet in her spacious, luxurious business suite, then tosses her purse on the bed. A hint of frustration in her body language.

Aunt Srin parks the carry-on next to a mirror, tries to read Chanrithy's face.

AUNT SRIN

[What time should I pick you up tomorrow?]

CHANRITHY

[I'll find someone else.]

AUNT SRIN

[Who? Khmer? American? Don't be ridiculous.]

CHANRITHY

[Why do you care? When I asked you to stop talking about Pa's story, you should have respected my wish.]

AUNT SRIN

[Well, what do you want?! I've been carrying it with me since 1991 when...]

CHANRITHY

[Yes, yes, uncle Ry heard about it from some villagers. I am aware! Doesn't mean you had to jam it down my throat. If I knew, I would have ridden with Theary here.]

AUNT SRIN

[... Crazy.]

CHANRITHY

[Now I'm crazy?]

(switches to English)

Argh, elders! Get on my nerves.

AUNT SRIN

[Mad at me. Talk back to me like that. Like you're *my* elder.]

CHANRITHY

[Because you don't know my mother's daughter. Me!]

AUNT SRIN

[I saw the sun before you.]

CHANRITHY

[You think age determines intelligence? Wisdom? Or even common sense?]

AUNT SRIN

[I have good intentions.]

The hotel phone rings.

CHANRITHY

Hello? *Bang Ty*? Hold on, please.

Chanrithy covers the receiver.

AUNT SRIN

[Coming to my house for dinner?]

CHANRITHY

[You've changed my mind for me.]

AUNT SRIN

[But we'll cook you frog legs with ginger, like you asked --]

CHANRITHY

[I'll order something downstairs.]

AUNT SRIN

[But aunt Kry and your uncles will be there. And I've already bought you rambutans and longans --]

Aunt Srin notices the woven basket full of rambutans, mangosteens, longans, and mangos on the coffee table. Her expression sinks.

CHANRITHY

[Look, Aunt. Your good intentions have caused a storm inside me right now... I hope you can understand that.]

(beat)

[See you tomorrow. That is if you're still coming to my talk.]

Aunt Srin heads for the exit, slams the door behind her. Chanrithy puts on a brave face and a voice to go with it.

CHANRITHY (CONT'D)

Hi, *Bang Ty*. Thanks for waiting.

BANG TY (O.S.)

Do you want a copy of the *Cambodia Daily* in the morning?

CHANRITHY

I'd love that.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. THE CAMBODIA DAILY BUILDING - BANG TY'S OFFICE - DAY

BANG TY, 40, a skinny, energetic fellow in light blue shirt and black pants, responds to Chanrithy:

BANG TY

Do you need anything else?

Chanrithy laughs to herself, relieved.

CHANRITHY

I thought you would never ask, Bang Ty. I just fired my aunt. I need a ride to the university tomorrow.

BANG TY

Oh, well I sent you an e-mail...

CHANRITHY

I haven't had a chance to check my e-mails.

BANG TY

I've been assigned as your chauffeur for tomorrow.

CHANRITHY

That's wonderful. Now my aunt can sleep. I'll text her your phone number, address, and resume.

BANG TY

Why?

CHANRITHY

Just kidding.

BANG TY

Oh... By the way, Chanrithy, a Khmer National TV crew will film your lecture for the sponsor.

CHANRITHY

Great. Scott will appreciate that. And this suite. Wow.

INT. INTERCONTINENTAL HOTEL - RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Chanrithy dines, sips a glass of wine. Her face pensive.

INT. CHANRITHY'S SUITE - NIGHT

She stirs in bed, tears streaming down on her temples.

ENTER DREAM
SEQUENCE:

EXT. CAMBODIA - REMOTE FIELD - DAY

Pa, Uncle Seurg, and Uncle Sorn and other city men excavate a large hole while armed Khmer Rouge and local men watch.

A sadistic looking KHMER ROUGE LEADER, 40s, in black pajamas and red checkered scarf, barks:

KHMER ROUGE LEADER
[Stop. That's deep enough!]

