

Nation of Two

The War Cycle

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Dramatis Personae

LIEUTENANT STEVENS, 20s or 30s

CAPTAIN WEBBER, 30s or 40s

ARIEL HARPER, 20s, a brother

DINA HARPER, 15, a sister

SOPHIA, 20s, a widow

LILITH HARPER, 50s, a mother

SAM HARPER, 50s, a father

SERGEANT TAYLOR, 30

RAPHAEL, 20s

LIEUTENANT BUTLER, 24

ACT I

SCENE 1

THE KNOCK

*July 7th, 2007. Marin County,
California. Captain Webber and
Lieutenant Stevens, dressed in
Class A dress uniforms, drive a
government issued sedan. Webber
is at the wheel.*

STEVENS

The gentleman at the gas station said second right.

WEBBER

Ok.

STEVENS

Up here then just under the overpass and a right turn onto the
cul-de-sac. Sir, that's the street.

WEBBER

Ok.

*A pause. Steven's looks out the
window for the overpass, then
looks at the dashboard.*

STEVENS

This clock, sir...That clock right?

WEBBER

Yup. Gives us about five minutes.

STEVENS

Yes, Sir, it does.

They drive in silence.

STEVENS

Cul-de-sac on the right.

Webber turns. Beat.

WEBBER
Three five seven...what is it?

STEVENS
Thirty-five seventy-eight.

WEBBER
Seventy-eight.

STEVENS
(reading house numbers)
That's fifteen. This side is odd. Twenty-seven.

*Webber slows the car and begins
to pull over.*

WEBBER
Right here.

STEVENS
I don't see seventy-eight, Sir.

Webber stops the car.

WEBBER
We're here.

STEVENS
That one says, um, thirty-three, sir, that one -

WEBBER
Lt. Stevens.

STEVENS
- says thirty four.

WEBBER
Lt. Stevens.

STEVENS
Sir?

WEBBER
Would you rather pull up directly in front of the Harper's house?

STEVENS
Sir?

WEBBER
You've never done this before.

STEVENS
No, Sir.

No. WEBBER

First one, Sir. STEVENS

Ok. You read the guide? WEBBER

Yes, Sir. STEVENS

*Stevens starts to open the door
and climb out. Webber stays
put.*

Ok, well, the guide...doesn't give you much. WEBBER

Sir? STEVENS

The guide's crap. WEBBER

The - um - time. STEVENS

Let me tell you a few things. WEBBER

*Stevens hesitates, then climbs
back into the car.*

We have two minutes. STEVENS

We're going to go up there, and..they're not going to want us there. WEBBER

I understand, Sir. I'm good to go. STEVENS

What are we going to do if they're home? WEBBER

With all due respect, Sir, if we're going to get in under the time frame, we've got to move now. STEVENS

We have time. Now, I want you to tell me what's going to happen if they're home. WEBBER

STEVENS

Once we've identified the Next of Kin, we convey the script while being as natural as possible in speech manner and delivery.

WEBBER

The script.

STEVENS

The Secretary of the Army has asked me to express his deep regret that your husband, Michael was killed in action in Iraq on July Seventh / two thousand -

WEBBER

Right. What else?

STEVENS

Do not extend overly sympathetic gestures that may be taken the wrong way. Use good judgment by not passing gory or embarrassing details.

WEBBER

Uh-huh.

STEVENS

Do not physically touch the NOK in any manner unless there is shock / or fainting.

WEBBER

You're not going to have time to think under the pressure.

STEVENS

Sir.

WEBBER

Whatever they do, however they react - if they come at you, if they fall down - just remember to treat them like you'd want your mother treated.

STEVENS

I will.

WEBBER

We're not...we're not, uh...

Beat as he searches for word.

STEVENS

Yes, sir.

Stevens watches Webber for a cue to get up, clearly ready to move. They get out of the car, place hats on heads, and walk up the street.

*Stevens looks for house numbers
as they go.*

WEBBER

Where do you fall on religion, Stevens?

STEVENS

It's a necessary conviction for some, Sir, others can live without it.

WEBBER

You?

STEVENS

I was born Baptist, but my family didn't really go to church.

WEBBER

What do you think happens when we leave this world?

STEVENS

Um, religiously speaking, Sir?

WEBBER

Yeah.

STEVENS

I don't really think about that much.

WEBBER

You don't think about it -

STEVENS

I really don't have an opinion formed one way or the other.

WEBBER

Really?

STEVENS

Yes, Sir.

WEBBER

I think these men are always with us. No matter what happens, no matter where you go, this guy's always going to be with you, one way or another.

STEVENS

Of course. He's a Soldier.

WEBBER

Not just that...

Webber stops.

STEVENS

Sir, his family's waiting.

WEBBER

No they're not, Stevens. They don't know. They're still happy in there. I don't care what the guide says about timelines, just slow the heck down. We're not going to knock on that door today and just deliver a message. We're going to knock on that door and take their son away from them. Forever. When we knock on that door we're going to cut a gash through the middle of their lives. Everything before we knock on one side and everything after on the other. So we can afford to give them a few more seconds living with their son. Can't we?

STEVENS

Understood, Sir. After you.

(awkward pause)

Just follow me up the path, Sir.

They take a few steps, then stop.

STEVENS

Sounds like they're home. That's good, Sir.

WEBBER

I know.

(beat)

Thank you.

Captain Webber steps up to the door, pauses, and then raises his fist to knock on the door. He is interrupted by a peel of joyous laughter. Webber and Stevens wait for the laughter to fade. Webber waits one last second. He knocks. Blackout.

SCENE 2

INTERVENTION

Almost a year later. The living room of the Harper's house. Ariel Harper, late 20s, Sophia, also in her 20s, and Dina, a teenager, lounge on the sofa.

Ariel, Sophia, and Dina in the throws of killer laughter.

ARIEL

It's like one of those "coming up at six" kind of announcements.
It's like -

(singing "breaking news
theme")

"Body language expert joins us to analyze Obama's latest
congratulatory speech in Ohio. Fist jab? Fist pound? A dab?
TERRORIST FIST JAB?!"

Sophia and Ariel laugh.

DINA

I can't write a paper on that!

ARIEL

Sure you can! "Terrorist fist jab" Fox blatantly veers into
propaganda.

DINA

Well, they only say it cause people already believe it's true.
Besides, what does that have to do with the war?

ARIEL

You ever heard of Causality dilemmas?

DINA

Um - no.

ARIEL

Yes, you have. What came first, the chicken or the egg?

DINA

This is a paper about the war.

ARIEL

Who's responsible for war hype: the media who create it: chicken -
or the audience who consumes it: egg?

SOPHIA

The chicken media.

ARIEL

You could write a dissertation on that.

DINA

I'm in the tenth grade.

ARIEL

You laugh, but if you ever listened to Rush Limbaugh, he's the
perfect example - where would he be without his audience; where
would his audience be without him?

SOPHIA

You listen to Rush Limbaugh?

Not if I can help it. ARIEL

Dad listens to him. DINA

Oh, I know - SOPHIA

Dad does? ARIEL

His only contact with the outside world - SOPHIA

That explains it. ARIEL

What's wrong with Rush? DINA

Oh, Dina - SOPHIA

Oh, god, Sophia! She's becoming / one of them! ARIEL

What? He's for the troops! DINA

Everyone is for the troops. ARIEL

Not the liberal media. DINA

Yeah, but the fist jab? It's the news, but - SOPHIA

(laughing - commentary voice)
"Terrorist fist jab?" ARIEL

Right, it's like out of Saturday Night Live. SOPHIA

It is, it is...oh, there's your paper, D. ARIEL

What? DINA

ARIEL
Juxtapose fake news with real news. Which one is actually reporting the facts...

DINA
That sounds boring.

ARIEL
You'd get to watch the Daily Show for research.
(announcer voice)
"Terrorist fist jab?"

SOPHIA
"The Daily Show?"

ARIEL
"Is there a connection? Tonight at eleven."

They laugh.

DINA
I can't. Mom cut off cable.

ARIEL
She didn't.

DINA
She said she'll sell the TV if dad doesn't come out of the basement.

Lilith Harper, 50s, enters setting down her bag and kicking off her shoes.

ARIEL
Do we still have internet?

DINA
Nope. Went out with cable.

LILITH
Are we all here, where's your father?

SOPHIA
Sam's downstairs.

ARIEL
Mom, what's / with the cable?

LILITH
Of course he is.

DINA
He's working on blueprints.

I need the internet -
ARIEL

If you want to pay for it.
(to Dina)
Go get your father.
LILITH

(yelling)
Dad! Mom's home!
DINA

Jesus. It can't be that bad -
ARIEL

Did you see the corner Chevron? Four dollars a gallon. We're
living in Code Orange kids.
LILITH

Code Magenta.
SOPHIA

That's right. We're living in Threat Level Magenta. Or Puce.
LILITH

You can steal a signal from the Martins if you sit by the Oak.
DINA

No password?
ARIEL

Nope.
DINA

You ready for this?
LILITH

I'm ready. We're just running a little late. Everything, OK?
SOPHIA

Picked up some extra hours. Long day.
LILITH

You skipped the meeting?
ARIEL

Who wants to drag your father up here?
LILITH

Dad!
DINA

Mother.
ARIEL

Child. LILITH

Did you skip Gold Star again? ARIEL

Maybe. LILITH

Are you asking us to stage an intervention? ARIEL

Yes. For your father. LILITH

Am I going to have to drag you there? ARIEL

You could go to the meeting for me; take notes. LILITH

I might have trouble convincing them that I'm a mom. ARIEL

Well, your mom doesn't need to sit around weeping for two hours. LILITH

That's not what it's about. ARIEL

Oh yes. It is. And they had a new mom today. LILITH

You did go. ARIEL

For five minutes. Only because I told you I would. That was about all the self-indulgence I could handle. LILITH

How new? SOPHIA

Her first month. LILITH

That is new. SOPHIA

What happened? ARIEL

Mom! It's bad luck! DINA

Roadside bomb. LILITH

Shh! DINA

Where? ARIEL

Kirkuk. LILITH

Where the fuck is Kirkuk? DINA

Excuse me? LILITH

Ariel says it! DINA

Come on, Dina. Northern Iraq? The Kurds? Pretty much the center
of the petroleum industry in the North? ARIEL

Excuse me, Mr. Wikipedia. DINA

Put that in your paper. ARIEL

Everyone there acting like it was their own son ... Ridiculously
teary. LILITH

(to Dina)
Where's dad? Dina, will you -

(shouting) DINA

Dad! We're having a family meeting without you!

Don't encourage him. LILITH

Go get him. ARIEL

You go get him. DINA

You both go get him. LILITH

ARIEL
Ok, ok. Let's go D. Into the cave...

Ariel and Dina exit.

LILITH
Call if you need reinforcements!
(beat)
Those women love to cry.
(to Sophia)
Are you sure you don't want me to handle this?

SOPHIA
I can handle it.

LILITH
Good. He doesn't listen to me anymore.

SOPHIA
Do you think it will work?

LILITH
You're half the reason he wants to build this ridiculous addition.

SOPHIA
(abrupt)
Lilith?

LILITH
Yes?

SOPHIA
We never finished talking about Michael.

LILITH
Will we ever?

SOPHIA
What to do with him.

LILITH
We're taking him to Mt. Tam. Like you wanted. What else is there?

SOPHIA
In the meantime.

LILITH
The meantime?

SOPHIA
I'd like to take him with me tonight.

LILITH

(awkward pause)

Oh.

Sam Harper, 50s, enters with Dina pulling him in and Ariel trailing behind. He has a distracted, disheveled demeanor that one might expect from a mad scientist who has been unwillingly ripped from his lab.

SAM

We're here! Hold your horses! What's the big commotion?

DINA

Family meeting, Dad. Remember?

SAM

Right. The - ah - logistics for the scattering. Right?

LILITH

And a few other things.

SAM

Well then, let's cut to the chase! Lots of work to do.

LILITH

Sit down Sam.

SAM

I've got an announcement to make.

ARIEL

Here we go.

SAM

I've been holding my breath all week, making sure I wasn't jumping the gun.

LILITH

And?

SAM

I was trying too hard to preserve the back hallway, but then I realized we could shorten it and create a little sun room on the south side. Should have a nice view of the garden.

DINA

Cool.

SAM

But most importantly, I'm working off of Michael's most recent draft. Why I didn't start from them...Anyway, I've finished the blueprints!

LILITH

So you'll be going back to work.

SAM

Yes, I'll be going to work on the addition right away!

LILITH

Paid work, Sam.

SAM

It won't be long, Sophie, before we can get you out of the attic and move you into your own, brand new room. We can start building in a week.

ARIEL

A week? Dad, that's the seventh.

SOPHIA

Look, Sam, you really don't need to.

SAM

Of course we do. The attic is not / livable -

SOPHIA

You're being sweet. I really appreciate the effort -

SAM

It's no effort. I promised Michael I would have it finished -

SOPHIA

It would be easier for me to get my own space.

SAM

That's exactly what we're doing, sweetheart. Giving you your own space. It's in the plans.

ARIEL

That's not what she means, Dad.

SAM

Then what do you mean, Sophia?

A Pause.

SOPHIA

I mean, it's time for me to move out.

