

TE'A Presents

Cadence: Home

Conceived and Produced by Radha Kramer, Artistic Director

Written by: August Dannehl, Amanda Marikar, Chuk Obasi, Joseph Reese, and Nalini Sharma

Directed by Michael Goldfried and Stefano Brancato

Original Cast

Donovan.....	Joseph Reese
Matty.....	August Dannehl
Nate.....	Chuk Obasi
Lisette.....	Nalini Sharma
Ethan.....	Chuk Obasi
Mo.....	Nalini Sharma
Austin.....	Jake Robards
Angela/ Noor.....	Amanda Marikar

Memorial Saturday

Chairs are set up to suggest a gathering. Donovan stands before the seats, dressed formal or semi-formal from the waist up. The rest of the actors (except for actor playing Nate) make a procession to the seats. They all sit, with Matty seated to the far left, save one seat, which remains empty.

Donovan: Six days ago, me and my friends met up for the first time in two years... without Scotty... I don't know what Scotty was to each of you individually, but the four of us were like brothers. Even as kids... when we felt invincible, like super heroes. We were tight, life was good, and we figured that's what it would be forever.

What does that even mean anyway, "life was good?" How should we define our lives now? ... You know, as much as those super hero fantasies felt real, as much as every moment with Scotty felt like there's something out there to look forward to that's larger than life... now its the opposite. Now there's a permanent missing - something none of us can quite put a finger on - or maybe each one of us has a finger on something that the person next to us doesn't agree with.

And that's the hardest thing for me to figure out. I've been trying to get this ever since I came home and realized that Scotty wasn't gonna come home too... I mean, think about it - on the surface we might simply be the contours of what makes us living... skin, bones, organs, faces... but under our contours we are individuals constantly trying to replace what's missing in our lives, or at least preserve whatever we have left ... but what are we protecting, really?

Lights go out.

Welcome Home

Lights come up. Stage has become a semi-crowded bar. All Actors enter scene as patrons/ a bartender (Mo). Nate and Matty are at the bar counter.

Matty: (rapping) *Yo, you can't go wrong with the Ninja Turtles here
I got the front, my boy Nate's got the rear
Throw me a beer with a stare, like 'Oh Yeah!'
Yeah, we're at the bar and I don't care...*

Nate: (overlaps part of Matty's rap) I just think it's weird. Ya know? We should've chosen a different spot. Don't you think so? (trying to get Matty's attention) Bro... Yo...

Matty: (rapping)...*Choose a different spot, Choose a different spot
stay where you stand, then you might get shot!*

Nate: Matty!

Matty: Yo!

Nate: You listening?

Matty: Yeah. Nah man, this is where we should be. Scotty would want us to be here, this is the spot.

Nate: Yeah, where the *four* of us were gonna have a reunion.

Matty: ... which is exactly why we should be here... even if it's just three of us.

Nate: Bro you're missing the point.

Matty: Nooo you, sir, are being Sentimental Sally right now.

Nate: Nooo I'm saying that without Scotty-

Matty: Nate! If you're not gonna come to the Memorial next Saturday at least suck it up tonight. We're not here to cry about who *isn't* here, this is a celebration. Donovan is back!

Nate: I don't know-

Matty: (rapping) *Back like the Prodigal Son
Back like Winter to the tropical sun,
Yo, ladies... I'm 22 and I'm single...*

passin' the mic to Nate...

Nate: You're not even rhyming anymore!

Matty: Loosen up my man! Is this how you're gonna act when Donovan gets here?

Nate: ... Yo, how is it that he's been home for three weeks and I'm just hearing about it?

Matty: You're still mad at him, aren't you?

Nate: I'm not mad at D.

Matty: Yeah, you are. You've been mad at him all year! You need to let all that shit go bro... at least *one* of them made it back.

Nate: I just told you I'm not mad at him. It is what it is.

Matty: It is what it is bro (*they dap*) now your head's right.

(Pause)

But you know, whenever you say "it is what it is" that usually means you're mad.

Nate: Shut up.

Matty: No you shut up.

Nate: You shut up.

Matty: You.

Donovan enters the bar

Nate: And your raps are whack.

Matty: So battle me then!

Nate: Gimme a beat then!

Donovan: Fellahs!

Nate & Matty: Ayoooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!

Donovan: (joining the call) Ayoooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!

Matty: My man D-Fish!!! What is up man??

Donovan: What's up fellahs???

Matty: (to everyone in bar) Yo-Yo- Ladies n gents, our boy is HOME, this man is an *Air Force Hero*, salute this man! That's right, this is a big deal! Hey, c'mon, people!

Nate: Matty, let the people be.

Matty: Okay, okay whatever. What are you drinking, man?

Donovan: What're yall drinking?

Matty: (to bartender) Three shots of Jack! And three Amstels! (takes out his wallet and looks in it) You got any cash Nate?

Donovan: I can cover this-

Matty: NO! (to bartender) Lemme open a tab love.

Nate and Donovan have a brief awkward moment as Matty is opening the tab

Donovan: What's the word, Nate?

Nate: It is what it is... .. It's been a hot minute.

Donovan: I know.

Nate: ... You look good.

Matty: (returning) Forreal, them boys worked you. You look like you can be a wrestler or Will Smith or something.

Donovan: What?

Matty: Hottaaay... (Bartender lines up shots) Alright, here we go. This first one's to Donovan.

Nate: AND Scotty!

Donovan: Oh, for sure! We gotta toast this! (raises his glass) We're six days from the anniversary. But the celebration starts tonight. This one's to Scotty.

Matty: To Scotty.

Nate: To Scotty. (*The Boys Drink*)

Matty: Another round! (*gestures to the Bartender to prepare another round*) No dickin around tonight, fellahs. Let's man up!

Nate: You're tellin *me* to man up, lightweight? Your moms can out-drink you.

Donovan: Oh snap!

Matty: (to Donovan) Well she could, but he's just hating because I'm trying to stay in shape.

Donovan: Stay in shape for what?

Matty: I don't know... can't a man just wanna get jacked?

Nate: Bullshit...

Matty: Maybe I'm inspired.

Nate: Maybe you're unemployed.

Donovan: Oooooo!

Matty: That's cool, that's cool.

Donovan: So come out with it, what are you getting into these days?

Matty: You know, I *could* be a lawyer or a doctor right now (*Nate laughs*). Or a boring ass *history professor* like Nate here... (*Donovan looks to Nate, amused*)

Nate: (*dryly*) I'm not a history professor...

Matty: ... that's not for me. I need more adventure. I mean, I think about what you were doing everyday and... I don't know...

Donovan: Nah that's tight, Matty. Go for what you want. I'm proud of you.

Matty: Really? Cuz *I'm* proud of *you*. (*he's drunk now*) I love you, man.

Nate: Here we go...

Bartender lines up shots. Matty passes them out.

Donovan: Damn, we're going hard tonight!

Matty: Yes sir! Another toast to GI fucking Joe Fishburne. The man's been to hell and back!

Nate: To us! The brothers...

Donovan: To the Ninja Turtles! *(they all laugh as they down shots. Matty gestures for another round)*

Here we see the boys drinking as the action shifts somewhere else...meanwhile the boys are getting drunk.

Actions moves back to the boys.....

Matty: Dude I gotta say this again, you really look great. You're like, healthy. Very together. Not a scratch. You were always the lucky one. *(to Nate)* Right, professor?

Nate: *(mocking Matty's voice)* "Dude I wanna take Donovan to bed tonight!" *(to Matty)* At least buy him a few more rounds first...

Matty: Hey, hey shut up! I'll tell you this though, I do wanna know something.

Donovan: Shoot.

Matty: What was it like? Really. I mean, no one-word bullshit. Like, I wanna see Iraq through your eyes bro.

Donovan: Let's just say I'm happy to be here.

Matty: That all you got for me?

Nate: Too soon Matty.

Matty: What are you talkin' about?

Donovan: Nah it's cool. I just... I don't know where to start.

Nate: He's not ready to talk.

Donovan: Hey, I can talk about whatever. It's not like I got my tongue cut out.

Matty: That's right! This is D - Fish we're talkin' about, stop acting so scared, Nate.

Nate: Why don't you shut up, Matty?

Matty: What, you wanna stand around all quiet? With all the shit you've been saying this past year, now you wanna be *quiet*?

Nate: I thought you said to let it go.

Donovan: Let what go?

Matty: Yeah but now you're acting weird.

Nate: ... Because I said its too soon to talk about-

Matty: D just came home, what do you suggest we talk about?

Nate: Anything else!... Why the fuck are we even here?

Donovan: Easy, fellahs. We can talk about whatever, so what are yall talking about? Nate, let *what* go?