PA
[Is this your orientation?]

KHMER ROUGE LEADER
[You guessed it. Tie them up!]

Armed Khmer Rouge and local men run toward the city men.

Pa is shocked. As the Leader ties Pa, he fights back.

PA
[Traitors. All of you are
traitors.]

KHMER ROUGE LEADER
[But we are not American
imperialist servants.]

PA
[You're brainwashed. Sell your own
country out. How could you?!]

An armed soldier points the barrel of his rifle at Pa.

KHMER ROUGE LEADER
[Don't waste the bullets --]

Uncle Seurg leaps forward with force, pushes the barrel away from his older brother. The rifle FIRES. *BANG!*

CUT OUT:

INT. INTERCONTINENTAL HOTEL - CHANRITHY'S SUITE - NIGHT

Chanrithy springs up in her bed.

ATHY (V.O.)
[Pa!]

Deeply shaken, she attempts to catch her breath. The digital clock near the TV reads 3:05 AM.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF CAMBODIA - BALLROOM - DAY

Opposite a packed audience, Chanrithy adjusts the microphone on the podium, then takes a deep breath and begins.

CHANRITHY (V.O.)

Who would have thought that a curious girl from Takeo province would, one day, travel the world to tell her story.

ENTER MONTAGE:

1) Earlier that day, Chanrithy works out on the treadmill, showers, and dresses herself in a lovely white blouse and cream pants.

2) A man hangs the *Cambodia Daily* on her door knob. She picks it up, gets into the elevator. She reads it at breakfast while she dabs her eyes.

3) Back in her hotel room, she kneels down by the bed to pray.

4) A car picks her up in front of the hotel and drives her across Phnom Penh to her speaking venue.

CHANRITHY (V.O.)

5.5 billion pounds of US bombs were dropped on Cambodia and destroyed a thriving society, forever wounding my life, my soul, and the spirits of countless other survivors. Three years after the massive bombing campaign began, the Khmer Rouge insurgency grew from merely five thousand to two hundred thousand rebels, capable of overthrowing the Lon Nol government and supported by the US government. The Khmer Rouge used lies, hatred, and fear to gain support, and to control. And so, they became "broken glass" that floated briefly but deadly. If the same amount of bombs were dropped in New York, Texas, and California, do you think American society would ever be the same? Imagine the cost. Human lives. Destruction of homes. Trauma that forever inflicts you. Your kids, your mothers, your sisters. Your fathers. Your grandchildren. Everyone.

INT. BALLROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

Theary and her friends sit in the front row while the TV crew documents the lecture.

CHANRITHY

In the past, two of my audiences at Duke and the Asia Society in Manhattan asked me, "how can we stop genocide?" First, the answer lies in powerful governments' moral responsibility. For example, the US government and its leaders. Such as former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and President Richard Nixon. Despite his famous words for bringing peace to Vietnam, Nixon was the modern Satan who expanded the American War into Cambodia. Yet, the US Congress immorally voted not to impeach him for bombing Cambodia and for other high crimes and misdemeanors.

QUICK FLASH:

INSERT DOCUMENTARY FOOTAGE: Investigative Journalist SEYMOUR HERSH and Washington Post correspondent ELIZABETH BECKER are interviewed in "*Secret Bombing of Cambodia*".

SEYMOUR HERSH

Congress authorized money for bombing in South Vietnam, and they went into Cambodia. I think anybody who died in Cambodia, you can argue criminally that they were guilty of murder one.

ELIZABETH BECKER

There was no American war in Cambodia before President Nixon and Dr. Kissinger...

BACK TO:

INT. BALLROOM - DAY

Chanrithy speaks with conviction.

CHANRITHY

Worst of all, President Ford pardoned that wicked man. And Kissinger, a war criminal implicated in the carpet-bombing of Cambodia, has yet to be made accountable for his crimes against Cambodia.