SAM

(chortle)

Psh! Crazy! Don't even consider it. Your place in this home is set for as long as you like.

SOPHIA

Yes, that's wonderful. I feel very welcome -

SAM

Ok, then. Fantastic. Enjoy the perks of being a Harper!

LILITH

Sam, she's - we're trying to tell you that there is no need for the addition.

SAM

No need?

There is a loud knock at the front door. Everyone jumps.

ARIEL

Jesus Christ! Can't you use the doorbell!?

SAM

Who would knock on the door at this hour?

DINA

It's not that late.

ARIEL

I'll get it. I'll get it. You all stay here. Relax. I've got it.

LILITH

You've been cloistered in the basement, drafting those plans for almost / a year -

SAM

It's a big project! Sophia can't / live in the -

SOPHIA

I can't stay here forever.

SAM

Michael asked me / to build-

SOPHIA

I'm moving out, Sam. Its already settled. Amy's roommate moved to the City, and I'm taking her room.

A pause.

SAM

But...what about the addition?

Ariel enters, followed by a decorated soldier dressed in his Class A uniform.

ARIEL

Dad, mom, this is Sgt. Taylor.

HAL

Staff Sergeant Taylor.

The Harpers seem momentarily stunned by the sight of the Sergeant. Sophia turns away, looking for somewhere to sit.

ARIEL

Sgt. Taylor served with Michael. In his platoon.

SAM

In Iraq?

HAL

Yes, sir.

SAM

Hal Taylor?

HAL

That's right, sir.

SAM

Michael mentioned you.

LILITH

How can we help you, Sergeant?

HAL

Am I intruding?

LILITH

No, no. You just took us by surprise. It's been awhile since the Army showed up at the door.

DINA

Dressed like that.

HAL

Of course. I'm an idiot. I should have been more considerate. I should have used the phone. I've interrupted -

LILITH

Not at all. We're thrilled to have you here.

ARIEL

Did you want to come in?

HAL

Thank you, yes. It's been almost a year now I've been thinking about meeting the LTs family. We worked together almost every day. We were friend's - brothers-at-arms - Baghdad, Fallujah...Mosul. I couldn't help but feel a certain duty to convey my condolences.

LILITH

I'm Lilith, Michael's mom.

HAL

(switching gears)

Ah, the famous Mrs. Harper.

LILITH

Famous?

HAL

The LT couldn't let one meal pass without ruminating on the quality of your cooking, Ma'am. He took it to such a legendary level that we were all feeling homesick for your kitchen.

(to Sam)

And you must be Mr. Harper.

SAM

Sam.

(shaking his hand)

Nice to meet you. Thank you for your service.

HAL

The pleasure is mine, sir. Michael talked about you all the time. About the projects you had together?

SAM

Thank you, yes.

*Sam slowly fades away - back to
the basement -*

LILITH

These are Michael's siblings, Dina -

HAL

(to Dina)

Michael told me to watch out for this one. Said she has a mean uppercut.

I do.

DINA

HAL

Said you almost knocked his tooth out once.

DINA

That was an accident.

HAL

Well -

ARIEL

Did you say Mosul?

HAL

Yes. Yes, I did. I was there in Mosul. When we - when he...
(switching gears)

You have to be Ariel.

ARIEL

Yeah.

HAL

It's uncanny how much alike.

ARIEL

That's...what they say.

HAL

Kind of ironic.

ARIEL

Ironic?

HAL

(to Sophia)

Sophia?

(extending his hand)

An honor to meet you, ma'am. Michael loved you very much. Talked about you every day.

SOPHIA

Thank you. I - I don't mean to be rude, but - excuse me.

LILITH

Where are you going?

SOPHIA

I have to go...meet Amy. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I can't be here.

Sophia runs out. Ariel goes after her.

ARIEL

She's just - it's ok. I got it.

HAL

I am so sorry. I'm leaving.

LILITH

You will do no such thing.

HAL

Ma'am, I have clearly disrupted your evening, and I do not wish to be a further imposition.

LILITH

Sit down Sgt. Dina, get the gentleman something to drink. Beer, soda?

HAL

Water's fine.

LILITH

Water.

(Ariel exits)

Are you hungry?

HAL

I only came to pay my respects.

LILITH

Can I fix you something to eat?

HAL

Well...How could I refuse that.

LILITH

I'll heat up some leftovers. Wait here.

She exits. Sgt. Taylor is left alone in the living room.

HAL

I didn't mean to - uh...shit.

After a moment, Sgt Taylor pulls a small weathered journal from his coat, turning it over in his hand with reverence. He stands and places the journal on a table. He gives it one last touch as if to say good bye, and makes for the door, but hesitates inside the doorway.

He moves quickly back to the journal opens it up and takes out an envelope. He turns the envelope over in his hand for a second. Dina enters with a glass of water. Sgt Taylor quickly but casually slips the letter in his pocket and grabs the journal while sitting down.

DINA

Welcome to the Harper's house.

*She hands him the glass of water.
Blackout.*

SCENE 3

NEW PLANS - MOMENTS LATER

Moments later in the basement. Sam sits at a desk, looking over blueprints, clearly not happy with what he is seeing. He tears them up, pulls out a new sheet of velum and begins drafting anew. Lilith enters looking for bedding. It is not where she left it and she begins to dismantle the make-shift bed Sam's made in the basement. She ignores Sam who ignores her in return.

LILITH

I had everything arranged. What happened?

(beat)

You should be upstairs.

SAM

You should see this. We're going to throw out the bungalow addition entirely, and build a completely separate structure. The Oak will have to go, but Michael said we'd have to do that anyway. That way Sophie can stay, and we give her space. She needs her space, I think.

LILITH

You think?

SAM

(back in the plans)

We can have a recessed entrance opening onto the laneway, that can act as private access...

LILITH
Do you know where Ariel is?

SAM
Where?

LILITH
He's upstairs in Michael's room.

SAM
Michael's? What - why?

LILITH
Helping Sgt. Taylor settle in.

SAM
In Michael's room? No.

LILITH
He's Michael's friend, Sam.

SAM
I don't /think -

LILITH
Then why don't you go upstairs and tell Ariel to put him on the couch.

(pause. Sam goes back to the plans)
Do you think it's strange that you're down here alone in the basement, when we have a guest?

SAM
Ariel is closer to his age than I am anyway. I need to finish this.

LILITH
Sophie's moving out.

SAM
Argh, please.... Once she sees this, she's not going to want to go anywhere. She'll have her own rumpus room.
(beat, Lillith goes back to rummaging for the blankets)

What are you doing?

LILITH
I'm getting blankets so that I can go upstairs like a proper host and help Sgt Taylor settle in. And then, while you scribble your lines, I'm going sit down and pay some bills from our stack of bills.

SAM
You know what your problem is?

LILITH

What is my problem, PR?

SAM

You can't see the big picture, Nurse Ratchett. If you could see now what this is going to look like you'd be as excited as I am.

LILITH

I can see how much it's going to cost.

SAM

Bill at C&A is going to do it for cheap.

LILITH

Dr Singh has agreed to see you for free.

SAM

Oh, God. Daryll Singh? Really? How's his arbitration going?

LILITH

Very generously offering his services...

SAM

He's a snake oil salesman. They all are.

LILITH

That's not true -

SAM

It's true! I'm thinking about becoming a scientologist.

LILITH

I suppose anything is better...

SAM

Than what?

LILITH

Your entire family missing you.

SAM

I'm right here.

LILITH

You're right here?

SAM

I am right here.

LILITH

You need to be up there.

SAM

I need to finish this. I can see what Michael saw. The roots of that tree are going to tear up our foundation. It's true. It happened with the Martins up the street with their septic tank. The roots are going to tear up our foundation and we're going to have no where to go. We'll be left with nothing.

LILITH

If you don't get help, I'm going to be left with nothing.

SAM

I can see it perfectly. Sophie will live in the guest house, and it will be exactly as Michael wanted.

LILITH

Michael's dead, Sam.

SAM

What?

LILITH

Michael's dead.

SAM

I..I don't know what to say. You think I don't know that? You think I don't wake up every day knowing that? What the hell do you think this is, Lilith?

LILITH

It's overindulgent, Sam. It's completely irrational and overindulgent.

SAM

Overindulgent? At least I have the audacity to show some emotion.

LILITH

I guess I can't afford that luxury right now, Sam, because I have to work. I have a family to support. And I have a brilliant, unemployed husband who will not leave the basement.

SAM

I wish I could be like you. I wish I could dive back into work and be content with the fact that my son is dead.

A withering silence. Sam begins to shrink.

LILITH

That's right Sam, you're the only one who misses Michael.

*Lillith exits with the bedding.
Sam returns to drafting.
Blackout.*

SCENE 4

BURN BOX - CONTINUOUS

Sgt. Taylor and Ariel stand in Michael's old bedroom. Everything in the bedroom has been left the way it was when Michael first left the house. The Sergeant admires a wall full of trophies, awards, and ribbons.

HAL

Why doesn't this surprise me? The LT always got antsy in second place.

ARIEL

What made you decide to visit now?

HAL

I'm down in Presidio at Monterey, learnin' Pashto. Defense Language Institute. And, uh, you know we're comin' up on the one-year mark, I felt... well I wanted to visit sooner, but I was in combat five months after Michael passed, and finally I came back and I s'pose I just wasn't... I wasn't ready yet.

ARIEL

You weren't ready.

HAL

Well. It's an odd thing. Losing a brother.

ARIEL

You see people die every day.

HAL

Most the time they're not ours.

ARIEL

(Chuckles)

...yeah.

HAL

...and they're very rarely like your brother. He was an excellent soldier. And he was a good man. I did not agree with him... all of the time-

ARIEL

Well, neither did I. He was a little hotheaded prick.

Genuine laughter.

HAL

He could be, upon occasion, he could be. He talked about you an awful lot.

ARIEL

Yeah?

HAL

Yes he did. Yes he did. He, uh, whenever we'd get, when we'd get inside a satellite coverage, he'd pull up your little blog, your little, little back-n-forth conversations, an', he disagreed with you, but, he respected you. He respected the, the, fightin' spirit in you. Said that's a hell of a lot of fight to be in a pacifist, that's what he said. I used to tell him, liberal in the army, that's ten fuckups in a two fuckup sack. He didn't see it that way.

ARIEL

No, he didn't.

HAL

You and he disagreed on a point that I actually contributed to, on the subject of *Taqiyya*. In *Sura 40* of the Qur'an it's implicit that believers are allowed to lie in service of the faith, for the greater good, and by implication, the service of jihad?

ARIEL

That's one interpretation.

HAL

And I argued that we therefore cannot trust any source of media from the Arab world, or anything that any moderate Muslims or Muslim apologists put forth. And he used a part of that argument, I don't know if you recall the specific debate.

ARIEL

I remember it. I rebutted by saying according to interpretations of *Sura 16*, *Taqiyya* could be invoked only on an individual level, and then only to directly survive physical persecution-

HAL

That's the Muslim apologist translation-

ARIEL

That's the non-Muslim Aggressivist translation. And I knew that wasn't his voice!

HAL

I may not have quite the turn of tongue that your brother had, but-

ARIEL

It was too bigoted.

HAL

Excuse me?

ARIEL

Michael wasn't a bigot.

HAL

(Forces a laugh, leers:)

I begin to see what he meant about you. Takes a hell of a man to stand up so straight when he has no Earthly idea what's comin out of his mouth.

Lilith enters and begins making the bed with the bedding she brought up from the basement.

LILITH

Well, you know, Sgt., you came at an unusual time-

HAL

Yes ma'am.

LILITH

You'll have to forgive Sam for being such a recluse -

HAL

Ma'am I don't want to be an imposition on the family-

LILITH

Not at all-

HAL

I really would rather come back another time.

LILITH

No, stop right there. It's not an imposition at all, any friend of Michael's, believe me. Everyone here is very excited that you're with us. These have been boxed for awhile, but they were clean when they went in, so-

HAL

That'd be fine.

LILITH

All right.

HAL

I probly can't sleep in his bunk.

An uncomfortable, probing silence.

LILITH

Well, let me know if there is anything else we can do to make you feel at home...

(MORE)

LILITH (CONT'D)

(to Ariel)
Can you finish this?

She hands Ariel the bedding.

Mmm.
ARIEL

You boys play nice.
LILITH

Thank you Mrs. Harper-
HAL

Night!
LILITH

For everything.
HAL

Lilith exits.

HAL
Well. (*Silence.*) ...S'pose we'll be bunk-mates! Now I've bunked
with both the Harper boys.

Uncomfortable silence.

ARIEL
Listen, I'm sorry if I'm coming across as rude -

HAL
I expected as much.

ARIEL
My family is in a very delicate place right now -

HAL
I understand -

ARIEL
We've just settled into a precarious balance and having someone
like you show up unannounced can throw that out of whack.

HAL
I can see that.

ARIEL
You never really answered my question.

HAL
What question?

Why'd you come here?
ARIEL

Why'd I come here.
HAL

ARIEL
Did you have something to say? Does this give you some closure or something? Forgive me for being blunt, but what is your objective here.

HAL
Your brother talked a lot about you. He was real upset the way the rift grew between you when he signed up.

ARIEL
You came here to tell me that?