Nate: (*takes a moment*) Ok fuck it. Donovan - I'm not a big fan of what you represent. That what you want me to say, Matty? Yeah, I just - I can't wrap my head around shit lately you know? I don't wanna philosophize or anything, but what the fuck is it all about? This war... I mean - who are you *protecting*?

Donovan: You serious?

Nate: Yeah man who are you protecting? Is that what militaries do? Protect? Serve? Or do they really just terrorize each other and innocent people get caught in the middle...

Donovan: Terrorize? What are you talking about...

Nate: it's all about death, man. The US... Iraq...Afghanistan... they're doing the same thing.

Matty: (sarcastically) So let's just not have a military then!

Nate: I'm not against the military. But why did yall join..? Why did *you* join? Did you even know what you were getting into?

Donovan: ... I don't regret any of it.

Nate: You didn't answer my question...

Donovan: Where's all this coming from Nate? You think this is all for nothing?

Nate: Well what is it for, Donovan? I mean, is it worth what we lose every day?

Donovan: ...

Nate: Shit, man. Do you have an answer for *anything*?

Donovan: ...I made an oath to serve my country.

Nate: No you bought into a fucked up system. You lost your sense of perspective. And you don't realize the damage your decisions have caused.

Matty: See, now that's just -

Donovan: Wait hold on, what do you know about my decisions? What do you know about "the system?"

Nate: Enough. (*under his breath*) I Know you're all ... fuckin...

Donovan: (*loudly, startling*) Speak up sir!!! Do you have something else to get out??

Bouncer approaches the boys.

Bouncer: Why don't you guys take this outside.

Matty: We're good right here, thanks.

Bouncer: That wasn't a request.

Matty: What are you, new?

Bouncer: (*menacing*) Excuse me?

Matty: (*to Nate and Donovan*) He's new. (*To bouncer, who has grabbed Matty's arm*) Hi, I'm Matt Cullen. My dad's your boss.

The Bouncer looks over to Bartender. She shoots a look of confirmation and the Bouncer releases Matty and retreats.

Matty: (*suddenly super assertive*) Donovan's a freakin' HERO! We owe our *life* to him! End of story... plus we've had a round of Jack sitting here waaay too long. Come on, boys.

(Nate and Donovan stare at each other.)

Why did you guys start up on this anyway? Huh? ... anyway, there's a lot of ladies up in this biizzznatch ... ladies, gentlemen hellooooo! ... By the way Donovan, are you single? Cuz uh... umm, hey look, my crotch is on FIRE!!!... seriously, my crotch, y'all... *(he gets nothing)*

(tense pause)

Nate: I gotta piss. *(he exits)*

Matty: Bro, you're going the wrong way, that's the exit... *(to Donovan)* okay, we have an extra shot bro.

Donovan looks to Matty for an explanation

Matty: He's been a little out of it, but you know it's all love. Between you coming home, and Scotty's one-year anniversary coming up... plus I think he's been backed up for like seven months, but don't sweat it...

Hey man, lighten up. It's cool. You're a hero, everybody knows it. Bottoms up?

(Matty hands Donovan a shot, then takes his own).

Donovan: Cheers.

(They drink. Donovan takes Nate's shot and drinks it too)

Matty: Haha... My man D-Fish...

Matty and the rest exit, leaving Donovan alone in the bar.

Donovan: I come home this hero, but they don't know what I did or what I didn't do. What I'm proud of. They don't know what I hid. They don't know where I've been ... I don't know where I am... I mean, is this home?

Lights go out.

Nate

Set change. The stage is now a grave site. Three actors (Donovan, Matty, Lisette) enter, wearing black tee shirts. They form a row downstage, then take a knee, facing upstage. Each actor represents a tombstone, and will have an inscription printed on their backs. The actor in the middle represents Scott's tombstone. Nate enters, approaches Scott, and reflects in silence. As this happens, we hear a phone ringing, followed by Donovan's voice message prompt.

Donovan's Voice: Hey, its Donovan. Sorry I missed you, but if you leave a message I'll call you back.

****beep****

Matty's Voice: D Fish! Its Matty. You know you sound like Barry White on the phone right? Where the heck is everybody? I called Nate, have no idea where *he* is. I mean, it's... 10 o'clock, is that a bad time to call people? You sleeping? Anyway, check this, I want you to meet my room mate, I think you'll like her. I already set it up, you'll thank me later. Tomorrow night baby, I'll text you the details. Then Thursday I say we have another go at the bar - me, you and Nate. Let's catch up forreal this time. Everybody got their shit out, now we can kick it like normal again! Alright, I'm out.

Nate attempts to touch the tombstone, but cannot bring himself to. Instead, he steps away from it.

Nate: I still don't get it. What the fuck are you doing here bro... *Here?*... This isn't for you.

(pauses. Sound cue of a funeral marching band is heard in his head)

I gotta go.

Nate Exits. Lights go out.

Donovan

Lights come up on Donovan, asleep on his couch. The sound of marching is heard, rapidly growing louder. It is a procession of actors, representing air force soldiers. One actor leads the rest, conducting a cadence. The cadence begins at the back of the theatre, moving to the stage. The soldiers will eventually form a line behind Donovan, who is up on his feet by the time the cadence halts.

Actor: *US CADENCE/ AIR FORCE CADENCE/ COUNT CADENCE COUNT*

All: *U!*

Actor: *I CANT HEAR YOU*

All: *S!*

Actor: *LITTLE BIT LOUDER NOW*

All: *A!*

Actor: *THAT'S MUCH BETTA*

All: *F!*

Actor: *ALL TOGETHER NOW*

All: *U.S.A.F. UNITED STATES AIR FORCE*

Actor: *LOOKING GOOD AND FEELIN FINE
DROP THE LEFT FOOT JUST ONE TIME*

(LEFT FOOT STOMP)

Actor: *NOW DROP YOUR LEFT AND DRAG YOUR RIIIIIGHT*

(LEFT FOOT STOMP, RIGHT FOOT DRAG)

Actor: *DROP YOUR LEFT AND DRAG YOUR RIGHT*

(LEFT FOOT STOMP, RIGHT FOOT DRAG)

Actor: *AND IF YOU GOT THAT AIR FORCE PRIDE
BREAK IT DOWN AND KEEP IT TIGHT*

(LEFT FOOT STOMP, RIGHT FOOT DRAG)

(LEFT FOOT STOMP, RIGHT FOOT DRAG)

(LEFT FOOT STOMP, RIGHT FOOT STOMP, LEFT FOOT STOMP, RIGHT FOOT DRAG)

Actor: *WHO ARE WEEEE?*

All: AIR FORCE

Actor: PROUD TO BEEE

All: AIR FORCE

Actor: YOUR MIGHTY MIGHTY

All: AIR FORCE

Actor: YOUR LEFT/ YOUR LEFT
YOUR LEFT YOUR RIIIIIGHT
YOUR RIGHT YOUR LEFT

All: AIR FORCE

Actor: YOUR RIGHTYYY LEFT

All: AIR FORCE

Actor: I LOVE TO HEAR THE SOUND OF YOUR LEFTTT

(LEFT FOOT STOMP)

Actor: SOUND OF YOUR RIGHTTT

(RIGHT FOOT STOMP)

Actor: SOUNDS SO GOOD LET ME HEAR IT TWICE

(LEFT FOOT STOMP, RIGHT FOOT STOMP)

All: HUAH!

All salute, including Donovan, who then looks at his saluting hand, then lowers it.

Donovan: I don't think that I was born to be a soldier, but I know I wasn't born to be a civilian. I mean, I know there's like one chance in a million that I go back to the ranks, but I'm tired of falling in line on wall street for these legions of banks. I wake up, make my bed hospital corners, have a shave and a shower, watch the news, stock reports at the top of the hour. I put on my pin stripe, notched lapel, double vented, single breasted straight jacket and march strait into hell.

Actors exit

From the sound of the opening bell there are no *brothers* on the stock market floor. Just life virgins becoming different versions of whores. I don't understand why there are egos and dissensions and why there is no common goal, why these thousands of individuals don't come together into a whole, and why I don't have a role that's been defined for me or a life that's been designed for me, and why does everybody get to question me when I'm clearly their superior.

Four actors enter (Nate, Matty, Austin, and Lisette) and form a line upstage behind Donovan. They carry cell phones.

Don't they know that I outrank them? Look at the pin stripes on my shoulder. And I step back and realize that, to them, I'm one of them.

Donovan falls in line with the four actors, who begin whispering on their cell phones, as if they are wall street workers having business conversations.