(MORE)

CHANRITHY (CONT'D)

Sadly, he continues to advise other American Presidents and amasses more wealth. But one has to believe that a higher court, one with divine sight, awaits the likes of him. Until global citizens make leaders like Nixon and Kissinger accountable for their evil actions, only then can we stop genocide and bring peace to our human family. Our failure to do so only emboldens ungodly Nixonians and Kissingerians out there waiting to be in positions of power. But today, I never thought it would come. During breakfast I was moved to learn that Mr. Kofi Annan has approved the government to set up the Khmer Rouge Tribunal. It's the first step to bring justice for all of us who have suffered, but most of all, for those who are no longer with us. Before I close, I must tell you...

Chanrithy fights tears as she searches the audience, surprised to see Aunt Srin in the back row with other relatives.

CHANRITHY (CONT'D)

I was daddy's angel. Yesterday, it pained me so much to learn about the vicious acts committed against my father. He endured a slow death... unlike what I wrote in my book, as my mother told me. But Pa was my hero. He denounced Cambodia's notorious traitors, worst in our history. His words forever echo in their souls. And I am so proud and honored that Pa was my father.

Chanrithy presses her hands, raises them to her chin.

CHANRITHY (CONT'D)

With that, I'd like to express my deep gratitude for all of you for being here.

The audience gives Chanrithy a rapturous standing ovation. Her relatives, Theary and others tear up as they applaud.

INT. INTERCONTINENTAL HOTEL - CHANRITHY'S SUITE - DAY

Chanrithy falls on her knees near a large mirror hung near the door. Her face contorts in pain. Then:

PA (V.O.)
[Athy...]

CHANRITHY
[Pa?]

Chanrithy looks up, sees the ethereal spirit of Pa looking empathetically and lovingly at her.

CHANRITHY (CONT'D)
[Pa? It's you. I --]
(choking up)

Pa's voice sounds just like when he was alive, affectionate and fatherly:

PA (V.O.)
[Athy, don't be sad. Don't worry
about Pa, child.]

She becomes calm as his translucent arms embraced her.

PA (V.O.)
[What you've been doing is very
good. You are helping to heal the
wounds of the past. Pa's okay. Take
care of yourself, my child.]

Pa guides Chanrithy. She crawls on her knees to the bed like when she was a toddler. Once her head is on the pillow, she falls fast asleep.

INT. CAMBODIAN NATIONAL TV STUDIO - DAY

A beautiful TV ANCHOR, 27, in a bow-collar yellow blouse and a white blazer, smiles at the camera, charming her viewers.

TV ANCHOR (ON TV)
[Ladies and gentlemen, today author
Chanrithy Him, a Khmer from
America, spoke at the University of
Cambodia to an audience made up of
students and NGOs.]

ENTER INTERCUT
MONTAGE:

- 1) Chanrithy, in sunglasses, a pink tank-top and white shorts, boards a plane with Aunt Srin and UNCLE RY, 50s, lanky and shy.
- 2) They are picked up by a van to the ancient temples in Siem Reap province, which we saw earlier.

TV ANCHOR (V.O., ON TV) (CONT'D)
 [Despite Miss Chanrithy Him's serious messages, she managed to inject humor at the end of her talk. When a student asked about her return to live in Cambodia, her response was...]

- 3) INSERT VIDEO FOOTAGE of Chanrithy's Q & A session:

CHANRITHY (ON TV)
 [America is my adopted country, for which I am grateful. But, Cambodia is always close to my heart.
 (sings)
 ["You were always on my mind, You were always on my mind"]]

- 4) Chanrithy nervously climbs one of the steep towers at Angkor Wat. Aunt Srin watches her like a hawk.

TV ANCHOR (V.O., ON TV)
 [When another student asked if Miss Him will visit our national heritage, she said...]

- 5) INSERT VIDEO FOOTAGE of Chanrithy's Q & A session.

CHANRITHY (ON TV)
 [How did you guess? My top secrets are: taking a nap first, snore if I have to...]
 (laughs)
 [Make sure I get enough rest. Then tour Angkor Wat with my loved ones. It's been a dream come true. I finally get to visit one of the World's Wonders.]