HAL
He told me that you were about as close as brothers can be without being twins. That you shared almost all the same beliefs.

ARIEL
We did.

HAL
But that you spent too much time considering the right and wrong of things and not enough time acting on them.

ARIEL
I didn't rush headlong into a pointless war -

HAL
He said you was about 180 degrees shy of Heaven, is what he said. He had a less polite way of putting it, but it pretty much boiled down to thinking you was a pussy.

ARIEL
What are you doing here?

HAL
(Suddenly emphatic:)
You know there was something I was supposed to give to you. I believe I was supposed to give it to you.

ARIEL
...What?

HAL
You ever heard of a burn box?

ARIEL
No.

HAL

Soldiers, they have things they don't want family to see. Girl in every port. Charm off a little boy you ran over. That kinda thing. When that soldier falls it's his brothers' responsibility to burn it for him.

ARIEL

Jesus. I don't want to-

HAL

But your brother, he didn't have much in there at all. Not even sure I could rightfully call it a burn box. Wasn't marked, and nothin' in it was ugly. 'least by my standards...

ARIEL

What was in it?

*Sgt. Taylor pulls the journal
from his coat.*

HAL

I saw him write in this, the entire time of my acquaintance with him, and I saw him use its contents to argue with you. He loved to record, the world around him, everything. This was his ammunition in your little online pissing contest.

*He hands it over, and Ariel takes
it with awe and a little fear.*

ARIEL

This is for me.

HAL

(Long pause. Vehemently:)

You ought to know what kind of man your brother became.

ARIEL

What do you mean?

HAL

(Long pause)

Well, it was real nice meeting you but I just can't stay in his old room. I won't sleep a wink. I'm gonna get back down to Presidio, I deploy to Afghanistan in a month. You tell your mother it was lovely meetin' her, and that I'm deeply grateful for her generosity, and the family's generosity. ...perhaps I'll get up this way again, before I deploy. I guess I'll see you when I see you.

*The Sergeant turns on his heels
and makes an abrupt exit. Ariel
sits with the journal. He opens
it and begins to read. Blackout.*

What?

SOPHIA

Think of nothing. That's very zen of you. My mind keeps churning...

RAPHAEL

Really? What are you thinking about?

SOPHIA

Ok. Um. I mean it's kind of like trying to hop a moving train. Let's see.

RAPHAEL

(beat)

I was thinking you seemed a little distant. And I started wondering if maybe you were over it.

SOPHIA

(sitting up)

Over it?

RAPHAEL

It just seems to be happening a lot recently...like you're checking out...you're somewhere else.

SOPHIA

Over what?

RAPHAEL

Well...us.

SOPHIA

Um, hello. I'm in your bed.

RAPHAEL

I know, I know - physically you're here, but-

SOPHIA

(interrupting)

Was there something I did?

RAPHAEL

(sitting up)

No, no! You were - it's fine - it's great. I was just -

SOPHIA

(interrupting)

OK. So then...are we OK?

RAPHAEL

(beat.)

Yeah, we're great.

(changing gears)

Fantastic.

*He kisses her, pushing her back
down into the bed.*

RAPHAEL

Oh! I know.

SOPHIA

What?

RAPHAEL

Check it out.

*Raphael rolls out of bed, yanks
on his superhero underwear,
picks up his pants off the floor
and pulls his wallet out of a
pocket.*

SOPHIA

What are you doing?

RAPHAEL

I was online the minute they went on sale, hitting the refresh button over and over to make sure that I got the best seats possible.

*He pulls tickets out of his
wallet. Offering them to Sophia:
Sophia takes the tickets.*

SOPHIA

Shinedown?

RAPHAEL

I don't get how those things work. I mean it must have been ten seconds after they went on sale and the best I could find were in row P, but...

SOPHIA

That's...

RAPHAEL

But it's still on the floor level. Should be excellent.

SOPHIA

Wow...this is so sweet.

RAPHAEL

Yeah?

SOPHIA

Yeah, it's...sweet of you to think of this.

RAPHAEL
I hear a "but"...

SOPHIA
No, no. It's - it's great.
(beat)
I just...can't.

RAPHAEL
Do you have something that night? I thought it was far enough
out...

SOPHIA
I feel really bad about this.

RAPHAEL
You don't have to feel bad about it.

SOPHIA
Let me - can I buy them off of you?

RAPHAEL
What? No. Can't you change your schedule around a little?

SOPHIA
Ariel already got tickets.

RAPHAEL
Ariel?

SOPHIA
To Shinedown. Yes.

RAPHAEL
You're going with Ariel?

SOPHIA
No. I'm not going.

RAPHAEL
So...I'm confused.

SOPHIA
Rapha. I can't go. Ariel will be there. It would be really
weird with you there...

RAPHAEL
Oh. Right.

SOPHIA
So...

*Sophia hands Raphael the tickets.
He doesn't take them.*

RAPHAEL
Where's he sitting? The Arena's huge.

SOPHIA
I wouldn't enjoy it.

RAPHAEL
There's no way his seats are as good as ours.

SOPHIA
It doesn't matter.

RAPHAEL
Come on, he'll never pick us out of the crowd.

SOPHIA
I'll be paranoid.

*Raphael jumps into bed, grabbing
Sophia playfully.*

RAPHAEL
We can wear a disguise.

SOPHIA
That's not -

RAPHAEL
Yes, yes, yes. I've got those Green Lantern masks. It'll be fun!

SOPHIA
No, it won't.

RAPHAEL
We'll go incognito...watch your favorite band play...

SOPHIA
My favorite?

RAPHAEL
Uh-huh. We'll get lost in the throng.

SOPHIA
I don't like Shinedown.

RAPHAEL
(playfully grabbing her
again)
Oh, right. Now you hate Shinedown.

SOPHIA
I never liked them.

RAPHAEL

Is that why they're all over that mix you've had on repeat in your car for the last nine months?

SOPHIA

That.

RAPHAEL

(singing - from "I Dare You")

"I dare you to tell me to walk through fire..."

SOPHIA

Ugh. Stop.

RAPHAEL

(fist pump)

"I don't know the lyrics but they rhyme with fire..."

SOPHIA

I didn't make that mix.

RAPHAEL

Is your eject button broken?

(sings)

"Hello..."

SOPHIA

(pushing Rapha off)

No, it works.

RAPHAEL

(taking in the serious tone)

OK...I'm sorry, I guess I don't understand.

SOPHIA

Michael made it. He left it in there...for me. Shinedown was *his* favorite.

A pause. Raphael withdraws.

RAPHAEL

Oh.

SOPHIA

Sorry.

RAPHAEL

You just left it in there?

SOPHIA

Yes.

RAPHAEL

For a year?

SOPHIA

I listen to the radio sometimes. Maybe you could put these on eBay.

She offers him the tickets. He takes them.

RAPHAEL

Sure, ok.

Raphael gets out of bed and distractedly puts the tickets back in the wallet, the wallet in his pants pocket. And then he steps into his pants. Sophia watches him.

SOPHIA

What are you thinking?

RAPHAEL

Nothing.

He rummages for his shirt.

SOPHIA

Nothing?

RAPHAEL

Yeah.

SOPHIA

(making fun)
That's amazing. How do you do that?

RAPHAEL

(pulling shirt on)
I'm a zen master.

Raphael pulls his shirt on, then looks anxiously around the room for something else to occupy his attention.

SOPHIA

Talk to me.

RAPHAEL

I'm being reactive. I'll get over it.

Tell me what you're thinking. SOPHIA

I feel ridiculous. RAPHAEL

No. Why? SOPHIA

I'm just - I've been singing along with it in your car. RAPHAEL

I know. I'm sorry. SOPHIA

Why didn't you tell me? RAPHAEL

I like your voice. SOPHIA

I feel foolish. I'm goofing around - singing along and it's this - this sentimental thing between you and your ex. RAPHAEL

(pulling back)
Please don't call him that. He's not my ex. SOPHIA

I'm - I'm sorry. I wasn't thinking. Of course not. Look. Like I said. I'm being reactive, and totally petty. RAPHAEL

It's ok. SOPHIA

I want this, Sophia. RAPHAEL

This? SOPHIA

Yes, this. Us. I want this to happen. RAPHAEL

Do I hear a "but?" SOPHIA

No, no. No but. I'm just - my mind wants to race forward. Keeps playing out these scenarios. RAPHAEL

What scenarios? SOPHIA

RAPHAEL

Things with you. Good things. Future things. But I keep unearthing all these - these relics - that make me wonder if we'll ever get there.

SOPHIA

It's not even a year.

RAPHAEL

I know. I'm not trying to rush you or anything. I know these things take time. I guess I'm just having trouble adjusting my timetable. I feel like we should be farther along.

SOPHIA

What do you want?

RAPHAEL

I want things to be normal. I want to be able to take you out: paranoia free.

SOPHIA

I'm not ready for the family to know.

RAPHAEL

I know. I get it. And I don't want to pressure you. I'm just...I'm starting to feel like we're cheating on someone. I don't want to be the *other* man in your life.

SOPHIA

You're not the other man.

RAPHAEL

You're still wearing a ring.

SOPHIA

For the family.

RAPHAEL

So, then, will you take it off?

SOPHIA

Now?

RAPHAEL

I'm tired of sneaking around...I want to be your man. *The* man in your life. The only man.

SOPHIA

You are, you are.

She takes the ring off.

SOPHIA

There.

RAPHAEL

I'm sorry.

*He crosses to her, and puts his
head in her lap.*

SOPHIA

You're not the other man.

RAPHAEL

I'm an asshole.

SOPHIA

Shh. You're not the other man.

Sophia grips the ring. Blackout.

SCENE 6

MEMORY

Lilith stands in a shard of light.

LILITH

At the time, Sam was working on the Bayridge development. Money wasn't the issue it is now, so I was volunteering for St. Vincent De Paul. I'd been there for almost a month, and when I started I told them I keep my cell phone on at all times. If it rings and it's my son, I'm picking it up. I'm sorry. I don't care if we're in a meeting with God. I'm walking out and picking it up. If that's not OK then I can't be here.

(beat)

We were finishing up a meeting with the new volunteers. Someone had Al Gore's global warming concert on in the parish office, and some of the volunteers were arguing over whether global warming was man-made. My cell phone rang. It was Sam. And I just kind of cleared it because he called me all the time. I thought he's just telling me something about Bayridge or asking me to pick something up on the way home.

(beat)

Before I could put the phone down he called a second time.

(beat)

That's when I thought - maybe this is important. Maybe I should pick it up. I picked up the call. "Are you at work?" Yes. "You need to come home as soon as possible." What is it? "Just come home." He sounded wrong. I hung up the phone; ran out the door. Didn't say anything to anyone - except for "I have to go" And I just remember - all I remember was someone saying to me "is everything ok?" I don't know.

(beat)

I did know. When you get a phone call like that, deep down inside of yourself, you know.

(MORE)

LILITH (CONT'D)

(pause)

I drove a hundred miles an hour down the freeway just sobbing the entire time because I knew what I was walking into. It was either he was gone or he was injured. I - at that point - tried to bargain with God. Take an arm, take a leg, take both if you want just don't let it be "that."

(beat)

The two officers in Class A uniforms - like you see in every movie you can imagine - were waiting. And still, I was telling myself it could be something else. I remember walking into the house, leaning on Sam, not understanding what he was telling me: the officers were waiting for Sophia. They couldn't tell us anything because we were not the primary next of kin and they, by law, had to wait for Sophia. We had to wait to hear our son was dead. Sophia arrived. The gentlemen stood. Sam intercepted Sophia at the door. "I'm so sorry." That was all he said. "I'm so sorry." And - we just..lost it. You know you - your legs give out. And you just find yourself crying like a baby on the floor. And it ended up growing because Dina ended up down there too. And Ariel, his older brother. It became this - this massive heaving crying...ball...it was the closest we had ever been as a family.

And you really can't - you can't think. The only thing I can remember going through my head at the time was: No, no! No no no no! No no no no no!

(Then almost to herself.)

This is a joke this is wrong they've misinformed me this cannot be.

(beat)

Those men were still standing in the foyer when we dropped. They just didn't know what to do with themselves so they just stood there for about twenty minutes, watching... and then - when it became apparent that the crying wasn't going to stop anytime soon - approached Sophia with some paperwork. She had to sign paperwork that she'd been notified - paperwork for like the insurance - things you don't even want to address when you're in that emotional state. She couldn't get off the floor. No one could. Someone needed to stand up. I put the pen in her hand, the papers on the floor and held her until she had signed them all. And then they left. And I can't...I can't remember their faces. Only the uniforms.

*Blackout.*SCENE 7

INDEPENDENCE DAY

Evening on the 4th of July.

*Sam, Ariel, Dina, and Lilith
bustle about the living room of
the Harper's house, gathering*

belongings and going through the motions of getting ready to go see the fireworks.

SAM

This is not a democracy.

ARIEL

He's the "Decider."

DINA

No way, Dad, you can't just decide this. It's not fair.

LILITH

Nothing has been decided yet -

SAM

There is no decision. There is a crack in the garage that is splitting the slab right down the middle.

ARIEL

(showing very small with his fingers)

It's like this.

SAM

But it was like *this* last year, and if we don't fix it, it will be like *this* a year from now. That's not the only place showing damage -

DINA

There's been a crack in there for years!