Rankless masses of middle classes making passive judgments about each other with no problems and no solutions and I can't find my absolution so sometimes I just want to go back

An explosion is heard, followed by gunfire. The actors, including Donovan, drop to the ground. They crawl downstage, ducking fire, retuning fire, etc.

Back to the barracks and the 75 pound tack
Back to the PT with the 20 mile track
Back to hauling gunny sacks
And carrying your brothers on your back
Not this lack of accountability this crap that we call civility
Give me a dogfight shitstorm heavy fire situation and I'll show you how to earn your pins and stripes

Donovan is back to his feet. The sounds of the gunfight fade out. The four actors lay in different positions on the floor, dead.

I gave up my humanity to defend your rights, so what's right or wrong then?
I made myself a man for this country and you stick me in this dog pen?
Life is hard out here and the world doesn't make sense with
This thankless bank system's insipid rankness but even at the height of my confusion and the depths of my doubt, going back to the front lines is taking the easy way out

As Donovan continues speaking, the four actors stand, forming a line downstage of Donovan, but facing upstage. They leave a space in the line for Donovan, who fills it when he notices it.

So I straighten my tie, and straighten my path,
I hold it together and I try to make a good living, and I realize that this urban fight might be
slightly more forgiving, for giving me a chance to live, amongst the living.

Bridgette

Donovan: You alright, man?

Matty: I'm cool.

Donovan: *(with a chuckle)* Sorry she chewed you out bro.

Matty: It's not funny.

Donovan: Its funny that you brought up Sponge Bob.

Matty: Whatever man, I wish you gave me a heads up. How come you haven't been answering your phone?

Donovan: I've been grinding it out bro. I got a job.

Matty: Gotta stay useful huh?

Donovan: My uncle got me hooked up with this stock broker firm. I started last Monday.

Matty: Dude- you're on Wall Street? How is it?

Donovan: It's been alright. I mean, the first day sucked. And then today at lunch I was sitting in the break room and this tool in a suit walks up to me with a smirk on his face and says, "nice tie, kid." And him and his boys start laughing.

Matty: Assholes!

Donovan: I come home and they think they can call me kid?

Matty: Exactly!... After what you've been through?? Hey D, what've you been through though?
(Donovan laughs)

Nate enters

... but let's talk about it later.

Nate: What's goin on, fellahs?

Matty: We's kickin it.

Donovan: What's up, Nate.

Nate: What's up.

Awkward silence

Donovan: I'm gonna get us a round.

Donovan goes to the bar. A young woman at the bar, Bridgette, strikes up a conversation with him when he gets there.

More awkward silence

Matty: What's wrong with you?

Nate: What's wrong with *you*?

Matty: I'm just asking cuz you seem a little off.

Nate: I'm good. (*glancing over at Donovan*) How was Donovan's date?

Matty: Great.

Nate: You lying?

Matty: Ask him yourself. (*glances over and notices Donovan with the woman*)

Nate: He's on a roll.

Donovan flashes Nate and Matty a look. They can't figure out what the look meant.

Matty: Maybe he needs us to save him.

Nate: Nah, he's got it.

Donovan returns with Bridgette and three beers

Donovan: (*passing out beers*) Okay this is my boy Matty, and that's Nate. Guys, this is...uh,

Bridgette: Bridgette.

Nate and Matty: Hey.

Donovan: She's a college student.

Nate: That's cool, I'm a grad student myself.

Bridgette: Oh.

Matty: Not me! I'm done with school.

Bridgette: (*aloof*) Great. (*flirty, to Donovan*) And then we have Rambo here. So, what is it about killing people that you love so much?

Matty: What is this chick talking about?

Nate: Matty.

Matty: What?

Bridgette: Why else would you choose to join the *air force*?

Matty: Why are you in my boy's face?

Donovan: Its alright Matty.

Bridgette: I'm sorry but nobody is even talking to you.

Matty: Nobody was talking to *you*!

Donovan: Matty, I got this. *(to Bridgette)* Let's talk for a minute.

Nate: *(pulling Matty away)* Let them talk. You okay, bro?

Matty: I'm good *(raps at Donovan and Bridgette)* My man right there fought for kids like you
Four years with no love, somebody walk in his shoes...

Nate: Dude- Shut up!

Bridgette: I bet you think you're so hot when you strut around in your uniform huh?
'Neutralizing the target?'

Donovan: Look, I know lots of people feel the way you feel, so I get where you're coming from.

Bridgette: No you don't, but thanks for trying.

Donovan: I'm not pro war, you know. Or pro killing... but somebody has to keep us safe, right?

Matty: *(rapping at them)* What you know about Kuwait? Or stayin up late?
All heart but no brains so you just wanna hate...

Nate: Matty!

Donovan: Matty's a trip. You can tune him out.

Bridgette: Already did. So let me ask you this: why do we have to kill to keep each other safe?
I think that's Ironic.

Donovan: I know. Me too.

Bridgette: I mean, it just turns you guys into animals.

Donovan: You've got somebody overseas.

Bridgette: ... My father. He volunteered for a second tour. He left two weeks ago.

Donovan: So this is not about me.

Bridgette: I bet you wish it was.

Matty: She's not even that hot!!!

Donovan glares at Matty.

Bridgette: I think your dog is looking for attention... I'll be over there.

Bridgette goes back to the bar.

Nate: That was pretty dick of you.

Matty: She was trying to play him and I stood up for my boy, what the fuck did you do?

Nate: Don't bring that here.

Donovan: *(returning)* Matty, I appreciate that you have my back, but that was a little uncalled for.

Matty: She was trying to play you!

Donovan: No she wasn't.

Matty: That's how its gonna be? You're just gonna let people shit on you?

Donovan: I can fight my own battles.

Matty: Well you're gonna have a lot of battles to fight out here. Who's gonna have your back? Certainly not Nate.

Nate: Oh really?

Matty: Look how you've been acting.... Complaining cuz D didn't call you first. Bitching

because Scotty is dead and you think its D's fault, bitching because you think you're smarter than everybody...

Donovan: Bro, why are you so angry?

Matty: Because all I do is look out for yall and this is what I get? I don't understand it.

Nate: Of course you don't.

Matty: D, has Nate told you that he's not going to this memorial on Saturday? It's just me and you, bro.

Donovan: *(looks to Nate)* That true?

Nate: ... Yeah.

Donovan: Why?

Nate: I'm just not.

Donovan: Whats up with *you*?

Matty: He's on that same shit from last Sunday. Same shit he's been on the past year. Ever since Scotty got killed...

Donovan: What, do you really think Scotty is dead because of me?

(pause)

Nate: He signed up because of you. Why didn't yall just go to college?

Donovan: For starters everyone doesn't get scholarships like you, or have a trust fund like Matty.

Nate: That's not an excuse.

Donovan: Everyone doesn't have the same path, Nate. We follow our hearts, even if we die doing it.

Matty: Exactly! Scotty did what he had to do, right?

Nate: Scotty was smart...

Donovan: What are you trying to say?

Nate: ... I'm saying yeah! Scotty is gone because of you!

Donovan: Fuck you, Nate!

Nate: (*advancing towards Donovan*) Nah, fuck you!

Matty: (*shoving Nate*) Back off bro!

A scuffle ensues between Nate and Matty. Donovan intervenes.

Donovan: Calm down! Hey, calm the hell down! I think we're all losing it.

The three boys stare at each other, angry and speechless. Everyone in the bar is staring at them. After a moment, people begin to leave the bar, one by one. First Nate, then Matty, then the bar patrons and bartender. Last is Bridgette, who shares a brief moment with Donovan, looking at him with both validation and pity. She exits, leaving Donovan alone.

Donovan: Is *passion* a crime when somebody dies?
will they hate or embrace the unlucky who survive?
Who are the heroes and who are the villains among the living?
Does truth reside anywhere where opinions lie?
Say what you're gonna say, but you don't know where I've been.
And I don't know where I am...
I just wanna go home.
(*Donovan Exits*)

The Brothers

A cell phone begins to ring. Lights come up on Donovan in his bedroom. He is in his pajamas. It is 1:30AM

Donovan: Yo... hello?... Nate? ... Are you there, Nate?

Nate emerges. He is in his own apartment.

Nate: I was just on Scotty's facebook page.

Donovan: ... What, the invitation page?

Nate: His profile. Remember what the last thing he posted was? On his little brother's page he wrote "I'll be home before you know it."

Donovan: Uh... yeah, I remember that.

Nate: His family never took his page2 down. It feels like he just posted that.

Donovan: ...

Nate: You should see his profile picture... he's such a confident looking dude. He's got on his helmet and a cool pair of shades. And his rifle's held up against his left shoulder, and he's got this smirk on his face and his middle finger is up. He looks like he's running shit out there.