- 6) Chanrithy climbs the Bayon and Ta Promh temples while her aunt and uncle take pictures.
- 7) Aunt Srin seriously bargains with a merchant who sells carved wood Apsaras. Chanrithy looks on uncomfortably.

She smiles when the seller relents and Aunt Srin hands her two carved wood Apsaras.

END MONTAGE.

INT. THEARY'S HOME - DINING ROOM - EVENING

The TV is on. The home is tastefully decorated with Cambodian artifacts and furniture. Chanrithy, Theary, BRAD, 45, Theary's stately American husband, and EMILY, their beautiful and adorable young daughter, have already finished dinner.

TV ANCHOR (ON TV)
[Until Miss Chanrithy Him returns to her adopted country, we hope she enjoys her homecoming. And we wish her a safe journey.]

Theary and Brad clap. So does Emily with a pure, happy face. Chanrithy smiles warmly at Emily.

BRAD
Bravo. Congratulations, Chanrithy.

THEARY
Yes, Bravo...

Brad looks at Emily lovingly.

EMILY
(smiling at her dad)
Pravo, pravo...

Brad, Theary and Chanrithy crack up in unison.

Brad turns the TV off. Signals to Chanrithy if she wants some more wine. She nods. Emily gets excited.

EMILY (CONT'D)
Daddy? Daddy, can you play hide and seek with me now?

BRAD
Honey, but we have a guest. Aunty Chanrithy is visiting us. And we have to be nice. Don't we?

Emily nods, then looks at Chanrithy searchingly. Chanrithy grins.

CHANRITHY

What if Aunty plays hide and seek
with you instead? Just once. If
that's okay with your mom and dad.

Chanrithy looks at Brad and Theary. They nod. But Emily looks confused.

CHANRITHY (CONT'D)

I'm good. Very good when I was your
age. Only once, okay? Want to play?

Emily nods. Her parents beam.

CHANRITHY (CONT'D)

So, I'm gonna cover my eyes, then
I'll count to ten. Okay? Ready?

Chanrithy covers her face with her hands, but leaves her fingers apart. She sees Emily excitedly run toward a room with the door ajar.

CHANRITHY (CONT'D)

One... two... three...

ENTER FLASHBACK:

INT. TAKEO HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Chea, 13, stands in a room, counting.

CHEA (O.S.)

[One... two... three...]

Athy, 3, in a yellow ruffle dress, runs into the living, heads toward a door. Pa waves vigorously at her, so she runs to him.

PA

(laughing to himself)
[Don't hide in the same spot,
child. She always finds you.]

Pa puts Athy on his lap, places the newspaper around her. Pretends he is reading it as he leans back on the couch.

Chea runs to the door, looks behind it. No one there. Mak waves to her, but she turns to Pa.

CHEA

(sotto)
[Pa?]

PA
[What? Don't you see her there?]

Chea shakes her head.

MAK
(sotto)
[Achea?]

Chea turns. Mak jabs her index finger toward Pa. Chea storms toward him.

Athy squirms behind the paper.

Chea pulls the paper away. Athy SHRIEKS. Pa hugs her.

Suddenly, all of her siblings converge in the living room. Laughing together. One happy family.

FADE OUT.

SUPER:

Chanrithy Him

Since Chanrithy's confrontation with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright at the 2004 NAFSA conference, the US has only contributed \$32 million to the Khmer Rouge Tribunal to date.

Zbigniew Brzezinski

Zbigniew Brzezinski, US National Security Adviser, played an important role in determining America's policy to support murderous Khmer Rouge and help Pol Pot to return to power.

They were responsible for an estimated 2 million lives, a third of the Cambodian population.

And yet, from 1980-1986, the Carter, Reagan and Bush administrations spent \$85 million of American Taxpayers' monies to fund the Khmer Rouge in this effort.

Backed by the United Nations, the Khmer Rouge Tribunal spent over \$300 million. But only three top Khmer Rouge leaders were convicted: GUEK EAV (known as DUCH), NUON CHEA, and KHIEU SAMPHAN.

In 2020, Cambodia was crowned as the number one friendliest country in the world to move to, according to My International Movers.