SAM

This is not up for a vote.

DINA

Because you know you'll lose!

SAM

(standing)

We're going to miss the fireworks.

LILITH

Sweetie, your father is delusional.

SAM

Where's Sophia?

ARIEL

If Dad thinks the tree is damaging the house -

SAM

No question.

ARIEL

- I mean, it's not like there's anyone climbing it anymore.

DINA

I might.

ARIEL

Come on.

DINA

If I have to chain myself in the branches, I will.

ARIEL

It's just. A tree.

DINA

It's The Oak!

SAM

And it's tearing down the house!

LILITH

Code Orange, kids.

DINA

What about the tree house?

ARIEL

She means those two-by-fours nailed up there for footholds.

DINA

Yeah, but who nailed them up there, huh?

SAM

We're going to build a tree house the way it was always meant to be. With a bedroom, a rumpus room, one full bath and a dining room large enough to double as a living room.

*The sound of a car pulling into
the driveway.*

ARIEL

(hearing something off)

Sophia's here.

LILITH

(checking the time)

Can we still make it?

ARIEL

Not Sausalito. But maybe the Fair.

SAM

And the best part is this: We can use some of the wood from the Oak as framing for the windows and doors.

DINA

No!

SAM

Or we could have the logs from the Oak milled and incorporate it as a clerestory or use it in the boarding for the barrier partition.

Sophia enters. Carrying a box.

LILITH

Nothing is coming down or going up until you show me how you plan to pay for this.

SOPHIA

(to Lilith)

Sorry, I'm late.

(noticing the family)

Everyone's here.

DINA

Sophie, tell dad you're not moving back!

SOPHIA

Um -

ARIEL

Dad's got another new plan for the addition.

DINA

He wants to cut down the Oak.

SAM

Which was Michael's idea in the first place. You remember?

DINA

Shh, Dad!

SAM

Dina, I will not be hushed in my own house.

LILITH

Hush, Sam. No one is cutting down the Oak.

DINA

Ha!

SAM

But -

Who's car are we taking? LILITH

I'm in Sophia's! DINA

I can drive. ARIEL

We should take one car. Parking will be nuts. LILITH

(to Sophia)
Can we take your car? DINA

Why does it matter? ARIEL

Sam exits.

I'm sorry - where are we going? SOPHIA

Your car smells. DINA

We were thinking / we could catch the fireworks at the Fair. LILITH

You smell. ARIEL

The Fair? SOPHIA

Sam! Don't wander off! LILITH

Let's go to Sausalito! The Pier! DINA

There's no way we can make Sausalito. It's getting dark. ARIEL

(to Lilith)
Weren't we supposed to talk? SOPHIA

Where did I put the binder? We can meet in the car. LILITH

Ariel picks up the binder from a table. He flips through it.

ARIEL

Mom.

LILITH

Ah. Thanks. Dina, go tell Dad we're all waiting.

DINA

Uh! It's impossible! He doesn't budge!

LILITH

Says the daughter who needs to be forklifted out of bed each morning.

DINA

Kids need more sleep! It's scientifically proven.

LILITH

Get your father.

DINA

(exiting)

Ugh...

Dina exits.

SOPHIA

I'm sorry - I can't -

LILITH

Can't what?

SOPHIA

I came over to talk to you about the seventh, and about - about Michael.

LILITH

I know, but we ran out of time. The fireworks. We can go over the itinerary in the car.

SOPHIA

The itinerary.

LILITH

Yes. For the scattering. Basically, we arrive at Mt. Tam just before sunrise - it comes out to be one year almost to the minute.

(reaching for the binder)

Here. While we're waiting for Sam -

ARIEL

(looking up from the binder)

What is this?

He points to something in the binder.

LILITH

That's it. The itinerary.

ARIEL

No, what the hell is this?

LILITH

What?

ARIEL

"Sgt. Taylor addresses the family?"

LILITH

Yes, Dina has a thing she wants to read - her paper she's writing for Michael -then you, then Sgt. Taylor / had a few words -

ARIEL

Whoa whoa whoa. When did he get invited?

LILITH

Last week, when he called.

ARIEL

And said what?

LILITH

He was very polite.

ARIEL

Right: polite. What does he want?

LILITH

The same thing we all want. He asked to say a few things about the kind of soldier and leader he saw in Michael.

ARIEL

Jesus. At our family memorial? This was for family only.

LILITH

He was Michael's family while they were in Iraq together.

ARIEL

Says who? Hal Taylor? I don't ever remember Michael talking about this Sgt. Taylor. So what if they were in the same unit or something. It doesn't make him family. That doesn't mean anything!

LILITH

He was a friend of Michael's. He was there in Mosul. I trust him.

ARIEL

But I don't, mom. And I don't want him anywhere near my brother's ashes. Help me out here, Sophia.

SOPHIA

I don't know. Maybe it's fine, Ariel.

ARIEL

No, it's not fine. There's something not right with him. Does dad know about this?

LILITH

I certainly told him. Whether it registered...

ARIEL

Dad's not going to want some stranger -

LILITH

(snapping)

Well, why don't you go help your sister dig him out of the basement, then we can ask him if he cares!

Sophia's cell phone starts to ring. It is a Superman ringtone.

ARIEL

Jesus, mom.

LILITH

Go get him! It's getting late!

ARIEL

(exiting)

Ok. I'll get him. Relax.

Sophia's cell phone is still ringing. Sophia is trying to get to her phone, but she is still carrying a box. She awkwardly shifts the weight of the box to one arm so that she can dig her phone out of her bag.

LILITH

(beat)

Did you need to get that?

SOPHIA

(canceling the call)

No. No. Just a friend.

She cancels the call, and awkwardly drops the phone in the box while looking for a place to set the box down.

SOPHIA

Look, I found some things - while I was unpacking - that I thought you might want.

LILITH

What did you find?

SOPHIA

Mostly clothes. Some books. A few pictures. Some knick-knacks he kept for sentimental value. I thought you would probably have a better idea of what to do with some of this.

LILITH

Yes.

(beat)

Thank you, Sophia.

SOPHIA

(referencing the box)

Did you want to -

LILITH

Yes. Not now, though... If we're going to make the fireworks. Where are they?

(yelling)

Sam! Get your butt up here!

SOPHIA

But I also wanted to talk to you about Michael.

LILITH

Dina, let's go, let's go!

SOPHIA

Lilith, please.

LILITH

What did you want to say, Sophia? We need to run.

SOPHIA

I want to take Michael with me.

LILITH

(beat)

Take him with?

SOPHIA

Tonight. I'd like to take him.

LILITH

That's - no. That's impossible.

(beat)

No.

SOPHIA

Why? You've had him for a year. Please, for just a couple of days before the scattering.

LILITH

No, he's safe here.

SOPHIA

He's safe with me!

LILITH

No. We've already compromised with the scattering -

SOPHIA

Michael wouldn't want to be kept in a box!

LILITH

I can watch him / here until -

SOPHIA

We never agreed / to that!

LILITH

Until we scatter him the way you wanted to, Sophia. We're doing it your way, okay? Can you compromise / a little?

SOPHIA

I just want two days with my husband! Two days!

*Lilith notices a ring hanging on
a chain around Sophia's neck.*

LILITH

Is that...Is that your wedding ring?

SOPHIA

What?

LILITH

That's the ring Michael gave you.

SOPHIA

Yes.

LILITH

I hadn't noticed that you...

SOPHIA

No, I just -

LILITH

The stone belonged to my grandmother. Michael told you? On the band my grandfather gave her.

SOPHIA

Yes. He did.

LILITH

He was so sure that you were the one...

SOPHIA

Lilith, please -

LILITH

He begged me for the stone. It was supposed to go to Dina, you know. But he was so persistent - like he always is. "It's staying in the family, Mom."

SOPHIA

It is. It is.

LILITH

Why is it on a chain around your neck?

*Sam enters carrying a model of
the guest house. Dina and Ariel
follow him in.*

SAM

Now! This will help you *all* see the big picture!

DINA

Oh, my god, Dad! Will you ever give up?

SAM

Not until the paint is dry.

DINA

Mom, we're going to miss the fireworks.

SAM

There's time. Gather round. Witness the masterpiece!

DINA

It's already dark out.

ARIEL

Forget it, D. We had to leave five minutes ago.

DINA

This is so lame.

*Dina notices the box of belongings
that Sophia set set down earlier.
She begins picking through it.*

SAM

As you can see, the window in the gable is South facing, so in the winter that's a nice green solution to heating, and in the summer with the steep angle of the sunlight, the awning keeps it shaded and cool. And that's just the roof.

DINA

Were these Michael's?

LILITH

Yes.

Dina continues digging through the box, Ariel takes an interest. Sam holds up his model in front of Sophia.

SAM

Sophie - here - take a look at this.

SOPHIA

No, Sam - I need to go -

SAM

What do you mean? Look at your house.

SOPHIA

(looking for her phone)

I'm not moving back in.

SAM

When you see this - when you see what an homage to Michael it is - you won't be able to refuse.

SOPHIA

Please, Sam, / stop -

SAM

(taking the model to Sophia)

I've been working on / this all day - Let me show you.

SOPHIA

(exploding)

Get off! Back off!

Sam recoils. Everyone freezes.

ARIEL

It's just a model. Relax.

SOPHIA

No it's not! It's not just a model! You're building me a cage!

(MORE)

SOPHIA (CONT'D)

I'm tired of fitting into this little box of Michael's widow for all of you! Why can't I just do something for me instead of having to pass it through the filter of what everyone in this family might feel?

SAM

What did I say?

SOPHIA

Where I'm going to live! How long do I wear this ring for! Who can I talk to! Who can I go out with!

LILITH

Go out with? We / never asked you -

SOPHIA

I have to go. I have to go.

SAM

(crushed, looking at his model)

A cage?

LILITH

We're all reliving a few things, right now. Why don't we just put Michael's things back in the box. We can sit down and talk this through.

SOPHIA

No. I can't put anything back in the box. I don't want it in a box! I want my life back.

LILITH

(grabbing Sophia)

It's ok, Sophia. It's, ok.

SOPHIA

I need to go.

Sophia's cell phone begins to ring again - the Superman ringtone. It is coming from inside the box, where Sophia inadvertently set it down.

LILITH

No, no. You can stay. We're all family -

SOPHIA

Where's that coming from?

Dina picks up the phone out of the box.

DINA

Is this Michael's?

SOPHIA

Don't! Don't answer that!

Dina answer the phone.

DINA

(answering the phone)

Hello?

(beat, she gets a grossed
out look on her face)

Oh, my god. Gross. That's -

(beat)

No it's not her. Who's this?

(beat)

Dina Harper. Who's this? Yeah, his sister - who -

(beat)

Like the turtle? Like the - Ok. Yeah, Hang on.

(beat, handing the phone to
Sophia)

It's Raphael.

*Dina hands the phone to Sophia
who takes it. Faint "hello's"
are heard from the receiver.
Sophia holds the phone for a
moment, then hangs up.*

ARIEL

(beat)

Who's Raphael?

LILITH

We don't need to -

SOPHIA

No! I do. I need to tell you.

SAM

What - what's going on?

SOPHIA

I've been seeing someone.

ARIEL

Oh, shit. I knew it.

DINA

Shut up.

SAM

Seeing someone? A therapist?

(MORE)

SAM (CONT'D)

(beat)

Oh.

The sound of fireworks in the distance.

SOPHIA

I tried to tell...

LILITH

Well, congratulations...

SOPHIA

It's not -

LILITH

How long have you been -

SOPHIA

It's been gradual.

ARIEL

How long, Sophia?

SOPHIA

We met in September.

ARIEL

September?

(counts to three on his fingers)

SOPHIA

Yes, in September.

ARIEL

(double counting on his fingers - 1, 2, 3)

July, August, September.

LILITH

Three months.

ARIEL

July, August...

LILITH

After three months?

SOPHIA

It wasn't like that at first. It took time.

LILITH

It took you three months.

SOPHIA

No, no - listen - it's not like that.

SAM

Hold on, hold on.

(beat)

What is he?

SOPHIA

Is he?

SAM

What does he do?

SOPHIA

He's not really...It doesn't matter.

SAM

It matters what a man does. Yes, it does.

SOPHIA

He's a - He's a salesman, I guess.

SAM

A salesman. What does he sell?

SOPHIA

He sells comics. Comic books.

SAM

Comic books. Let me see. He sells comic books.

SOPHIA

It's not who he is...

SAM

My son was a Soldier. He was a - a hero who sacrificed his life for his country and his family...and now...comic books...

SOPHIA

That's not who he is...

SAM

(exiting)

I think - I think I have work to do.

Sam exits.

DINA

Dad.

LILITH
You couldn't even wait three months?

SOPHIA
I -

LILITH
His ashes still in a box -

SOPHIA
That's not fair -

LILITH
Yes, it is. Yes, I'm sorry. It is.

SOPHIA
It's lonely -

LILITH
For all of us, yes -

SOPHIA
But it's not just that. Raphael is different.

ARIEL
Oh, god. I can't listen to this anymore. Mom, it's not really our business what she does now. It's not. I'm sorry. I'm going for a drive.