Donovan: Ha.

Nate: How do you look at a picture like that, and then you're gonna tell me *this* guy isn't living anymore? Him? With his middle finger up? He's basically saying "fuck death," so how are you telling me death got him?

Donovan: Nate- (*Donovan begins to get dressed*)

Nate: You know, they said it was a roadside bomb followed by an ambush. I'm trying to imagine what that looked like. Like, his face and his body... I missed the funeral.

Donovan: The casket was probably closed.

Nate: You know what? I don't wanna know what that looks like anyway. I...

Donovan: You alright Nate?

Nate: That's my fucking BROTHER, D. I wanna see my brother, man. He should be here right now... I wanna see my brother.

Donovan:... I'm sorry, Nate. Hey how about you meet me at the park in like 15 minutes, lets get out.

Nate: Its too late...

Donovan: We used to hang out all night, remember? Buggin out in the parks, walking around Union square, hittin up the bars with our fake IDs... C'mon, Nate, we're still young... Ninja Turtles, bro.

Nate: Shit isn't the same anymore, D.

Donovan: ... I haven't been around for four years, and I come home and I don't recognize

anything anymore. Scotty is gone, but we're still here, right? We can't let ourselves fall apart.

Nate: Scotty is dead.

Donovan: ... Yeah... and we're gonna honor him less than 12 hours from now... How about I just drop by your place?

Nate: ...Scotty is dead.

Donovan: Yes... ... Hey, I love you, Nate.

Nate walks to his window. Sound cue of the funeral marching band is heard. He hangs up the phone and breaks down. Donovan runs out of his apartment. Lights go out.

Lisette & Matty

Lights come up. Stage has become Lisette and Matty's apartment kitchen. Lisette enters. She heads straight to her cabinet, takes out a pill bottle, and swallows one. It is clear that she does this every morning. Matty enters and Lisette quickly hides the pills. He gives her a suspicious look, but resumes morning business as usual. Lisette writes in her notebook. Matty pours coffee.

Matty: Morning.

Lisette: Morning!

Matty: You were up late last night.

Lisette: *(quickly)* You were *out* late.

Matty: *(laughing)* Yeah. . .

Lisette: So what's her name?

Matty: Jack Daniels.

Lisette: Uh-huh. So how was it?

Matty: It was cool. . .

Lisette: Really?

Matty: Not really. There was kind of a fight at the end of the night. . .

Lisette: Aww, Matty. . .

Matty: Nah, not like that. One of the guys was a friend I haven't seen in a long time and it's just... different being back together again. Guess we're not in high school anymore.

Lisette: Oh right! Your high school friends-- the turtles?

Matty: Ninja Turtles.

Lisette: Right-- So what happened?

Matty: I don't want to talk about it... Whatcha working on?

Lisette: My book, I keep getting stuck. That's why I couldn't sleep.

Matty: Oh really? Tell me about it.

Lisette: It's a work in progress.

Matty: I know, I know. But c'mon, we've known each other for like forever, and you never let me see your stuff. Please?

Lisette: No. It's not ready. *(trying to change subject)* Have you found yourself a job yet, Matthew?

Matty: I'm not looking for a job, baby doll. I'm looking for a *career*.

Lisette: Am I gonna have to pay your half of the rent soon? Oh, right, you've mastered the art of siphoning money from thy parents. . .

Matty gives a her a look

Matty: Why are you changing the subject?? Come on. . . Lemme check it out!

Lisette: Just drop it, ok Matty?

Matty: Alright, Sorry. Want some more coffee?

Lisette: Yes!! Please.

(He gets up to pour more.)

Matty: Eh-hem. . . so. . . Lisette?

Lisette: Yes, Matthew?

Matty: You know I think you're awesome.

Lisette: Thanks. . . and. . .

Matty: And. . . nothin'-- I'm just saying. You're awesome.

Lisette: Uh-huh.

Matty: And special.

Lisette: What are you getting at?

Matty: *(pauses for effect)* I think you should go on a date.

Lisette: A date? Right that's exactly what I need.

Matty: Yeah! Well, maybe. That friend I saw last night? His name is Donovan. I think you two would really hit it off.

Lisette: I don't think so.

Matty: C'mon Lissy. He's a hottie. . .

Lisette: Ugh.

Matty: Great. Meet him tomorrow night at 7 at. . .

Lisette: Wait, wait, wait. I can't do it tomorrow night. I have my vets group.

Matty: What's the big deal? You can miss one meeting.

Lisette: No I can't.

Matty: Why not?

Lisette: It helps. . .

Matty: You go every week.

Lisette: Matty!. . . Nevermind. . . it's just. . . nevermind.

Matty: No I feel you. I know it's been tough. . . Hey, not to sound cheesy or anything, but you know I'm here for you, right?

Lisette: I know.

Matty: I mean, you're my boy! We need to work on that fashion sense though.

Lisette: Shut up!

Matty: I'm serious. You got a big date coming up. Wednesday instead.

Lisette: Aren't you at least gonna tell me a little more about him? Like what he's like, what he does.....

Matty: He's awesome. You'll like him.

Lisette: Ugh. . . ok.

Matty: Sweeeeet! Okay great. . . (*Matty turns to leave*)

Lisette: Where you going?

Matty: Beer calories to burn. . .

Matty exits. Lisette takes a moment, processing what she has just agreed to, then exits.

The Group

Stage transitions to into a gathering. A chair is set upstage center. Lisette sits in it, takes out her notebook, and opens it. The moment she opens it we begin to hear her voice over, and she begins to write. As she writes, four more chairs are placed, setting up a circle with her seat, suggesting a group meeting. Although no actors actually sit in these chairs, each is filled by a veteran participant who we cannot see.

Lisette's Voice: He stood with his hand extended. She couldn't return the gesture. Instead, her eyes met his. Brown. Sincere. Soulful, even. Eyebrows gently arched. Three dark wrinkles seeming as if they were etched onto his forehead. What was so special about this? Seconds had passed, yet the gaze didn't break. This was the most captivating image she had seen in months, and in that moment, she stood and struggled to understand why. What was so special about him? After all, he was just one of *them*. Same buzz cut. Same boots, same camouflage pants. Same masculine posture. One of the boys. . .

Lisette: ... One of the boys. . .

She looks up, notices the other participants have been waiting for her to speak.

Oh, I'm so sorry, didn't realize it was my turn, I just wanted to write down this thought before I forgot it. *(closes notebook and puts it away)* Um, I didn't have any highlights last week, but I *am* going on a date tomorrow. . . with a boy! Crazy, I know. Maybe I'm getting better. *(responding to a participant's question)* I actually don't know that much about him. Maybe I don't care. I just need to know that I can do this. . . *(smiles)*. I think I'm excited. . .

Lights go out

Downtown Café

Lights come up. Setting is now a cafe. Lisette sits alone at a table, anxious. Three Waiters (Ethan, Nate, Austin) are working. She pulls bottle of Welbutrin from her purse, takes out a pill. As she is about to take it a waiter approaches her, startling her.

Waiter: You're a marine.

Lisette: Excuse me?

Waiter: Don't take this the wrong way, but I noticed you the second you walked in here. I know a marine when I see one. . . 2nd Battallion, 4th Marines.

Lisette: *(uncomfortable pause)* Oh. . . well, yeah I was with the 1st LAR.

Waiter: *(offering fist)* Ooh Rah!

Lisette: *(fist pounds waiter)* Ooh Rah.

Waiter: Want some water with that?

Lisette: (*embarrassed*) No I'm fine, but I'll have a glass of wine.

Waiter: You got it. (*leaves*)

She takes the pill dry. DONOVAN enters, looking a bit nervous. Looks around, sees LISETTE and approaches her cautiously.

Donovan: Hi. Lisette?

Lisette: (*caught off guard*) Yeah! Hi! Are you Donovan?

Donovan: Yeah - you're Lisette? Nice to meet you.

Lisette: You too. Have a seat.

Donovan: Oh, thanks. (*Donovan sits*) Have you been waiting long?

Lisette: No, I just ordered a glass of wine.

Donovan: You look nice. . .

(*Awkward pause.*)

Donovan: So. . . It's so funny that Matty set us up.

Lisette: Yeah, he's a good friend.

(*Awkward silence.*)

Lisette: So, yeah. Matty and I met at camp when we were like, 10. Actually, it's kinda funny we're such good friends, 'cause he definitely didn't like me at first. He teased me. A LOT. Still does.

Donovan: Yeah, he can be like that.

(*They laugh together*)

Lisette: So, he told me you guys've been friends for awhile?

