

"HUNTING RABBITS"

by
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LOGLINE: Exiled to a summer job in rural America during the Vietnam War era, a naïve suburban teenager confronts the painful realities of life and death during a rabbit-hunting adventure with a ragged band of his fellow farm hands in this coming-of-age drama.

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EXT. RURAL FARMLANDS - DAY

1

It is the summer of 1972. The sun beats down on a road-weary pickup truck kicking up a cloud of dust along a dirt road through seemingly endless rolling fields of corn.

INT. CAB OF PICKUP TRUCK - DAY - TRAVELING

2

Inside the cab three young men jostle together. Driving is LONNIE (20), wearing Army-issue aviator sunglasses with short hair under a creased, dirty military-style cap.

At the passenger window is PETER (16) with shoulder-length hair, a new-looking brimmed hat and signs of a sunburn on his clean-shaven cheeks. In the middle is GEORGE (17), whose well-worn straw cowboy hat covers his longish hair. Country music blares on the radio. Wind rushes through the open windows.

GEORGE

(yelling to be
heard)

No, you don't eat them! Hey
Lonnie, the city boy wants to know
if we eat the rabbits.

Lonnie shakes his head slowly but shows no emotion, his eyes firmly on the road.

GEORGE

Yeah, sure. We'll take 'em back
and the old lady will fry 'em up
for dinner. Fuckin' fricassee 'em.
Give 'em to the old man and he'll
say "What in thee hell is this,
woman!"

Lonnie shoots him a look without turning his head.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

(laughing nervously)

What? The old man? Hell no, I
won't say it to his face. He'd
kick my ass all over again. (to
Peter) The old man don't take no
nonsense.

PETER

Yeah, I got the idea. My first day
he had me sorting irrigation pipes
out behind the barn. They were
burning my hands they were so hot
from the sun.

GEORGE

Bet he told you to quit your
belly-aching.

PETER

Yeah, something like that.

Peter looks out the window and sees his reflection in
the dusty side mirror.

GEORGE

(after a silence)
Ever hunted before, Pete?

PETER

(glances over at
the two others and
looks back out the
window)

No, not really. And it's Peter.

GEORGE

Huh?

PETER

My name's Peter. Not Pete.

GEORGE

(ignoring him)
Ever shoot a gun before?

PETER

Yeah, once or twice... A BB gun.

GEORGE

A BB gun! That's not a gun! That's
a goddam toy! Wouldn't do you much
good in the United States Marine
Corps, right Lonnie?

Lonnie shows no sign of hearing the question, and
keeps on driving. His eyes are cold.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
(to Peter)
You joining the Marines, Pete?
Think you're Marine Corps
material? You think he is, Lonnie?
I'm going in the day I turn 18.

Again Lonnie is silent.

PETER
I don't know. Haven't thought much
about it.

Peter again gazes out the window, the wind in his face.

EXT. WIDE SPOT IN THE ROAD NEAR CORNFIELDS - DAY 3

The pickup truck pulls up next to another pickup,
whose passenger is already standing outside. This is
JIMMY(17), who could be a stand-in for George. He
approaches the truck as the newcomers get out and
start removing shotguns from the gun rack in the truck
cab. Peter hangs back.

JIMMY
Hey Lonnie. How long you been back?

LONNIE
(stone-faced)
Hey, Jimmy.

JIMMY
(looking at Peter)
Who's the new guy?

GEORGE
That's Pete. Spending the summer
down here from the city. Old man's
got him breaking down irrigation
pipes already. (then as an aside
to Jimmy) And Nadine's already got
her eye on him.

JIMMY
Oh ho! Seeing how the other half
lives, huh kid?

Peter looks at him and turns away. The guys are
packing their gear, checking their weapons, cracking
open cans of beer and throwing pop-tops on the ground.

JIMMY (CONT'D.)
Hey Lonnie, you get any gooks over
there?

Lonnie ignores him.

GEORGE
Hey fuck yourself, Jimmy.

JIMMY
What, didn't bring back no ears...

George rushes at him.

GEORGE
(through clenched
teeth)
Maybe he don't want to talk about
it, asshole.

Lonnie holds his gun over his arm and walks away.
George and Jimmy tussle briefly and then all follow
Lonnie toward a path leading away from the road into a
flat area between corn fields and a creek.

JIMMY
(walking alongside
Peter)
Hey city boy, heard you got the
hots for Nadine.

He makes suggestive hip-thrusting movements.

GEORGE
Hey, fuck you, Jimmy. I didn't...

JIMMY
Christ almighty, George, who died
and made you king. (to Peter) You
kiss her yet? (sticks his tongue
way out and waggles it around a la
French kissing)

GEORGE
Hey asshole, that's Lonnie's
sister you're talking about.
(aside to Jimmy) I didn't want you
to say something. You know how he
looks after her.