(beat. to Sophia)
Michael would have been stronger.
(he exits)

Ariel exits.

SOPHIA
I'm sorry.

LILITH
Of course. It was bound to happen. But I think you can see why - I think you can understand why Michael is safer here.

SOPHIA
No, I don't see -

LILITH
(beat)
Thank you, Sophia. For your honesty. That must have been very difficult to admit. And, we're very - we're very happy for you...
(she exits)

Lilith exits. Dina stands for a moment, staring awkwardly at Sophia.

DINA

We missed the fireworks.
(she exits)

*Dina exits, leaving Sophia alone.
Blackout.*

SCENE 8

STATUS CHANGE - LATER

*Scene Eight. "Status Change."
Raphael's apartment. That night.
Raphael stands in the doorway,
a large bag over his shoulder.*

RAPHAEL

How'd you get in?

SOPHIA

You gave me a key.

RAPHAEL

I did?

SOPHIA

On the Captain America keychain.

RAPHAEL

Captain America.

SOPHIA

His shield.

RAPHAEL

Right.

SOPHIA

It was a while ago -

RAPHAEL

No, I remember. You haven't ever used it so...

SOPHIA

There was so much traffic around the Fair, I thought it'd just be easier to find you here. Your cell was off...

RAPHAEL

Was it.

SOPHIA

Where have you been?

RAPHAEL

The shop.

SOPHIA

This late?

*Raphael puts away unused picnic
supplies from the bag he carries.*

RAPHAEL

Old Glory stokes the flame of hero-worship. Never fails to bring out the closet nerds. Beer, hotdogs, and cover-bands trigger a neural cluster in the Asperger set that causes cravings for dumbed-down stories of Truth, Justice, and the American way.

SOPHIA

Oh.

RAPHAEL

Did you know he died?

SOPHIA

Who?

RAPHAEL

Captain America. Marvel killed him last year.

SOPHIA

No. I didn't know that.

RAPHAEL

He got sniped on the steps of a courthouse. Didn't have his shield on him so he was vulnerable. Sent a shockwave through the comic world.

SOPHIA

Can't they just...bring him back?

RAPHAEL

Yes, but they won't. There may not be much that a comic book company can do to change the world. But they can kill their heroes. Marvel sent a signal - a protest against all this... They've confirmed that he's gone. For good.

SOPHIA

That's...sad?

RAPHAEL

Yes, it's fucking tragic. An American icon who stood for everything brilliant and transcendent about this country, slain on the steps of justice.

(chuckling)

And now that he's been dead over a year he's more popular than ever. It's fucked up.

A pause.

SOPHIA
Yeah. That's pretty fucked up.

RAPHAEL
Jesus. That's not what I meant -

SOPHIA
It'...a comic book. I know.

RAPHAEL
I'm sorry, that was thoughtless -

SOPHIA
You're mad at me.

RAPHAEL
(beat)
Actually, yes. I am.

SOPHIA
OK. I get that.

RAPHAEL
Was I imagining things or did you really hang up on me?

SOPHIA
It was bad timing -

RAPHAEL
I thought I'd call to see if you had any idea why I was hanging around the Fair with my thumb up my ass -

SOPHIA
I was running late -

RAPHAEL
Well -
(chuckling)
I must've freaked her out.

SOPHIA
What did you say -

RAPHAEL
That's exactly what I said, "I'm standing here with my thumb up my ass!"

SOPHIA
(chuckling)
Oh, no. You've scarred her for life.

RAPHAEL
I thought it was you!

SOPHIA
Do I sound fifteen?

RAPHAEL
I wasn't expecting a Harper to pick up!

SOPHIA
Neither was I! I freaked out. It was a panic reflex. You can't hold that against me -

RAPHAEL
You didn't need to hang up on me. "I can't talk now" would have sufficed.

SOPHIA
It was an awkward moment.

RAPHAEL
Right. Always is.

SOPHIA
Really freakin' awkward.

RAPHAEL
I can imagine.

SOPHIA
Come on! Shake it off!

RAPHAEL
Shaking.

SOPHIA
Let it go, baby! Let it go! Come on.

RAPHAEL
I working on it.

Sophia pulls Raphael to the bed.

SOPHIA
I'm sorry, ok? I'm sorry. Can't we just skip the rest of this fight and make up now?

RAPHAEL
Hmm.

SOPHIA
Come 'ere.

*Sophia pulls Raphael into a
passionate kiss, but it is
obvious that he isn't into it.*

SOPHIA

No? Still mad?

RAPHAEL

Just processing.

He pushes away from her.

SOPHIA

Talk to me.

(beat)

Please.

RAPHAEL

Ok. Uh, let's see.

(beat)

Things should be getting easier, not harder. But it seems so
much harder now than it was six months ago. Shouldn't we be moving
forward?

SOPHIA

What makes you think we're not?

RAPHAEL

Why are we still having this problem?

SOPHIA

What problem?

RAPHAEL

The Harper problem, the -

SOPHIA

It's not a problem.

RAPHAEL

I think it is a problem, yes -

SOPHIA

No, it's not.

RAPHAEL

No, it really / is -

SOPHIA

Not.

(beat)

Is not. Not anymore.

What do you mean?
RAPHAEL

I mean...I told the family.
SOPHIA

You what?
(beat)
RAPHAEL

I told the Harpers. About us. Tonight. When you called. That's what I was doing.
SOPHIA

Oh.
(beat)
RAPHAEL

Wow.
SOPHIA

Yeah. So...not a problem. Anymore.
RAPHAEL

Wow. OK.
(a burst of laughter quickly contained)
I'm...sorry...Are you alright?
SOPHIA

It's - it's - no not really, but yeah, I'm ok actually. I'm actually ok.
RAPHAEL

How did it...go down?
SOPHIA

It was ugly. Can we just -
RAPHAEL

Of course, of course -
SOPHIA

I don't really want to talk about it -
RAPHAEL

Fine - That's fine, we can just -
SOPHIA

Can we please?
RAPHAEL

Yes. We can.
(crossing to her, unable to contain his glee)

Thanks.

SOPHIA

RAPHAEL
(dorking out)
Yes, we can. Yes, we can. / Yes, we can -

SOPHIA
(laughing)
You are unbelievable!

RAPHAEL
I'm a jealous dork.

SOPHIA
Definitely a dork. Now shut up.

She pulls him onto the bed.

RAPHAEL
Does this mean I can take you out to dinner?

SOPHIA
(pulling him back)
It does.

RAPHAEL
Wherever I want?

SOPHIA
Uh-huh.

RAPHAEL
Can we hold hands in public?

SOPHIA
Shh! Yes!

They make out.

RAPHAEL
Will you change your status?

SOPHIA
My what?

RAPHAEL
Your Facebook status.
(beat)
Will you change it?

SOPHIA
What? Why?

RAPHAEL

Well, I mean, last time I checked it still said "Married to Michael Harper."

SOPHIA

It's Facebook. Who cares?

Raphael gets up.

RAPHAEL

Well, I care.

SOPHIA

Really? Are you really making a deal of my Facebook relationship status?

RAPHAEL

It doesn't have to be a deal if you just change it.

SOPHIA

To what? Last time I checked there wasn't an option for "war widow."

RAPHAEL

You don't have to have a relationship status at all. You can just leave it off your profile. Like I do.

SOPHIA

I don't see why this has to be an issue -

RAPHAEL

All our friends are on Facebook. Come on, of course it's an issue. It's kind of like the ring -

SOPHIA

It's not like the ring -

RAPHAEL

I mean, socially, it serves a similar purpose -

SOPHIA

No it doesn't -

RAPHAEL

It lets people know you're taken - you're involved. And right now you're telling everyone we know that you're married to Michael Harper.

SOPHIA

I can't change my status, Raphael.

RAPHAEL

Why? The family knows. Right?

SOPHIA

Yes. I told them.

RAPHAEL

Ok. Then what more is there to hide?

SOPHIA

I'm not hiding anything.

RAPHAEL

Then what's the big deal? Just change your status.

SOPHIA

It's not just my status, it's Michael's.

RAPHAEL

What?

SOPHIA

He still has a profile, Rapha. No one knows the password, so it's still up there. It's still active.

RAPHAEL

I know.

SOPHIA

People still write on his wall. People still remember him there.

RAPHAEL

I've seen that.

SOPHIA

If I change my status, his status will change. If I drop my married to Michael status, his will drop too, and there's no one there who can log back in to change it back.

RAPHAEL

But you won't need to change it back.

SOPHIA

How can I do that to Michael? What would his friends and family think if they see a message that says "Michael is no longer listed as married?"

RAPHAEL

They'll think it's been a year. They'll think you're moving on.

SOPHIA

No. I can't.

RAPHAEL

You can't move on?

I can't change, Michael. SOPHIA

Michael? RAPHAEL

No. I - I mean - SOPHIA

Did you just call me Michael? RAPHAEL

No, I mean. I was saying. I can't change Michael's status. SOPHIA

It's your Facebook status. RAPHAEL

I'm still his widow, Rapha. That won't ever change. SOPHIA

Yes. I understand that now. RAPHAEL

He grabs his backpack and keys.

What do you mean? SOPHIA

I get it. You haven't let go of him. RAPHAEL

Where are you going? SOPHIA

I don't know. Nowhere. RAPHAEL

Rapha. SOPHIA

I'm sorry. RAPHAEL

Don't go. SOPHIA

Just. You can let yourself out? RAPHAEL

Yes. SOPHIA

RAPHAEL

(beat)

And...when you go, just leave the shield in the box.

He exits. Blackout. End of Act One.

ACT II

SCENE 1

THE FALLING PRICE OF BLOOD - EVENING

At a bar in Monterey, CA. Sgt. Taylor sits at the bar, a beer in front of him. He plays with a worn looking envelope. Ariel enters.

ARIEL

Can you drink in uniform?

The Sergeant slips the envelope into a pocket.

HAL

Don't see anyone stopping me. You want one?

ARIEL

No. Thanks.

HAL

Not thirsty?

ARIEL

No thank you, I'll pass.

HAL

Come on, take the edge off?

ARIEL

How many of those have you had?

HAL

A couple - a few - who's counting, right? Sit down, brother. Let's have us a conversation, yes?

ARIEL

Look, I didn't come here for a friendly chat, ok?

HAL
No? Why not? I did.

ARIEL
Jesus, are you drunk?

HAL
I'm not Jesus, but thank you for saying so.

ARIEL
OK. Get up. Get up. Let's go outside.

HAL
You want to take it outside? You sure about that?

ARIEL
Get some fresh air.

HAL
(beat)
I think we're getting off on the wrong foot, brother - Got off on the wrong foot, more like! Why don't we sit down and let's start over.

Ariel sits.

HAL
(Hal sits, then extends his hand)
Hi, I'm Hal. And I'm a...a, uh...well, shit, what the fuck am I? ...I'm a combat veteran. Served with your brother in Iraq. I was there the day he died -

ARIEL
Ok -

HAL
Saw him die actually -

ARIEL
Ok, stop.

HAL
(taking his hand back)
Isn't that what you came here to know, boy?

ARIEL
No -

HAL
You want to know how your brother died?

ARIEL
I know how he died, that's not why I'm here -

HAL

You know what the Army told you.

ARIEL

What the hell is that supposed to mean?

HAL

The Army likes to sanitize the details for the family. Keep it clean and simple, let you know your soldier was a hero in his final moments. I'm sure they told you, right?...what a hero he was?

ARIEL

Look, I don't know what you're trying to insinuate -

HAL

I ain't insinuating nothing. I thought you came here for information.

ARIEL

I didn't come down here to get your version of Michael's death.

HAL

Then why don't you enlighten me, brother -

ARIEL

Stop calling me brother.

HAL

Why did you call me out here?

ARIEL

What are you doing here?

HAL

Doing here? I'm assigned here! Learning Pashtu 'fore I hit the Korengal Valley. Gotta make sure I know how to say, "kiss my dick" before I send 'em off to allah.

ARIEL

That's how it is for you.

HAL

(intensely serious)

You want to spit in my face again? Call me a racist? I ain't waiting around to get my ass handed to me by some hajji. Shoot first ask questions later! Hooah! Take out a few civis 'long the way: so it goes. They probably just terrorist in training - little pre-emptive strike.

ARIEL

You're fucking psychotic!

HAL

(laughing)

Cool down, brother! You're coming in way too hot! Good lord, take a breather. I'm just joking with you - just pulling your cord. We got very clear rules of engagement. Clear as can be in that situation. I's just - you know - fucking with you a little.

ARIEL

That's not very -

HAL

You're kinda an easy target right now.

ARIEL

That's fucked up.

HAL

I know, I know. Sorry, ok. This is how we shot the shit - the LT and I - so I's just...I's just...Forget it.

(beat)

What is it you came all the way down here to tell me, Mr. Harper, that could not be said over a telephone?

ARIEL

I came down here to make sure there was no misunderstanding. I don't want you coming near my family.

HAL

Why the fuck not? What's the problem?

Ariel pulls out Michael's journal.

ARIEL

You show up, drop this in my lap without any explanation.

HAL

Yeah, so?

ARIEL

Now I find out that you've talked your way into speaking at my brother's memorial.

HAL

Talked my way? I asked your mother for permission to speak. She said yes. What's the issue?