Donovan: Yeah, we've been bros since high school.

Lisette: It's so weird we've never met before.

Donovan: Yeah, it is. So Matty told me you were in the Marine Corps.

Lisette: Yup, yes. I was.

Donovan: Cool, cool. I was Airforce, so. . .

Lisette: *(uneasy)* Oh really? Matty didn't mention that to me. Wow.

Donovan: Where'd you go to bootcamp?

Lisette: *(zoning out)* Parris Island, South Carolina.

Donovan: Where were you stationed? Was it Iraq or Afghanistan? How long was your deployment?

A shift. Lisette stares out, blankly. DONOVAN and Waiters join one another's ranks.

Donovan: C'mon you can tell me. C'mon Lisette. Please? You can trust me. C'mon. I won't ever betray you. I like tough girls like you. Damn, you're so pretty. What did they call you?

Lisette: Oh God.

Donovan: Dyke?

Lisette: No.

Donovan: Bitch.

(Other GUYS join. In the voices of military drill sergeants, overlapping.)

Waiter #1: Lesbo.

Waiter #2: You're a loser.

Waiter #3: Slut.

Waiter #1: You don't deserve it.

Waiter #2: You're no Marine.

Waiter #3: Bitch.

Waiter #2: You never were.

Waiter #1: Never could be.

Waiter #3: Whore.

Waiter #1: Get off my truck.

Waiter #2: Don't you dare touch those guns.

Waiter #3: Hah. Women shouldn't even be here.

Waiter #2: Fatass.

Waiter # 1: Loser.

Waiter #3: Slut.

Waiter #1: Bitch.

Lisette: Shut up!

When I joined the marines I had nothing to lose, and the world to prove it to, I had innocence and I found an ideal to lose it to. Blood makes the grass grow, everyone is a rifleman, everyone is a killer. I popped my combat cherry and the blood poured from the necks, chests, and faces of the faceless enemy that threatened the freedom I fought for but lost within. And war stories become nightmares behind closed eyes in empty rooms that live only in midnights and twilights and the dim lights only serve to highlight the loneliness. And I grieve for my virtue lost, for the innocence that my womanhood cost. I grieve. Shock and denial, anger, bargaining, guilt, acceptance. I'm moving slowly toward retribution, turning the barrel away from the execution of orders, away from the Al Qaeda supporters and the sons and daughters of this war, and I've turned those barrels

inward because its more proper in civilian life. Those bullets flying into myself from inside myself are the echoes of the marine voices that I will never silence. Dyke, slut, bitch, piece of shit, bad marine, weak, stupid, fragile, frail, frightened, resounding through ribs and flesh, crushing bone and breaking spirit, and when I hear it in my head I can feel it in my gut and I get so angry trying to get them to shut the hell up. But I take steps that I need to keep those voices from fresh tongues and that breath from living lungs. And I smile, and I hurt, and I smile, and I rage, and I smile and I break, and I smile and I mend, and I smile, and

I fix, and I smile, and I smile, and I write.

Donovan: *(back as himself, still in the midst of the date)* So Matty tells me you're a writer.

Lisette: What?

Donovan: You're a writer.

Lisette: Well, I like to write, but. . .

Donovan: Great, I'd love to read some of your stuff sometime. I like to write too.

Lisette: *(distant, staring into space)* Oh, yeah. Sure... That'd be cool...

Donovan: Lisette?

Lisette: Huh?

Donovan: You alright?

Lisette: um.. I should go. I'm not feeling well.

(She exits. Her waiter returns with her wine in hand, having watched her run off)

Waiter: Is she coming back? *(Donovan shakes his head)* Hmm. That's awkward. Bet you wish you could be anywhere *else* in the world right now. *(pause)*

Donovan: *(shrugs his shoulders)*. . . Yeah. . . actually.

Waiter: Well, have her wine. On the house. *(places glass down)* You seem like the wall street type. Am I right?. . . You'll be alright. *(Waiter exits, leaving Donovan alone on the stage for a moment)*

Post Date

Lisette walks into her apartment, visibly upset. She pours herself a glass of water, then sits on her couch. Not knowing what to do with herself, she pulls out her notebook and opens it. She begins to write, but within seconds realizes that it won't work. She pulls out her bottle, stopping just short of taking a pill. Instead, she throws the pills against the wall. She opens her book again. Suddenly enraged, she begins tearing pages out, crumpling and throwing them against the same wall. She throws her entire notebook, then storms out. As all of this happens, we hear a phone ringing, followed by Donovan's voice message prompt.

Donovan's Voice: Hey, its Donovan. Sorry I missed you, but if you leave a message I'll call you back.

beep

Matty's Voice: Bro, its Matty! You already know what I wanna know. She's awesome, right? Right? You're welcome.... ...You know, I did this because you're both two of my favorite people. And we gotta look out for each other. Nate too. I love yall... Speaking of Nate, we're on for tomorrow night! More drinks in honor of Scotty! Haha... But seriously, Lisette, she's a... a delicate rose, ya know? I'm not gonna get ahead of myself, but... I mean, I don't have to *tell* you to treat her good. I know *you* got this... Wow, I'm seriously rambling. I swear I'm not drunk. I

gotta go, but let me know how the date went. Ooorrrrr I'll bug her about it... Yeah, I think I'll bug her about it. I can't wait... Later bro.

Lights go out.

What's the Word?

Matty and Lisette's apartment. Matty enters living room from his bedroom. He notices the mess and begins to clean it. Lisette emerges and stands at the doorway watching Matty clean the mess. She is still upset but not angry. More hurt. Matty picks up the bottle and examines it.

Beat.

Lisette starts to say something but stops. Matty turns around.

Matty: Lisette. . . what happened?

Lisette: You never told me he was air force Matty.

Matty: What happened? What did he do?

Lisette: Not what he did Matty. What you did!

Matty: What?

Lisette: Matty! *You* never told me he was an ex-military.

Matty: Did I do something wrong? I thought that would be the best surprise for you!

Lisette: (*explodes*) Oh my god Matty do you even know who I am!?

Matty: Lisette, Jesus!

Lisette: Don't fucking Jesus me! I totally froze. I made a complete fool of myself, had a total crazy meltdown, and I'm sure I'll never hear from this guy again, because he probably thinks I'm insane. . . The whole date was horrible. Even the stupid waiter was military- I never should have gone. I *told* you I wasn't ready. . .

Matty: What did Donovan being in the Air Force have to do with you not being ready?

Lisette: Not everyone who goes off to the military has a grand ole time okay!! I wasn't exactly one of the bros out there!!!

Matty: --How am I supposed to know any of this when you don't even talk to me anymore Lissy!

Lisette: (overlapping) Not everyone comes back a fuckin hero-

Matty: (overlapping) All you do is write all day and you don't even show me what you write -- you don't share anything with me so --

Lisette: I need you to listen to me right now, not get defensive! (*Breaks down*)

Matty: Lisette, okay. . . okay Lisette. I'm so sorry. I didn't know. . . (*he comes towards her*)

Lisette: I feel fucking crazy. I just want to scream all the time. Do you know what that feels like? I don't want to talk to my family or friends. . . I don't even want to see the sun sometimes. . . and I can't do anything about it because nothing works.

Matty: What do you mean nothing works. . . you've been writing non-stop.

Lisette: Non-stop bullshit. (*pulling herself together, as she finishes cleaning her mess.*) I'm sorry about the mess.

Matty: I was wondering what happened. . . Lissy I had no idea you weren't into--

Lisette: Forget it.

Matty: And you're not fucking crazy. You know who's crazy? That lame-o in the knock-off Sponge Bob suit. Remember that guy? He tried to charge us \$20 bucks for posing with him in Times Square! fuckin' *that* guy! Now that's crazy.

Lisette: *(giving up)* Go ahead turn everything into a joke like you always do.

Beat.

Matty: I really don't know what else to say.

Lisette: You used to. . . I'm gonna call it a night.

Matty: Lisette.

Lisette: I'm tired.

Matty: Okay. . . okay.

Lisette exits. Matty sits on the couch, at a loss for what just happened.

What's the Word Part 2

Lisette and Matty's living room. Matty sits on one end of the room on the couch. Reading. Lisette enters with her notebook. She looks at Matty and sits on the other end of the room. Awkward silence fills the space.

Lisette's pen drops.

Matty: What?

Lisette: What?

Matty: Did you say something?

Lisette: No, I thought you did?

Both at the same time: I just said what.

Matty: Jinx- aaah - sorry that wasn't a joke.

Lisette chuckles inside. Doesn't show it on her face. She opens her notebook begins to write. She stops. Looks at Matty. Beat.