LONNIE
(snapping)
Quit it now with the grab-ass and
let's get this cluster-fuck
movin'. Christ all-fuckin'-mighty.

Lonnie forges ahead and the others fall in a rag-tag line behind him, shotguns over their arms. Jimmy falls in next to Peter.

JIMMY
(speaking so as not
to be overheard)
So the Old Man got you working?
Lot of fun, huh?

PETER
Yeah, it's not so bad.

JIMMY
Not like city life, though, huh?
No mama bringing you breakfast in
bed. What you doing out here,
anyway? Looking for a little
strange.(waggles his tongue in and
out again)

GEORGE
(pushing between
them)
Give it a break, Jimmy. What's
your fuckin' problem.

JIMMY
(shouting again)
My problem? Why don't you go back
home, too, George. Nobody made you
come here, neither.

GEORGE
I wish I could right about now,
rather than out here with you
assholes.

JIMMY
Well, I don't see nobody keeping
you here...

Jimmy pumps his shotgun with dramatic flair as he steps toward George with eyes blazing. The two nearly bump chests, but their bickering is interrupted by a SINGLE SHOTGUN BLAST and the sound of another shell being pumped into the chamber. At the head of the line Lonnie has fired into low brush at the edge of the cornfield and has raised the gun to his shoulder, looking for another shot.

LONNIE
(manic look in his
eye)

You goddam crybabies need to spend
more time lookin' out and less
time grab-assin', you got it?

They all move toward Lonnie, lifting their shotguns and moving forward in a rough line across the open space. For once they are quiet. They walk slowly and methodically. Streaks of sunlight flash through the cornstalks. At one point a few raucous crows fly close overhead. Jimmy takes a SHOT at one, but the crows fly away unruffled.

LONNIE (CONT'D)
(barking)
We're not hunting fuckin' crows
here, soldier. Get your eyes down
here. Straight ahead.

The men continue to walk, occasionally stumbling on rocks or climbing over fallen trees. The BUZZING OF CICADAS fills the air. Eventually a large RABBIT breaks from the corn rows and bolts up the clearing away from the group. Each of them fires several SHOTS. Peter fires once and stumbles, nearly falling. More shots are fired. The rabbit is killed. Firing ceases.

The group walks up to the dead rabbit and forms a rough circle around it. One of them pokes the body with the toe of his boot. The dead rabbit lolls on the ground. Peter looks at the faces of the others. George flashes his eyes and smirks. Peter looks back down.

GEORGE
Yeah, alright. One down.

JIMMY
That was my shot that got him, I
know it. You fuckers were all over
the place.

GEORGE

You wish, asshole. He was all mine.

JIMMY

Bullshit, George. That's one more
for me. Wait, let me cut off one
of his ears. A trophy, right.
(hootling with laughter)

George and Jimmy scuffle again and Lonnie turns away
with an angry look in his eyes. The others follow him,
one by one. Peter remains, looking down at the dead
rabbit.

Peter slowly begins to follow after them. As he comes
closer, Lonnie has waited behind the others. He
appears agitated. As they move ahead Lonnie veers away
and heads into the corn field, walking between the
tall rows.

Peter follows, walking in an adjacent row. All that
can be heard is the sound of their boots and the
cornstalks rustling as they move past. The two are
visible to each other in flashes between the
cornstalks.

A scrambling sound is heard and Lonnie fires at the
animal, which turns out to be a plump RACCOON out
looking for food. It scuttles away unharmed. The two
continue through the corn rows until they reach a
clearing on a rise.

They stop to survey the scene. Lonnie keeps looking
around, hunching over and assuming an almost defensive
posture.

PETER

So, did you ever?

LONNIE

(after a long pause)
Ever what?

PETER

Ever, you know, have to kill
anyone?

Lonnie doesn't speak but looks at Peter coldly. He
turns to move on through the corn rows, shotgun at the
ready. Peter follows, stumbling to keep up.

PETER (CONT'D)

It's OK, I was just asking.

Lonnie stops suddenly, turns and comes back at Peter and cross-checks him with his gun. Peter falls to the ground. Lonnie pumps his shotgun and aims it at Peter.

LONNIE
(coldly, through
clenched teeth)
When they're killing you first.

PETER
I'm sorry. It's OK. I was just
asking what it was like. Just
curious, that's all.

LONNIE
It's not fucking LIKE anything.
They kill you or you kill them.
You don't think about it...or
that's all you fucking think about.

Peter tries scuttling backwards as Lonnie's voice gets louder and he appears more agitated.

PETER
Jesus, Lonnie, I'm sorry.

LONNIE
Nobody tells you what to do, you
just do it.

Lonnie raises his gun at Peter angrily. Then he lowers it and stomps away. Peter watches him go.

PETER
(calling after him)
Forget it, Lonnie. Forget I even
asked. I'm sorry. Jesus.