ARIEL

The issue is what you plan to say.

HAL

Just a few words about the LT.

ARIEL

What do you want to say?

HAL

Well, now, that would spoil the surprise.

ARIEL

I don't want any surprises at my brother's memorial.

HAL

I told your mother.

ARIEL

You told her the same thing you told me when you handed me this.
You want us to know what kind of soldier he was.

HAL

Is that a crime?

ARIEL

Have you read this?

HAL

So what if I have?

ARIEL

Have you read this?

HAL

Yes. Parts of it.

ARIEL

What parts?

HAL

I don't know / what parts -

ARIEL

What parts did you read?

HAL

All the goddamn parts! I read the whole fucking thing!

ARIEL

All of it.

HAL

I carried that thing with me for almost a year - through some
dark times - yes, I read it.

ARIEL

So you knew what you were putting in my hands.

HAL

I thought it would give you some comfort.

Comfort?
 ARIEL

And profound sadness, yes.
 HAL

Are we talking about the same thing?
 ARIEL

If we're talking about Michael's war journal -
 HAL

You found this comforting?
 ARIEL

(beat)
 Oh. I see. You don't like what you see in there. A little too real for you?
 HAL

This isn't how we want to remember Michael.
 ARIEL

What's eatin' you up, brother? His description of the house-to-house action in Tikrit? Those were some fucked up / nights -
 HAL

Yes -
 ARIEL

Fucked up beyond all reason. But, hooah! Your brother knew how to capture nuance.
 HAL

Nuance? Is that what you / call it?
 ARIEL

Or - I know - was it when he described his first confirmed kill? I'll bet that's what's gotcha -
 HAL

Stop.
 ARIEL

It was terrifying the way he went on and on about that one. Pretty fucking graphic. Pages and pages. Kinda messed him up a little didn't it?
 HAL

Shut up!
 ARIEL

HAL

But he's much more succinct the second time, isn't he? And the third -

(chuckles)

That was priceless.

ARIEL

You think this is funny? He killed people.

HAL

People? Those weren't people. Those were the enemy. What do you think America paid him to do? Smile friendly and wave?

ARIEL

Not all of them.

HAL

Shit, you talking about the checkpoint outside FOB Marez? What'd you expect him to do, wait to find out they had 500 pounds of explosives, and take out ten of his men.

ARIEL

They were a family.

HAL

They were fucking stupid - driving like that. He made a good call. Like they say: better a dozen guys judging you than a half dozen luggin' you.

ARIEL

Why didn't you burn this?

HAL

I don't see what you've got your panties all up in a bunch over. That's the war journal of a 21st century soldier, what'd you expect to find in there.

ARIEL

This isn't how we want to remember him.

HAL

Well, I'm sorry that's not what you want, but that's what he did with his life and that's who your brother was.

ARIEL

A killer.

HAL

A killer? No, that's too strong a way to put it. He had a killer instinct, maybe - just like you do.

ARIEL

Not like me.

HAL

Oh, yes, just like you do, just like I do - just like every swinging dick does.

ARIEL

I don't have that.

HAL

You wouldn't have the balls to sit across from me trying to pick a fight if you didn't. Only difference between you and him is that he knew how to pull the trigger but you got a limp dick.

ARIEL

That's bullshit.

HAL

It ain't bullshit. You're the kind of guy that gets caught thinking about things so hard that you lose the balls to act on 'em. You just sit there jerking off to your own self-righteousness, while better men like your brother sacrifice their lives for what actually is right. For freedom, / for your -

ARIEL

Don't start that flag-waiving, freedom bullshit with me, I've heard that argument. It's bullshit and it's tired-

HAL

See you're walkin' around with the average, blind-man liberal media line of who we're fighting, you / don't fuckin' know-

ARIEL

Who are we fighting? Guys hiding in caves with / old Soviet machine guns?

HAL

We are fighting the most sophisticated, resilient, and determined guerilla army ever engaged on a / global level -

ARIEL

Maybe if we hadn't been fucking them over for crude for the last hundred years they wouldn't hate us so much -

HAL

That is not the point, oil is a smoke screen, they hated Zion hundreds of years before oil / got involved-

ARIEL

What the fuck are you talking about, Zion? Anybody that doesn't think that this is an oil war is a fucking idiot, and my brother did not deserve to die over there for you to pay less at the pump.

HAL

So chickenshits like you say run-

ARIEL

No chickenshits like ME say think. THINK about how we're going to leave, because we ARE leaving,/ we have to-

HAL

(jerking off)

Withdraw! Withdraw! / Withdraw!

ARIEL

What if we stayed? What if you and everybody like you is willing to stay over there for a hundred years.

HAL

We are and we will. Take a look around. People already don't give a shit. You're an anomaly, brother. The American public want's "change," you see, but what they really want is to change the fucking channel.

ARIEL

That's ridiculous -

HAL

Hell, they got their "hope." They ain't interested in the messy details -

ARIEL

Messy details?

HAL

(vehemently)

I want to make sure the LT gets remembered the way he ought to be.

ARIEL

What the fuck does that mean?

HAL

That's what I'm gonna explain to you on Monday morning.

ARIEL

His mother is going to be there. His little sister, and his wife.

HAL

What the fuck do you think I'm gonna say? That he killed people? That he wrestled with demons? He was a human being in a war zone. That's nothing to be ashamed of.

ARIEL

I never said ashamed.

HAL

But that's what you mean.

Watch your fucking step. ARIEL

On account of what? HAL

On account of he's my brother. ARIEL

Mine too. HAL

What did you say? ARIEL

Brother by blood. I bled with him. HAL

Shut your fucking mouth. ARIEL

You just can't stand the thought maybe I know our brother a little bit better than you, maybe he was more like me than you- HAL

My brother was not like you - ARIEL

You wanna know how he killed people, he just knocked them down, that's what they teach us, the gun is an extension of the hand is an extension of the mind and if you kill somebody there, you just reach out and knock them down and they don't never get up again, I saw him do it, house by house, saw him kill with his mind- HAL

Shut your fucking mouth- ARIEL

You want to hit me? Make you feel better to hit me? HAL
(begging)
C'mon, hit me, I want you to hit me, I want you to do it hit me. Pull the fucking trigger. Hit me. Hit me!

I don't ever want to see you again. Stay away from my family. ARIEL

Ariel exits.

Chicken-shit. Michael woulda hit me. HAL

*HAL sits back down to his beer,
eyes sliding over the bar.*

Blackout.

SCENE 2

MOTHER NIGHT - LATER

At the Harper's house. Sophia is dressed as if for a funeral. She wears her wedding ring. Lilith holds sits protectively over a small plastic temporary urn.

SOPHIA

It seems so long ago.

LILITH

It seems like yesterday.

SOPHIA

And, yes - like yesterday.

LILITH

Very clear. That moment will always be very clear.

SOPHIA

Yes. Me too.

LILITH

For the rest of my life, I imagine.

SOPHIA

The rest of your life. Do you think so?

LILITH

Of course I do.

SOPHIA

The details won't fade.

LILITH

How could they?

SOPHIA

No. They couldn't.

LILITH

The last time I saw my baby? Not ever.

SOPHIA

I can see him on that bus, grinning and waving.

LILITH
Looked like the happiest day of his life.

SOPHIA
He was in his element. As a soldier.

LILITH
He was always in his element.

SOPHIA
Yes, he was.
(beat)
I keep replaying that very last instant.

LILITH
He pressed his palm on the window. Remember?

SOPHIA
Of course.

SOPHIA
It was his left hand.

LILITH
And he said "Love you."

SOPHIA
He said - something - yes. Before he turned.

LILITH
"Love you." I could read his lips.

SOPHIA
Just as he turned the corner?

LILITH
Yes, the last thing. Just as he turned the corner.

SOPHIA
I think it was...he said something else.

LILITH
Something else?

SOPHIA
I'm certain.

LILITH
I don't think so.

SOPHIA
It really doesn't matter.

LILITH

Then what do you think he said?

SOPHIA

He said, "Nation of Two." That's what he said.

LILITH

"Nation of Two?" I don't think so.

SOPHIA

Yes, just before the bus turned. / The last -

LILITH

That's - what's that?

SOPHIA

It's what he said to me every time the Army sent him away.

LILITH

When did they send him away?

SOPHIA

For training. Fort Knox, Fort Irwin...

(beat)

"Nation of Two."

LILITH

He was looking at me.

SOPHIA

It was a quote from a Kurt Vonnegut book. Mother Night. From the lit class where we met. We had it engraved inside our rings. He was reminding me. Like every time - of us. We were our own little nation. Our Nation of Two. It was between us. That was the last thing.

LILITH

(beat)

Well. I suppose we remember that particular detail differently.

SOPHIA

This is the first time since then that I've been with him.

LILITH

(beat)

He's always been here, Sophia.

SOPHIA

Where? I never knew where you kept him.

LILITH

You never asked.

SOPHIA

I asked you, Lilith. Last week.

LILITH

Yes, but before that, you never seemed interested.

SOPHIA

I was - I couldn't bear to think of him in a box like this.

LILITH

I've wanted to transfer him to an urn. A real urn.

SOPHIA

Any box, Lilith.

LILITH

An urn is not a box.

SOPHIA

Michael wouldn't want to be kept like an heirloom!

LILITH

And he won't be. But I thought - for tomorrow - we might want something nicer than this plastic box.

SOPHIA

Why? What does it matter?

LILITH

It matters how we remember our last moment with Michael, Sophia. Clearly, the details matter. And since this time we have some control over those details, I'd rather remember scattering my son from something beautiful.

SOPHIA

I'm sorry. You're right. You're right. I'm just being...reactive.

LILITH

Thank you.

SOPHIA

(beat)

Tomorrow will be beautiful. I'm sure it will.

LILITH

I hope so.

SOPHIA

Our spot on Mount Tam is so beautiful. Especially at sunrise. It's an unobstructed view of the City, and you can see the Pacific. You can see forever up there. He called it the Maker's Perch.

LILITH

We need to talk about the location.

SOPHIA

I know, I know - I never got you the trail map you asked for, but I figure it's a lot easier if I just take everyone up there. It's off the beaten path.

LILITH

Sophia, Mount Tam is...

SOPHIA

I know its big.

LILITH

Not that -

SOPHIA

But I know the way by heart. Michael took me up there at least a dozen times. We won't get lost.

LILITH

It's not happening. We've reconsidered the location.

SOPHIA

(beat)

Reconsidered?

LILITH

We decided that - under the circumstances - it made more sense for Michael to be somewhere with a more permanent emotional value.

SOPHIA

Hold on, hold on. I don't understand. Emotional value? What are you saying?

LILITH

I'm saying that it doesn't make sense for us to scatter Michael on Mount Tam. None of us have any memories with him up there.

SOPHIA

I do. He and I do.

LILITH

But, none of his family do.

SOPHIA

I am his family.

LILITH

We found a spot that makes more sense.

SOPHIA

Mount Tam makes sense. It's a place he discovered.

LILITH

There's a lighthouse at Point Reyes Michael loved. He used to climb up and stare out at the ocean.

SOPHIA

I've never been to Point Reyes.

LILITH

It has meaning to Michael's family, Sophia.

SOPHIA

But it wasn't a place of meaning for *him*. Michael never mentioned a lighthouse.

LILITH

He never mentioned Mount Tam to me.

SOPHIA

There are things about Michael you didn't know.

Sam enters unnoticed.

LILITH

I knew him better than anyone, Sophia.

SOPHIA

Maybe as a child. Not as an adult!

LILITH

Sophia, I respect the relationship you had/ with my son, but -

SOPHIA

Relationship? I'm his wife.

LILITH

For a year, yes. I've been his mother for over 24. I can't choose to stop being his mother. Ever.

SOPHIA

And I chose this?

LILITH

You chose to shack-up with this Raphael.

SOPHIA

We didn't "shack-up."

LILITH

You took him into your bed. If Michael could have known you would have been so faithless -

SOPHIA

No, no, no -

LILITH

Yes! Faithless, Sophia! You were still newlyweds! It's disgusting. It makes me sick to think how quickly you forgot my son!

SOPHIA

I didn't / forget Michael!

LILITH

Were you thinking of Michael when you took this / other man?

SOPHIA

He has nothing to do with Michael!

LILITH

Did you even love him?

SOPHIA

Who?

LILITH

Michael! I don't care what you feel for this other man! Did you ever love my son?

Sam exits unnoticed.

SOPHIA

We were in love, Lilith. In Love! Until the moment he died. I still love him / so much -

LILITH

(cackle)

You still love him!

SOPHIA

Yes. I do. And that is why I am taking him to Mount Tam. Because I / know - yes. I. Know - That is where Michael wants to be -

LILITH

No. No, you are not. If you still love him you'll let him be with his family -

SOPHIA

I am / his family!

LILITH

His true family! His / blood family!

SOPHIA

He wants / Mt. Tam -

LILITH

He wants the Lighthouse!

SOPHIA

His Makers's Perch! On Mount Tam. That will be where I lay my husband!

LILITH

No.

(beat)

I'm sorry, no. We've already decided. Join us at Point Reyes, or stay away. But I'm his mother. The family is on my side.

SOPHIA

I am the next of kin, and law is on my side!