Lisette: I can't think of this word. . .

Matty: *(cautiously turns to her and points to himself as if saying “are you talking to me?”)*

Lisette nods yes.

Lisette: It’s been driving me nuts all day. Listen to this.

(She reads from her book) “After the camouflage flight into the sand, she walked into the barracks and for the first time ever, she was home. These were her boys. Her soul mate among them, they shared a quiet embrace, disguised in a smile. Now with one shared pair of eyes they were both seeing the world, together, though fractured by war, still heartbreakingly beautiful. Through the hot, dry haze, the Tigres and the Euphrates still flowed like. . .”
Like WHAT?

Matty: Lisette.

Lisette: What?

Matty: How did you learn to write like that?

Lisette: . . .

Matty: I mean, that was good. Like really, really effing good. . .

Lisette: Shut up Matty.

Matty: No. I’m serious.

Lisette: . . . Thank you.

Matty: Jesus, you’re really talented, Lissy. I can’t believe . . . Hey. You have to keep writing. No matter what. The other stuff—we’ll work it out.

Lisette: . . . I’m sorry about yesterday.

Matty: You take Wellbutrin. I take that junk too.

Lisette: Huh?

Matty: Wellbutrin. I’ve been on the stuff for years. My mom put me on it after I burned down my treehouse when the Mets lost the subway series.

Lisette: Ughhh- Matty.

Matty: Sorry sorry! I kid I kid -- I just can't help myself!

Lisette: (*laughs*) You're a good friend, you know that?

Matty: (*jokingly*) Oh I know.

Lisette: Seriously.

(beat)

Matty: . . .Oh, and incidentally, he had a good time.

Lisette: Who?

Matty: Donovan. He said he had a good time. Said you were quirky and sweet. He liked that.

Lisette: Really?

Matty: Yeah. Is that hard for you to believe?

Lisette: (*embarrassed*) Kinda ..yeah.

Matty: Who wouldn't like you? You're a soldier Lissy, you went after what you wanted -- not too many women can say that. . . more than I can say for myself.

Lisette: This job hunt thing is killing you huh?

Matty: I'm looking for my calling Lissy -

Lissy: Right, not your job. Your career.

Matty: I'm at a loss really.

Lisette: I didn't exactly join the military for a career...

A beat.

Matty: Me and my boys got into it again at the bar. This time it got physical.

Lisette: Matty... You and Donovan???

Matty: Nah we're cool, it was mostly me and Nate.

Lisette: What's up with you guys?

Matty: Its complicated.

Lisette: Okay...

Matty: ... Even Nate, he's gonna be a college professor someday but doesn't know it yet... Donovan is this all-American war hero... I don't wanna be a soldier or anything... but I don't wanna be just some civilian with fancy parents. Where does that leave me?

Lisette: We can always get you a Sponge Bob suit.

Matty: *(smiles)* Right. Can you imagine me on the street with kids? They'll be like "mommy, Sponge Bob called some guy a douche. What does douche mean mommy? *(Lisette starts to laugh)* I wouldn't overprice 'em though.

Lisette: You'll be fine, Matty.

Matty: Yeah, if i ever figure my life out.

Lisette: What if you don't?

Matty: ... Then im stuck with my void... Ever since we lost Scotty really... I've just been left with a void...

Lisette: That void, it doesn't really ever go away. You know that right? I mean, even after you figure your life out...

Matty: So *then* what?

Lisette: Then it is what it is.

Matty: ... True... It is what it is... *(Matty laughs to himself)*

The Farm

Twenty miles from Durham, North Carolina. Ten acres of farmland dotted with ancient trees and verdant pastures. At its edge sits a small dairy with its own ice cream shop: Gross Farm Creamery. It is 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and the dairy is abuzz with the cries of school children on a field trip, who pet cows, feed sheep, and lick melting cones. A young couple enters: Austin, in his mid 30's, has the appearance and manner of a southern gentleman, the interior dexterity of a soldier, and a heart in crisis. Angela, his fiance, is in her late 20s - early 30s. She is warm, and apparently guileless, which belies a quiet strength and steadfastness.

Austin: *(noting the children)* So this is what they teach 'em in school these days.

Angela: *(beaming)* Aw, they're cute. Look, that little one's covered in chocolate.

Austin: And what d'ya think these kids are learning on a field trip to an ice cream shop?

Angela: They learn lots of things on a farm.

Austin: They should be learning that there's lots of things outside cow pastures n' tree forts.

Angela: C'mon Austin. Doesn't it feel great to be outside? *(She holds him, affectionately)* Handsome. God, this place is just beautiful. Can't believe you haven't brought me here before!

Austin: Guess I was so glad to get off the farm that I wasn't that keen to get back. But, here we are. So: Miss Angela Crenshaw, Gross Family Farms welcomes you. We come from a long line of Grosses. So glad my mamma married a Smith.

Angela: *(teasing)* I'd marry you even if you were gross. *(He smiles)* Wow, this place is gonna

be so perfect for the weddin'. I have been waitin' a long time for this. To see the farm. With you. It sounds kinda corny, but I had all these dreams about it when you were gone.

Austin: *(bothered)* Me too, babe.

Angela: Sometimes, in the morning, I'd catch myself turning to talk to you. I mean, I knew you weren't there. I knew you were gone. . .

Austin: *(with a sudden shift in demeanor, as if a ghost crossed his path)* I wasn't gone Angela. You know it's not like that. I wasn't just gone. . .

Angela: *(carefully)* What do you mean? . . . Ok, I'm sorry.

Austin: It's okay.

Beat.

Angela: Everything alright?

Austin: Yeah. Just a little out of it today. . . I dunno. . .

Angela: I heard you on the phone this morning.

Austin: Yeah.

Angela: It was someone from the marines, wasn't it.

(silence)

Angela: What did they say?

Austin: Doesn't matter.

Angela: Please. You can tell me.

Austin: No.

Angela: Austin.

Austin: 'Bout a friend of mine. . . Scott.

Angela: Scott. . .

Austin: I served with him in Afghanistan. Apparently his family is putting together this huge memorial for him on Saturday back in New York and they want me to go.

Angela: That's great. I was gonna meet the florist with your mamma, but we can reschedule.

Austin: *(not sure what to say)* Great. I'd have to drive back up a few days early though, so. . .

Angela: Yeah, of course. We'll work it out. *(pause)* So. . . did Scott die recently?

Austin: A year ago. I don't really wanna to talk about it right now.

Angela: *(tentatively, trying to reach him)* Hey. I know this is hard. . . if there's anything I can. . . sounds like you were close to him.

Austin: *(defensive)* It's not like we were best friends or anything.

Angela: *(flustered by his defensiveness)* Oh-- no - I-- it sounded like/
(overlapping)

Austin: Just. . . you don't really need to know anyhow/
(overlapping)

Angela: I know I don't need to know. I wanna know. I'm right here. . .

Austin: I know Ang.

Angela: I'm right here. And I wanna be there with you at that memorial. *(silence)* Honey? *(no response)* Austin? . . .

Beat.

Austin: Let's go up and look at the house.

Back to New York

Austin and Angela drive back to their New York City apartment. Angela tries to find a radio station, while Austin drives. Eventually she finds a station playing “The Gambler” by Kenny Rogers, and Austin starts to sing along. Angela laughs, then taps along with him.

Austin: “They’ll be time enough for countin’, when the dealin’s done. .”/

Angela: *(as he sings)* . . . You are so silly!

Austin: What? I thought you liked it when I sing to you! *(To the tune of Barry Manilow’s “Mandy”)* “Oh Angie, well you came and you gave without takin’. . . “

Angela: Mhmm. . . I know what this is about. You’re tryin’ to soften me up so that I let you do that Top Gun thing at the weddin’.

Austin: Well, it’s tradition!

Angela: Navy, not Marines. I don’t want all those people starin’ at me! It’s embarrassin’.

Austin: You’re the bride! Of course they’re gonna be starin’!

Angela: I know, but. . . Plus, honey. I don’t know how to break this to you. . . but you really can’t sing.

Austin: Aww, c’mon. You know you love it.

Angela: Do I, now?

Austin: Mhmm. And if you don’ stop lookin’ so darn cute, I’m gonna have to pull this car over. That hay field looks just about right. . . *(He pretends to veer off the road)*

Angela: *(squealing)* You wouldn't!

A horn blares behind them. Angela looks back at the other car, as Austin's whole body suddenly tenses.

Angela: Jerk. *(She turns back around and notices the change in Austin)* Hey. Austin.

Austin's body is rigid, and his mind is far away.

Angela: *(cont'd)* Honey?

The car lurches dangerously close to a tree at the edge of the road.

