

FADE IN:

EXT. SOUTH CHINA SEA - FERRY DECK - DAY

MARK SWIDAN (40s, Texan, Leica) frames the ASIAN MODEL against a rising sun.

MARK

That light's pure Texas, darlin'.

Two CHINESE MEN shadow him. They take candid shot of Mark's activities.

OLD WOMAN Chinese bumps past.

OLD WOMAN

Pretty girls break cameras.

MARK

Only if the man behind it forgets who he is.

CUT TO:

INT. ZHUHAI HOTEL - NIGHT

Door EXPLODES. An army officers and government agents storms into the room. Mark is slammed to the floor.

LEAD AGENT

Spy!

MARK

Photographer. American.

CUT TO:

INT. INTERROGATION ROOM - LATER

Blood drips. Two passports hit the table.

INTERROGATOR

Name your handler.

He picks up the passports and slaps Mark's face with them.

MARK

The Constitution.

INTERROGATOR

Then it signs your death warrant.

CUT TO:

INT. BLACK-SITE CELL - NIGHT

A inmate signs a document anxiously. The signer is led out. Mark stands.

MARK

I won't trade my flag for breath.

He taps the wall: *U - S - A* in Morse with his shackle.

CUT TO:

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

Judge's gavel falls.

JUDGE

Death!

Mark is dragged, whispering:

MARK

...of thee I sing.

CUT TO:

EXT. CAPITOL HILL - DAY

KATHERINE SWIDAN pins a tiny flag to a CONGRESSMAN's lapel.

KATHERINE

Bring my son home, or send me in his place.

INT. CELL - SAME

Mark unfolds Mom's letter. One line in red ink: *"The republic still needs its witness."*

CUT TO:

MONTAGE - "FUN AND GAMES"

- Bowl of slop. Mark carves a lone star into the wall.
- Winter. He wraps his Texas-flag patch around frostbitten fingers.
- Cobra slithers. Mark pins it with a broken spoon.
- An inmate offers his wrist, begging for a bite.

MARK
(to the cobra)

Not your country, not your bite.

CUT TO:

INT. VISITATION - DAY

LAWYER
Retrial. Life sentence, maybe.

MARK
I'd rather die on my feet than live on my knees.

CUT TO:

INT. CELL - MORNING

Headline: *CANADA ARRESTS HUAWEI CFO.* Mark kisses the eagle on the masthead.

AMBASSADOR enters.

AMBASSADOR
The United States does not forget.

MARK

Tell Mom I kept the faith.

PROSECUTORS burst in—second death sentence.

MARK

Two ropes, one neck. Still American.

CUT TO:

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

JUDGE

Death. Again.

Mark rises.

MARK

Then let the record show: an American chose liberty over life.

Inmates stand, hands on hearts.

CUT TO:

INT. CELL - NIGHT

Venom drips from the cobra gripped in a boney hand. Friend offers cigarette—filter stamped *"Made in USA."*

FRIEND

Last drag my friend.

GUARD slips Mark a folded flag the size of a postage stamp.

GUARD

(whisper)

For the day.

CUT TO:

INT. BEIJING HANGAR - NIGHT

Hood ripped off. Kangaroo court. Parole stamped.

PROSECUTOR

You leave alive—because someone paid.

Mark sees the U.S. SEAL on the paper.

MARK

Tell them the debt is mine.

CUT TO:

EXT. TARMAC - DAWN

Private jet. MARINES snap salute. AMBASSADOR drapes a full flag over Mark's shoulders.

AMBASSADOR

Welcome home, son. The republic kept its promise.

MARK

I never stopped keeping mine.

CUT TO:

EXT. ANDREWS AFB - DAY

Jet doors open. Honor guard. KATHERINE waits beneath a giant flag.

KATHERINE

My lens, my light.

They embrace. Crowd chants *"U-S-A!"* Fireworks crack noon sky.