LILITH

(beat. venom.)

How dare you do this to my family!

DINA

(screams)

The sound of a chainsaw firing up.

SOPHIA

What the hell?

DINA (O.S.)

(screaming)

Moooooooooom!

Dina dashes onstage.

DINA

He's cutting it down! He's cutting it down!

The chainsaw revs. Dina grabs Lilith and pulls her towards the door.

DINA

Dad's cutting down the Oak! You have to go! Let's go, mom!

Lilith and Dina run outside. They can still be heard over the chainsaw noise.

LILITH (O.S.)

(shouting)

Sam!

Sophia moves as if to follow Lilith, then hesitates in the doorway, watching for a moment.

*She then turns and makes her way
back into the room, pacing for
a moment, clearly frustrated.*

DINA (O.S.)
Dad! You can't! Stop it! / Stop it!

LILITH
Sam, turn it off!

*The chainsaw gives a powerful
rev and then idles. Sophia
stops pacing, and notices
Michael's urn sitting where
Lilith left it. She hesitates
a moment, listening to Lilith
argue with Sam outside.*

LILITH (O.S.)
Where are you going with that!

SAM (O.S.)
My goggles!

LILITH (O.S.)
You can't bring that thing inside!

*Sophia grabs the urn and exits
out a side door.*

SAM (O.S.)
Where are my goggles?

THE ROOTS OF THE OAK - CONTINUOUS

*Sam enters carrying the chainsaw.
Lilith follows.*

LILITH
Sam, please!

SAM
(turning to Lilith)
Check the garage, will you?

LILITH
Turn it off.

SAM

Move aside.

LILITH

You're stinking up the entire house!

SAM

Then get out of my way so I can find my goggles.

LILITH

Have you completely lost your mind?

SAM (O.S.)

Absolutely! Abso-fucking-lutely Thank you very much, Nurse Ratchett!

(beat)

Ah!

*Sam finds his goggles. Chainsaw
comes off earlier--can't remember
where.*

LILITH

Dina loves that Oak!

SAM

This has nothing to do with Dina.

LILITH

Of course it does. Sam, wait!

SAM

(turning on her)

I can't wait, Lilith! This is an architectural matter. I'm saving our foundation.

LILITH

It's our memories, Sam!

SAM

Oh, Jesus! This is not an episode of Guiding Light, Lilith. Don't be so dramatic. It's an overgrown tree.

LILITH

I'm being dramatic, Sam? Dina's screaming in the branches and you're parading around the house with a chainsaw.

SAM

Get out of my way!

LILITH

Dina broke her wrist jumping out of the branches with Michael.

SAM

This is not about Michael. This is a matter of architecture!
This / is cause and effect!

LILITH

You can't blueprint Sophia back into this family.

SAM

I don't / need you telling me what to do -

LILITH

Yes! You do! Stop trying to cut down our memories! Stop trying
to take away -

(she notices that the urn
is gone.)

Oh, no. No, no. No no no.

*Sam turns off the chainsaw,
setting it down.*

SAM

What? What's wrong?

LILITH

She took his ashes.

SAM

Sophia?

LILITH

I can't hold this family together by myself. With everyone cutting
and tearing pieces away -??

*Lilith picks up the chainsaw and
hands it back to Sam.*

LILITH

You might as well finish the job.

SAM

She still loves him, Lilith.

LILITH

Take the saw.

SAM

She took those ashes because she still loves him. And you can't --

LILITH

You drove her out of this house with your / ludicrous obsession.
Now take this -

SAM

I drove her? I drove her? No, I will not take it! I will not take the blame for this! You drove her out!

LILITH

No -

SAM

Has it ever occurred to you that this thing with the boy is how Sophia is working through her grief?

LILITH

By screwing it away?

SAM

We can't know what it's like! You can't control every last detail of Michael's death. You can't tell us how to grieve!

LILITH

There's grieving and then there's making excuses for ridiculous and overindulgent behavior??

SAM

And which are you doing, Lilith?

LILITH

I am being responsible, I am holding this family together -

SAM

Well, just stop! Just let go to pieces if that's what's happening!??

LILITH

I can't let it go!??

SAM

Your son is dead, goddamnit! Stop trying to micro-manage the pain.

LILITH

I don't have a choice!

SAM

Of course you do!

LILITH

And let you tear down the Oak? And let Sophia steal Michael's ashes?

SAM

Yes, / if that's what it takes!

LILITH

No, I can't let this / destructive behavior -

SAM

Maybe if you stopped obsessing about everyone else's behavior,
and took a good look at / yourself - ??

LILITH

I don't need to wallow in / self indulgence.

SAM

What do you need, Lilith?

LILITH

I don't / need -

SAM

What *do* you need?

LILITH

I need my family back. I need my husband.

SAM

(beat)
Oh, god, honey. I'm right here. I'm right here.

LILITH

I don't know who you are anymore.

SAM

I'm the same.

LILITH

I don't understand why you continue to pour all your time building
a guest house that no one will ever sleep in. Sophia's not coming
back, Sam.

SAM

I know that.

LILITH

Then why are you still building a house for her?

SAM

It's not for her. It's for me.

LILITH

What do you mean? The basement's not enough.

SAM

It's not a guest house anymore. No one will sleep there.

LILITH

Then what is it.

SAM

It's my grief.

LILITH

Are you building a sculpture in our back yard?

SAM

No.

LILITH

Why, Sam? ??

SAM

I don't think you could understand.

LILITH

I want to.

(beat)

That is what I need. I can't understand what you're doing.??

SAM

(beat)

The only way I can think to explain it is like I'm lost in the lines. That's the grief.

LILITH

A structure?

SAM

Yes, and I can't find the way out. But I know that if I can figure out how the grief is constructed - if I can understand the lines, the angles - then maybe I can find the edges. And if I can find the edges then maybe I can find a doorway out. Those lines are made up of unfinished business. Projects we never finished, things I never said: I love you son, I miss you son, I'm so proud of you, I'm so sorry I didn't keep you safe. This building is the outline of an entire life, un-lived. Where we built the treehouse, where we completed the bins of blueprints we drafted together. Where his home for Sophia was full of life and grandchildren and memories we'll never have in our lines. So many lines leading nowhere. Into nothing. Drafted incomplete.

(beat)

If I can complete just one line on our draft, Lilith, then perhaps I can begin to understand where this grief ends.

I can either wake up every morning looking at that Oak, hoping that a day may come when I can just let it go - it could be a month, or a year a decade or the rest of my life slipping by while I wait in the dark. Or I can walk out there right now and take the Oak down. Like Michael wanted. I can complete that. Even if it doesn't make any sense anymore, I have that choice left. I can complete that.

Lilith extends the chainsaw to Sam. After a beat, he takes it. Blackout.

SCENE 3

THE LEVERS AND PULLEYS - BEFORE THE DAWN

*SOPHIA sits on Mount Tam with
Michael's urn. A flashlight
provides her only light. Raphael
approaches behind her, unseen
or heard.*

SOPHIA

"It's all I have to bring today - This, and my heart beside -
This, and my heart, and all the fields - And all the meadows wide
- Be sure you count - should I forget Some one the sum could tell

She opens the urn.

SOPHIA

- This, and my heart, and all the Bees Which in the Clover dwell."

RAPHAEL

Sophia.

SOPHIA

Oh my god! Oh my god!

RAPHAEL

It's ok! It's ok!

SOPHIA

/ What - !

RAPHAEL

It's just me.

SOPHIA

Oh my god.

RAPHAEL

Calm down. It's ok.

SOPHIA

You scared me!

RAPHAEL

Sorry.

SOPHIA

You scared the hell out of me!

RAPHAEL

Sorry about that.

SOPHIA

You can't be here.

RAPHAEL

You shouldn't be here either.

SOPHIA

I can't believe this. What are you doing here?

*Raphael looks out over the edge
of the mountain.*

RAPHAEL

Did you know there's a Maker's Perch in World of Warcraft? It's in the Sholazar Basin.

SOPHIA

(baffled)

What? No -

RAPHAEL

The Titans who created the world used to hang out there and look over all of their creation. And the Perch guards a waygate to another dimension. A pretty accurate description of this location, don't you think? Anyways, that's probably the reason the name stuck when you took me up here.

(beat)

Remember that? The fog rolling in over the City? We were talking about coincidence. How there's no such thing? It's just a word we use when we can't see the levers and pullies. Remember? An amazing afternoon for us. For me, anyways. Pretty amazing.

(beat)

I didn't realize that the Maker's Perch was, um...That you took Michael up here too.

SOPHIA

He took me.

RAPHAEL

Oh. Ok. What a coincidence.

SOPHIA

I'm sorry.

RAPHAEL

Look, don't worry about it. I'm glad you took me up here. Otherwise I would have had no idea where to find you.

SOPHIA

Why are you looking for me?

RAPHAEL

Everyone's looking for you Sophia. The Harpers called me. They called me.

SOPHIA

They did?

RAPHAEL

Yeah. That's how crazy this is.

SOPHIA

How did they get -

RAPHAEL

My number's on Facebook. It was fucking weird getting middle-of-the-night phone call from Mrs. Harper.

SOPHIA

What did she say?

RAPHAEL

What do you think? She wanted to know if I'd seen you. She sounded really desperate. It was - ugh - it was really awkward. Crying about ashes and a lighthouse and Maker's Perch. That was a surprise.

SOPHIA

What did you tell her?

RAPHAEL

Nothing. That I hadn't seen you since the 4th. That I had no idea where you were.

SOPHIA

Good.

RAPHAEL

No. Not good. This is really stupid, Sophia. What are you doing?

SOPHIA

What do you think I'm doing?

RAPHAEL

I think that you're being reactive and you're going to spread his ashes up here.

RAPHAEL

You have to take them back to the family, Sophia.

SOPHIA

I can't.

RAPHAEL

It's the only right thing to do.

SOPHIA

No it's not. It isn't right.

RAPHAEL

And this is?

SOPHIA

Yes.

RAPHAEL

That doesn't make sense.

SOPHIA

This is the place Michael brought me to have the conversation about what would happen if he didn't make it home. I didn't want to talk about it, but he begged me to listen. He looked so serious. As he talked, a fog started rolling in. Some of it was practical - he showed me his will, he told me he wanted to be cremated, he had some ideas about what to do with the insurance money. I didn't want to hear it. And then he told me that if he died in Iraq, he didn't want me wearing black for the rest of my life. You're young and beautiful. Be young and beautiful. I don't want to be the thing that keeps you from love. That's never going to happen! It can't; I won't. You will, and that's ok. By the end of the conversation, the fog had completely blanketed the City, like a quilt of cold comfort. He told me everything was going to be ok. And, just then, it was. Just like it was when I brought you up here. I didn't know why I was bringing you up here other than I had a feeling that I needed to take you to Maker's Perch. And then the fog rolled in.

RAPHAEL

A coincidence.

SOPHIA

Coincidence is just a word we use when we can't see the levers and pullies.

RAPHAEL

What are the levers and the pullies?

SOPHIA

Michael was guiding me.

RAPHAEL

What, was he whispering in your ear?

SOPHIA

It's a knowing. When you're that close to someone, you just know.

RAPHAEL

Thank God for Facebook.

SOPHIA

What?

RAPHAEL

We're talking about coincidences, right? What a coincidence that you spilled your coffee on me at Starbuck's.

(MORE)

RAPHAEL (CONT'D)

What a coincidence that I fell in love with you. What a coincidence that his sister picked up the phone and that I was so angry with you that I went on to Facebook, changed my status to Single and posted my phone number there. What about the thousand little coincidences that led me here tonight? What is the universe trying to say? What is the knowing?

(beat)

His family is waiting. It's the right thing to do.

SOPHIA

Everyone thinks they know what's right.

RAPHAEL

I think a memorial is supposed to be for letting go of things we love too much for our own good. People that can't love us back anymore. Not for holding on tighter, not for controlling - It's for letting go so that we can start to find love and life again. Not for driving it away.

(a pause)

I love you Sophia.

SOPHIA

Please leave me alone.

RAPHAEL

(beat)

Good bye.

He starts to walk away.

SOPHIA

Rapha.

RAPHAEL

(hope)

Yes?

SOPHIA

Don't tell them I'm here.

Defeated, he exits.

Sophia opens the urn.

SOPHIA

"It's all I have to bring today - This, and my heart beside - This, and my heart, and all the fields - And all the meadows wide - Be sure you count - should I forget Some one the sum could tell"

She scoops out a handful of ashes and scatters them.

SOPHIA

"- This, and my heart, and all the Bees Which in the Clover dwell."

Blackout.

SCENE 4

SCATTERED - SUNRISE

*Just before dawn, beneath the
lighthouse at Point Reyes, Sam,
Lilith, Ariel, and Dina wait.
It is not quite light. Over
the next few minutes, the sun
rises.*

Dad.	DINA	Mom.	ARIEL
Yes?	SAM	Yes?	LILITH
Is that an oil rig?	DINA	She's not coming.	ARIEL
What are you looking at?	SAM	There's still time.	LILITH
Right there. The lights.	DINA		
It can't be. They can't drill off the coast.	SAM	Four minutes, Mom.	ARIEL
Is it an island?	DINA	We're waiting.	LILITH
A tanker probably.	SAM	It would take a miracle.	ARIEL
		Your mother believes in miracles.	SAM
		And Michael was the miracle child.	ARIEL

DINA
An oil tanker?