Angela: *(cont'd)* Austin, watch out!!

Austin gasps, suddenly aware of his surroundings again. He stops the car. He breathes heavily, as if waking up from a nightmare.

Austin: Sorry. . . sorry babe.

Angela is frightened and speechless. She stares at him, with confusion.

Austin: I'm so sorry.

He starts the car again. Angela shuts off the radio and stares out the window.

The Bedroom

Austin and Angela's bedroom. Austin sits up reading at his desk. Angela lies in bed, waiting. She peers at Austin. She tries to look alluring, to summon him with her gaze, but to no avail.

Angela: *(an attempt at seduction)* Austin. . . Don't you wanna. . . come to bed?

Austin: *(absorbed in his reading)* Not now, honey, I just gotta finish this chapter for class tomorrow.

Angela: So proud of you, my Columbia University scholar. S'pretty hot. C'mon. Don't you wanna. . . you know. . .

(Austin doesn't respond.)

Angela: C'mon babe. It's been a whole week. . .

Austin: *(firmly)* Not right now.

Angela: *(hurt)* Ok. *(pause)* Ok.

Austin: I'm sorry, I jus' really need to finish this.

Angela: *(defeated)* It's alright.

Austin: *(sighing and looking up at her)* Look at you.

Angela: *(brightening)* You *could* read afterwards. . .

Austin: How can I say no to that? *(he tackles her, they embrace, and he turns out the lights)*

(a few moments)

Angela: Ouch.

(a few more moments)

Angela: Ouch! Honey, stop. Stop! You're hurtin' me!

(She flicks on the lights)

Austin: *(retreating into himself)* I'm sorry.

Angela: I . . .

Austin: *(quickly)* Sorry.

(An awkward silence. Neither knows what to say.)

Angela: It's ok. *(She tries to touch him and he flinches.)* It's just. . . I bruise easy. Don't you remember? *(She tries again to touch him and he moves away)* We can try again later. . .

(Austin looks at her remorsefully, slowly walks back to his desk, picks up his book, and begins to read again. Angela rolls over in bed.)

End Game

Austin sits on the couch watching football highlights, while Angela does the dishes.

Angela: Thought we could invite Doug and Sarah over tomorrow night for dinner.

Austin: Not tomorrow.

Angela: Well, you haven't seen 'em since you've been back. Doug said he's been tryin' to get in touch with you. And I'd like to see the baby.

Austin: *(suppressing frustration)* I don't. . . feel like it right now.

Angela: He's your best friend. He just wants to see you, that's all.

Austin: Angela. Don't push me.

Angela: Look, I know I need to give you space and time. They told us that. I just don't see why you wouldn't want to see *him*.

Austin: *(barely able to contain himself)* Just. Drop it.

Angela: Ok. *(trying to smooth things over)* You want a beer?

Austin: Sure.

Angela: So, I've got some weddin' stuff to tell you. *(She begins to wash the dishes)* If you're interested.

Austin: *(sincerely)* Of course I am.

Angela: Good. Well, I called the caterer today, and the good news is they can do the buffet if we want them too. I jus' don't like the idea of everybody havin' to sit the whole time. Also, your momma called and she wants us to invite some more people from the family. She said 2-3, but I

have a feelin' it's gonna be more.

Austin: *(becoming irritated again)* Ang, can you stop washin' the dishes while you talk to me?

Angela: *(she stops)* Of course. I'm just tryin' to clean this pan. That fried chicken made a mess of my dutch oven.

Austin: Doesn't mamma know we wanna keep it small?

Angela: She does, but no one knows her better than you. And it *is* her farm. *(Without thinking, she innocently begins scrubbing again)* So I told her it's alright. But I think we need to end the list there.

(Austin's frustration begins to reach a fever pitch, as Angela clangs the pots while she speaks.)

Austin: Ang.

Angela: I know. I also looked at some linens today, but I'm thinking maybe I could get out my old Singer and sew the napkins myself. I mean, I'm not an amazin' seamstress, but I think I could figure it out.

Austin: Angela.

Angela: Well, you're the one who inspired me to start lookin' into the DIY stuff, so now I'm kinda hooked.

Austin: *(Releasing cataclysmic rage, and throwing his beer can down, violently.)* ANGELA!!! SHUT THE FUCK UP!! FUCK! FUCK! FUCK!!! *(He growls, and throws some other things, before collapsing in exhaustion.)*

Angela: *(Stunned, but mustering all of the courage she can)* Get out. You can't talk to me like that. Get out right now.

(Austin, still reeling, staggers out the door. Angela looks around the room, stricken. She tries to pick up a few things and put them back in place, then finds her phone and dials.)

Angela: Hello. Mamma? Mamma. . . I can't do this anymore.

(She weeps.)

The Gravestone

Set changes to the grave site. Austin enters with a flashlight. He's been drinking. He has 2 beers left, hanging from the rings of a six-pack. He places one at the base of the tombstone.

Austin: I owe you one because the Giants won the superbowl. Don't think that I forgot. And don't think that I'm drunk cause I'm not. I just came by to repay debt. A beer if the Giants ever won, that was the bet. So what else do I owe you?

...

I got a call today from a guy who seems to know you. Says there's a memorial that he wants me to go to. What the hell does he expect for me to say to the people you were close to? I come straight to the source, so what else do I owe you? I'd rather just come here, and have a beer with my friend. Doesn't matter where else I go, I know I'll come back here to meet you in the end.

...

What happened that day? We learned to walk together, we learned to run, we learned to crawl. We learned to shoot, to stand, to fall. We learned to climb, to build, to break down walls. But first we learned to walk. Boots press into sand in time. **Left!** Your heel falls in rhythm with mine. **Left!** See what I see, do what I say, and stay in line. **Left, Right, Left.** Don't break formation, remember we're at war. **Left Right!** You were 2 steps behind me, or maybe it was more. I turn. **About Face.** And take one, two, three steps to grab you before I could hear her cry. In the second it took to hear, I let you go, I don't know why. You took four more steps into the killing field and I froze and closed my eyes. You were just four steps away from me when I left you to die. I turned. **About Face.** And I ran **Left, Right, Left, Right.** And I feel like I'm still running **Left, Right,** Bullets were whistling **Left, Right,** The crying was coming from **Left, Right.** And now there's just one of us **Left, Right.** And now there's just one of us **Left, Right.** Now there's just one of us left.

...

I think that's the way it happened. Now it's all a bloody haze. And they want me to go back and relive it in 3 days? I don't go a single day without seeing your mother's face. Crying in my dreams for son she can't replace. And you breaking my grip and vanishing without a trace? Going to that memorial is just rubbing the wounds with salt. They all know what happened and they think it was my fault. They'll be accusing me with their eyes and pleading with the past, wishing they could cast me out to bring you back, and I would do it if they asked. I've got too much blood on my hands, and I don't know how to atone. I don't think that I can face them, not

alone.

...

I'm sorry, Scott.

He begins to exit, then turns

...

Hey did I ever tell you that I'm going to marry that girl I told you about? Angela? Yeah, she's a great girl.

exit

The Other Side

Later that night, Angela lies awake in bed. Next to her bed lie two empty suitcases. Austin's side of the bed is empty. He enters. He has been drinking. He staggers to the bedside and turns on the light. Angela gasps.

Angela: Austin! What time is it?! Where have you been?!

Austin: *(moodily and drunkenly)* Out.

Angela: You wreck a' liquor. I can smell it from here. *(She gets up on the bed)*

Austin: *(slurring a bit)* I tol' you. I was out.

Angela: What's goin' on with you?

Austin: Does everything need words?

Angela: It needs somethin'! *(Everythin' you do is hurtin' me. . .)*

Austin: Like what?

Angela: Like what?! I don't even know how to tell you. . .

Austin: Like what? What did I forget this time Angela?

Angela: You're jokin' right?

Austin: *(pause - deliberating what to say).* . . I'm sorry Ang. . .

Angela: Well this is. . . it's just embarrassing...

She goes near him to get clothes from the chest drawers.

Angela: I'm goin' to my mamma's tomorrow mornin'. I think I should leave you be for awhile.

Austin: Aww, Ang. Why? C'mere. I love you. C'mere. *(He tries to touch her and she cowers).*

Angela: You scared me.

Austin: I'm sorry, baby.

Angela: No. Austin, look at me. You scared me. And I dunno if I can do this anymore.

Austin: Ang. *(seeing she's serious, he sobers up immediately)* Angela. I'm sorry.

Angela: You've been saying that a lot lately. We both have.

Austin: I jus' need time, honey.

He goes to touch her and stops.

A beat.

Angela: And I'm gonna give it to ya'!