Lonnie stops after a few steps and comes back, shotgun raised again, pointing it at Peter. He has a wild look in his eyes.

LONNIE
(more intensely)
Or maybe you open fire in some
fucking jungle that's just opened
fire back at you. Or maybe your
fucking buddy runs into your line
of fire and you never fucking saw
him.

Lonnie starts to stomp away then turns back on Peter, still brandishing his gun.

LONNIE (CONT'D)
(right in Peter's
face, snarling)

And the next thing you know you're
pulling him on the fucking Huey
and you gotta ride next to him all
the way back to the goddam
firebase.

Lonnie lowers his gun and drops his head as a wave of emotion seems to wash over him.

PETER
Jesus, Lonnie. It's OK.

Lonnie drops to his knees and his shouts fade to body-wrenching dry sobs. Peter crawls cautiously over to him and reaches for his shoulder. Lonnie pulls back and falls back on the ground, emitting sounds that come out as words and groans.

LONNIE
Fuuuuck.

PETER
Lonnie, you didn't mean to. It's not your fault.

LONNIE
(bolting up,
snarling again)
Not my fault! He's fucking dead.

PETER
They were shooting at you.

LONNIE
(quieter)
The fucker ran right in front of me.

PETER
You didn't mean to. Maybe you didn't. You don't know.

Lonnie's shoulders quake and he hunches over, holding his hands on his head. Peter crawls toward him and goes to put his arms around his shoulders. Lonnie makes no move to pull away.

Suddenly, a rustling is heard in the cornstalks and voices are heard a distance away. Lonnie freezes and the manic look returns to his eyes. He clutches his shotgun and pushes Peter to the ground.

LONNIE
(almost hissing)
Quiet, they're coming.

PETER
Easy does it, Lonnie. Shit.

LONNIE
Shut up. Don't move.

PETER
(a little freaked
out)
Lonnie, it's the guys, It's OK.

LONNIE
Shut the fuck up. Let 'em pass.

The noise in the bushes and sound of voices grows louder, along with the buzz of the cicadas.

PETER
OK, Lonnie, it's OK. It's George.

JIMMY (O.S.)
Hey boys, have a little accident?

GEORGE (O.S.)
We're burning daylight here, men.

Lonnie pushes Peter back to the ground and raises up, pumping his shotgun and lurching to a standing position. CRIES OF PROTEST can be heard off-screen.

As Lonnie lifts his gun, Peter jumps up and pushes the barrel into the air. The roar of the SHOTGUN BLAST fills the air and SHOUTS are heard. The two men fall to the ground.

JIMMY
(diving toward the
cornstalks)
What the fuck, Lonnie!

GEORGE
Jesus Christ!

Lonnie gives Peter an intense look and a slight wave of recognition flashes in his eyes, but he says nothing.

JIMMY
(brushing himself
off)
He coulda killed me.

Peter pauses, then sits up and calls out to the others.

PETER
It's OK, guys, he just tripped up.
He thought it was rabbits. You go
back to the truck. We'll catch up.

GEORGE
(somewhat
reluctantly)
Yeah, OK. Let's go, Jimmy. Jesus.

As the others tramp away cursing, Lonnie sits up and locks eyes with Peter. He raises his shotgun and purposefully ejects the remaining shells from the chamber, his eyes still focused on Peter's. One by one, he tucks the shells into the pocket of his hunting vest. Shouts are heard off-screen.

JIMMY (O.S.)
Let's move it, boys.

They sit for another few moments, eyes still locked. After another moment, a slight softness comes to Lonnie's face. He gives a quick wink and looks slowly away. He gets to his feet and walks to the opening in the cornstalks, not looking back.

Peter watches him go, stands up and starts to follow. After a few steps he stops and looks back in the direction they have come.

He slowly starts retracing his steps and then gets a determined look in his eye. He walks through the corn stalks until he comes to the clear area along the creek bed.

Peter keeps walking until he finds the spot where the dead rabbit still lies. He stands over it for a few moments. He hears SHOUTS in the distance but stands his ground.

After another moment he leans down and picks up the rabbit's body by its hind legs. Holding it at arm's length, he walks to a spot near the cornfield and scrapes out a shallow trench with the heel of his boot.

Peter gently lays the rabbit's body into the trench and kicks dirt in a mound over it. He tamps the earth a few times with his boot and stands a moment looking down at the grave.

A close-up of Peter's face reveals tracks of tears marked in the dust on his cheeks. He wipes them away with his sleeve.

GEORGE (O.S.)

Pete, let's go.

JIMMY (O.S.)

Move it, kid.

Peter looks in the direction of the voices. He tamps the rabbit's grave once more with his boot and starts walking slowly back toward the trucks.

As Peter moves out of sight, the BUZZING OF CICADAS reaches a crescendo. The camera slowly pulls back and pans up over the fields to the horizon.

ROLL CREDITS.