LILITH
We're waiting for Sophia.
She might still decide to
come.

ARIEL
Michael would have
got a kick out of
that.

DINA
What?

ARIEL
Get his ashes all
spread out in a sea
lane trafficked by
tankers and end's up
smeared on the side
of some ship sailing
back to Iraq.

DINA
Shh! That's not funny.

ARIEL
He would have thought
it was hilarious.

DINA
Well, he's not here.

ARIEL
We have three minutes.

DINA
Mom! Why are we waiting out here? No one is coming.

SAM
I'm not looking forward to climbing up those stairs.

DINA
This is weird. We should have gone with Sophia. And it's cold
out here.

SAM
It would have been colder on Mt. Tam.

LILITH
Didn't you have something you wanted to read?

DINA
What's the point? It was for Michael.

SAM
Read it anyways, sweetheart. I'd love to hear it.

DINA
I didn't bring it.

LILITH
Dina, we had you in the itinerary.

ARIEL
You were supposed to start the memorial.

DINA
I'm sorry. I didn't think it was happening anymore.

LILITH
Of course it's happening.

DINA
There's no ashes.

LILITH
There's still time.

ARIEL
Two minutes.

DINA
She's not coming! Get over it.

LILITH
Read it anyway. For the family. It's important.

DINA
Are you deaf? I didn't bring it.

SAM
What did it say?

DINA
I don't know. It was about heroes.

ARIEL
Heroes? I thought it was about the war.

DINA
War heroes. Michael.

LILITH
Tell us what you remember.

DINA
I didn't memorize it. It was a paper.

LILITH

It doesn't have to be perfect.

DINA

Why do I have to?

SAM

Sweetie, you don't have to say anything. But it would mean a lot to your mom and me...to hear you.

ARIEL

Do we have to pretend Michael was a hero?

DINA

We're not pretending.

ARIEL

If we're going to have this memorial, let's at least be honest with the memory.

LILITH

There's nothing dishonest about calling Michael a hero. Go ahead, Dina.

DINA

I didn't / bring it.

ARIEL

I'm so sick of this automatic "hero" status that every average Joe gets just for signing up for the Army. What does that even mean, anyway: "Hero."

DINA

A person, typically a man, who is admired or idealized for courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities.

ARIEL

Is that a quote from the dictionary?

DINA

Maybe.

SAM

Just let Dina recite her paper.

ARIEL

He went to Iraq, had some crazy experiences as a soldier and then he was blown up by an IED. It's not heroic. It's fucking ugly.

LILITH

We don't remember it that way.

ARIEL

Why not? We're Michael's inner circle. Let's not turn him into an icon. Michael was a human being who happened to be a soldier. Do you know what that really means?

SAM

It means he's a hero.

ARIEL

How was he?

DINA

It's time.

SAM

To me. He is.

ARIEL

Hero is a myth that governments use to entice young men into war, and then to sugarcoat the messy reality when people start dying.

SAM

Oh, / come on.

DINA

Dad.

SAM

The hero is the western Martyr.

DINA

You guys, it's time!

*They look out over the ocean. A
silence.*

LILITH

(a long pause)

One year.

*Enter Sgt. Taylor, unseen. He
is dressed sharp and soldierly
in his Class A's.*

DINA

(a long pause)

What do we do?

ARIEL

Jesus, Michael, why did you have to go?

HAL

I'm sorry. Excuse me.

ARIEL

What? Oh, no. Where did you come from?

HAL

I came from down those stairs. You see that sign? Kind of ironic what they call it. Stairway to Heaven it says.

ARIEL

You can't be here.

HAL

But they go down.

ARIEL

Well, why don't you turn around and climb back up!

HAL

I brought a flag. For him. Shouldn't be a memorial for a soldier, ain't got a flag.

ARIEL

This guy is crazy, and he's leaving.

LILITH

I'm sorry Sergeant.

HAL

Excuse me, ma'am. I thought I was invited.

ARIEL

Well, now you're uninvited. So go.

HAL

That's three times you told me go, now you either make me or you let me speak my peace.

Ariel pulls the Sergeant aside.

ARIEL

We are not having this conversation again. Not here.

HAL

Sir, with your permission I need to speak here. I've come all this way. I owe it to my brother -

ARIEL

You're not his brother -

HAL

I owe it to Michael, and to your family.

(for everyone)

Please, I need to speak here!

LILITH

What did you want to say?

HAL

I went into too many houses.

SAM

Too many houses?

HAL

Sir, I was in combat for six years. Six years, Ma'am. You start to see it comin, around every corner. You can only be lucky and smart and quick and brave for so long, before - before -

(beat)

The day Michael died we were moving along Route Tampa after a zero-dark-thrity movement-to-contact when he came over the radio to tell us that he'd seen some guy with an AK jump in a vehicle and speed off. He wanted to chase him down. Which we did, but it led us into a bad neighborhood which had been the site of an ambush back in 04. The LT hadn't been around then, but I had. We lost 12 men in that ambush, and it was like I was there again. No one had bothered to patch up the bullet holes. It was like the smoke had cleared and I was right back in the fight - the shit-storm of RPGs raining down around us and watching my old truck commander spill his guts out inside my Stryker.

I was the truck commander that morning with your son. I made up some lie that my Stryker was having mechanical problems. I told him we needed to head back to base unless he wanted my vehicle broke down - stranded outside the wire. When we got back to the motor pool, and your brother found out there weren't nothing wrong with my truck, he was pissed cause we let that insurgent go, and he demanded to know what was my issue. I couldn't say nothin'. I couldn't tell him I was seeing ghosts. We got a call later that afternoon for a seek-and-destroy through that same neighborhood, and then to FOB Freedom to escort some brass to FOB Marez for a dog and pony show. I was with First Squad in the front vehicle which was a humvee, not a Stryker. That humvee had a soft, soft belly, and it just became clear. I couldn't get in that vehicle. I took your brother aside an I told him how it would sit real well with the boys if he rode the front car instead of me, if he rode the soft-belly. There's plenty of tactical reasons a Lieu doesn't ride in front. But I teased him, and I brow-beat him, and I jabbed at him. I tried everything I could to keep out of that vehicle. He pulled me aside and ordered me to man up:

"You are the Infantry! You are your country's strength in war! You are the heart of the fight! You are the best trained soldier in the world! You fight through the foe to the objective! You do not yield to weakness, you do not yield to hunger, you DO NOT YIELD TO COWARDICE - "

I was thinking of Issa's face, of my little girl. When you're in combat for six years, you stop sleepin. Start countin. You can only be so lucky... She's only seven. And finally, I just begged him.

(beat)

And he went. He rode the soft-belly for me. Rode it right over copper wire - rode right into heaven.

"I yield not to weakness! I yield not to hunger! I yield not to cowardice, to fatigue, to superior odds! For I am mentally tough, physically strong, and morally straight! I forsake not my country, my mission, my comrades, my sacred duty!"

(beat, approaching Ariel)

I got him killed. I'm sorry.

ARIEL

(quietly)

Stop.

HAL

I gave him up. I'm so sorry.

DINA

/Air?

HAL

I got my brother killed/, I killed my brother.

ARIEL

Shut up!

ARIEL punches Sgt. Taylor hard across the face. He staggers back.

LILITH

Ariel!

DINA

Mom!

Sgt. Taylor puts a hand out to stop Lilith. He turns back to Ariel.

HAL

I'm sorry.

(stands straight, to Ariel)

I went into too many / houses.

ARIEL strikes him again.

ARIEL

Shut up!

And again. Hal falls to the ground. Sam holds Lilith.

LILITH

No, no, no!

Ariel delivers one last punch to Hal on the ground. Sam pulls him off.

SAM

That's enough!

HAL

Hoo-ah, brother.

SAM

That's enough.

The Sergeant climbs to his feet, wiping blood from his mouth.

HAL

Thank you. Thank you, brother.

ARIEL

I don't -

HAL

Thank you.

He pulls the envelope from his pocket and offers it to Ariel.

HAL

I needed you to know what kind of man our brother was.

Ariel doesn't move. Dina takes the envelope, and opens it. The Sergeant steps back and stands at attention while Dina pulls a letter from the envelop. She reads.

DINA

Hi Mom, Dad, Ari, Dina, and my beautiful Sophia: If you're reading this letter, then you've heard the bad news. I am so sorry to put you all through this. But I want you all to know that I am safe now. I'm with God, and I'm making sure he's watching over all of you.

(MORE)

DINA (CONT'D)

While I've got your attention, I wanted to tell you all about some special memories I'll be taking with me. Mom, I'll never forget how you used to make all of my friends laugh when they came over with your crazy jokes and do you remember how when I was little and couldn't sleep, you'd make me carob milk and let me drink it out of a straw? Little Dina, remember all those late nights when you'd come into my room and we'd just talk and talk about everything in the universe. Just hanging out with my little sister. That I will always remember. Ari, brother, I have always looked up to you. I remember one time in grade school during show-and-tell we had to tell everyone who our role model was. The only person I could think of was you. Dad, I will never forget our nights in the basement, drawing and drafting, and all those little gems of wisdom you'd drop into the conversation so casually. I want you to know that you taught me so much about being a man. Sophia, you are the love of my life. I hope to God that you never have to read these words, but if you do I want you to know that I will always love you, no matter what. But I know that life goes on. So should yours. I thank God every day I'm here for blessing me with such an amazing family. You are my world. I hope I have made you all proud. I love you with all my heart and please don't be sad and know that I've made it to Heaven first. I'll be waiting for you there. Love, Second Lieutenant Michael David Harper.

Blackout.

SCENE 5

THE CYCLE

*Somewhere in America Lt. Stevens
and Lt. Butler arrive in their
car.*

STEVENS

We're here.

BUTLER

Sir, this is thirty fifty eight.

STEVENS

Lt. Butler.

BUTLER

Sir?

STEVENS

Should we pull up directly in front of Gutierrez' house?

BUTLER

(beat)

No, Sir.

*Butler starts to open the door
and climb out. Stevens stays
put.*

STEVENS

You ever done one of these before?

BUTLER

No, Sir.

STEVENS

No. This is your first.

BUTLER

Yes, Sir.

STEVENS

Ok. Have you read the guide?

BUTLER

I have, Sir. That is / why I'm concerned -

STEVENS

The guide's crap.

BUTLER

Sir. The time.

STEVENS

The guide is crap. Get in.

*Butler hesitates, then climbs
back in to the car.*

BUTLER

With all due respect, Sir, if we're going to get in under the time frame, we've got two minutes.

STEVENS

We have time. I want you to tell me what's going to happen when we knock on that door.

BUTLER

We will inform the next of kin.

STEVENS

How?

BUTLER

We'll deliver the news of Pvt. Gutierrez' death, console the family, and procure / signatures on -

STEVENS

You're not going to have time to think.

BUTLER

Sir.

STEVENS

Whatever they do, however they react - if they fall to the ground, if they try to attack you - just remember to treat them like they're your family.

BUTLER

I will.

STEVENS

What we're doing is, um....it's, um...

Beat as he searches for word.

BUTLER

Yes, sir.

Butler watches Stevens for a cue to get up, clearly ready to move. They get out of the car, place hats on heads, and walk up the street. Butler looks for house numbers as they go.

STEVENS

Do you believe in god, Butler?

BUTLER

Yes, sir, I do.

STEVENS

That's good. That's good. What do you think happens when we die?

BUTLER

I guess that depends, Sir.

STEVENS

On what?

BUTLER

On the kind of life we lived.

STEVENS

Heaven or Hell?

BUTLER
 Yes, Sir. I believe that.

STEVENS
 Really?

BUTLER
 Yes, Sir.

STEVENS
 I think, uh...I think these soldiers are always with us. No matter what happens, no matter where we go, these...this guy's always going to be with you, one way or another.

BUTLER
 He's a Soldier, Sir. God has a special place for him.

STEVENS
 Well, yes, but not that...I mean they haunt you.

BUTLER
 (impatient)
 Of course.

Stevens stops.

STEVENS
 Hold on. I want you to take that in.

BUTLER
 Sir, his family's waiting.

STEVENS
 Waiting for what, Butler? They don't know. Right now they're happy in there. What do you think we're about to do? We're like the Angel's of Death. We're going to knock on that door and take their son away from them. Forever. When we knock on that door we're going to cut a gash through the middle of they're lives. Everything before we show up on one side and everything after on the other.

(beat)
 So we can afford to give them a few more seconds living with their son, can't we?

BUTLER
 Yes, Sir.

STEVENS
 Whether there is a Heaven or not, Private Gutierrez is going to be with you, and your family, and your thoughts, for the rest of your life.

BUTLER
 Understood, Sir.

(MORE)

BUTLER (CONT'D)

(beat)
After you.

*They walk a short ways, and
finding the house number, they
pause for a second.*

BUTLER

Just follow me up the path, Sir.

They take a few steps, then stop.

BUTLER

Sounds like they're home. That's good, Sir.

STEVENS

I know.
(beat)
Thank you.

*Stevens steps up to the door.
Pauses. Butler straightens his
stance. He knocks. Black out.
End of show.*