Austin: No. No. I need you. I. . .

Angela: You're not the only one. . . I need you too. Only you're not here.

Austin: I'm tryin' baby.

Angela: Maybe I should go now. I can get the early bus.

Austin: What? No.

(She begins to pack her bag, quickly).

Austin: I'll stop. I'll stop doing everythin's that makin' you mad.

Angela: I'm not mad! (I'm hurt!)

Austin: With/

Angela: When you're here, you're not really here. . . I'm tryin to hang on, but I need *somethin* I can hang on to. . .

Beat.

(Austin: Me. . . (hard for him to say this) I'm not enough. . .

Angela: . . .

Austin: I know. . . it's too much. . .)

(A beat. Maybe two.)

Angela: If you don't tell me what you're goin' through. . . then I have to leave. Can't you see that? We don't have a choice anymore . . . I wish that you'd/

Austin: Angela, I can't.

Angela: Talk to me.

Austin: *(He begs her not to force him)* Please.

Angela: Help me understand.

Austin: Please, Angela.

Angela: Look at me. I'm here right now.

Austin: No.

(Angela looks at him imploringly)

Austin: *(beginning to break down)* I. . . it was my fault.

Angela: What was your fault?

Austin: They died. Scott died. *(Clenching and releasing his hands)* I let him go. Angela. . . FUCK. . . I let him go.

Angela: . . . That was not your fault.

Austin: Yes it was.

Angela: No. No, Austin. That was war. That was not your fault.

Austin: I coulda saved Scotty.

Angela: He did what he could. And so did you.

Austin: *(pleading)* Ang. I. . .

Angela: *(embracing him)* I love you. And that was not your fault.

(They lie on the bed and she cradles him in her arms.)

Rockin Gandhi's World

Stage becomes Ethan's living room, with Ethan standing in the middle. He surveys the walls of the room for a moment. Gandhi's book "Experiments with the Truth" is in his hand. An open laptop sits on the floor by his couch. Sound cue of warplanes flying overhead...

Ethan: Captain Ethan Martin no longer reporting for combat, no longer jumping out of planes, I'm just guarding the inside of my four walls, and trying to stay sane. I buried my tags and my past in a grave I've never seen, covered in bloody sand, not the hero's journey like I had planned.

I got into the military to meet women, and did it work? I guess it did.

I mean, I didn't get any play in Lisbon or Madrid, and the Russian girls, they thought of me as just a kid.

But in the desert heat of battle

I found a diamond in the rough of rough necks, and leather necks.

An Afghani flower, American made, desert bloomed.

Her name was music, her face was sculpture, her voice was hope.

Her heart was mine.

She was Naima.

I could have saved her life, had I still been on the ground, so I guess she really died from me not being around.

But its been a year and I'm still here, looking for the peace in loss. To replace the sleep I've lost.

Cause really I'm just a pacifist passing this life by, just a poor wayfarin' stranger, trying to be a nice guy.

Just a pacifist, like Dr. King marching for a New Day or Ghandi fighting but not fighting the UK.

Now, Ghandi is my hero, straining my thoughts through his mind keeps me zen. And its a pity that these famous peaceful leaders I love are all men. Imagine Ghandi as a woman. I could snuggle up to a female Ghandi, assuming we could meet. If I asked beautiful girl Ghandi out to dinner, I think I could make her eat. I would wrap her tenderly in robes and arms and wash her sometimes bloody feet.

Out of all the women that I've known deeply, loved briefly, and lost forever, she could give me once again the peace that I've been missing. And maybe I fall in love too quickly, or maybe not at all, or maybe I'm a weirdo building cages out of walls, but if Ghandi sprouted long black hair, and kept his gentle touch, and changed into a desert rose, but didn't change too much, then I wouldn't be ashamed to fall in love with that girl. And, not for nothing, I'm not bragging, but I would rock Ghandi's world.

Mo enters. A woman very much resembling Gandhi.

Mo: You would rock my world huh?

Ethan opens his eyes.

Ethan: Whoa.

Mo: I'd really like to see you try.

Ethan: (in awe) Where'd you come from? No way. Am I dreaming?

Mo: That's not the point, Ethan. The point is you think you can rock my world and I'd like to see you try.

Ethan: Wow. You're hot.

Mo: Yeah. Obviously. *You* conjured me.

Ethan: I did good.

Mo shakes her head in disapproval. Ethan steps forward to try to touch her

Mo: woh woh woh Mister - you can just plant you behind right back on that couch there thank you!

Ethan: OK - but.. you're Gandhi?

Mo: Hi Ram in how many of those Paratrooping jumps did you land on your head you delusional idiot! You just said that's what you wanted- *Gandhi in a woman's body*. Here I am. *Namaste*.

Ethan: You're beautiful.

Mo: (*shifts*) Thank You.

Ethan: You remind me of –

Mo: Naima?

Ethan: How do you know Naima? That's private.

Mo: I'm a part of you. I know everything –

Ethan: Right, Right.....

Mo: And you are very late. *Now* you wish to talk to Gandhi? After you've already fought your battles over there? I mean shouldn't you have picked up my books *before* you enlisted?

Ethan: I ask myself that all the time.

Mo: And no conclusive conclusion?

Ethan: Well- before I enlisted, I *knew* of you, but I never took the time to get to know you. Stupid, I know.

Mo: Stupid, I know. I did the same thing.

Ethan: Really?

Mo: 1906. The Zulu War in South Africa. I wanted us Indians to join forces with the British against the Africans.

Ethan: Right but you were young, you didn't know any better.

Mo: I "knew", just never took the time to get to know.

Ethan: And then you witnessed the manhunt.

Mo: and that's when my view on war began to change.

Ethan: the Satyagraha..

Mo: Very good....it's only after you witness the atrocities of a manhunt that things begin to change.

Ethan: Yeah.

Mo: You have conjured a failure, I hope you know that.

Ethan: A failure? What?? You're Gandhi. You like *invented* passive resistance.

Mo: Yes, but India still has aggression, community violence - one religion against the other - one this against that - no good reason but pure hatred.

Ethan: You are not a failure. You did something very few people have done-

Mo: That's exactly why I failed. My extraordinariness...it made achieving peace seem as if it can only be achieved by few – whereas it should have spread within every soul-

Ethan: But it did spread. It spread to *me*.

Mo: A little late perhaps?

Ethan: You are amazing. Don't ever stop talking to me please.

Mo: Ram Ram. You are obsessed with me. If you really have conjured me to have some sort of fantasy love life in the comfort of your living room I hate to tell you mister I'm not one of those delivery services.....

Ethan: (*making the moves*) Delivery service? Nah.. I'm just saying - I like you.. and we're here in my living room-

Mo: Of course we're in your living room. You have not left this apartment in sixty-three days. Sixty-three days, Ethan. This is twice as long as my fast in 1947.

Ethan: (amused at her boldness) Damn- you don't play!

Mo: And you too do not play. Why are you fantasizing about me when who you really want is Naima.

Ethan: I don't think about her anymore.

Mo: But I have mentioned Naima. So you *do* think of her.

Ethan: (hurt inside) I don't know what you're talking about.

Mo: The very first day you met her when she was assigned as your Pashto translator - you knew.

Ethan: I didn't know shit.

Mo: Stop lying to yourself.

Ethan: I don't think about her anymore.

Mo: You fell in love with her the moment you saw her.

Ethan: I did not.

Mo: I don't blame you. Naima was an amazing woman. Beautiful. Brave. In the midst of war she built bridges over rivers of language-

Ethan:-over rivers of language, she was love-

Mo: There see! That is the memory you deprive yourself of. *(picks up Ethan's laptop and reads the screen)*

Ethan: I don't deprive myself - I just choose not to-

Mo: *(reading the screen)* ... And Scott's memorial is this Saturday -

Ethan: No, I'm not thinking of her and I'm not - Scott, Scott Scott! I'm tired of even thinking of Scott Matthews so I'm sure as hell not going to his memorial. I'm staying in my house and that's my right!

Mo: You'll be honoring the man who died for her.

Ethan: What are you doing to me?!

Mo: There is no need to get so angry. I am not real.

(a knock on the door)

Mo: On the other hand, that is.

(a louder knock on the door)

Mo: Umm... you know I can't physically open the door, right?

Ethan: I'm not getting it.

Mo: Perhaps it is the neighbor asking for a cup of milk?

Ethan: Fuck you.

Mo: "It is better to be violent, if there is violence in our hearts, than to put on the cloak of nonviolence to cover impotence..."

Ethan: Yeah exactly I'm violent in my heart so fuck off. That's the truth.

Mo: Is it really? Ethan, I don't think you have an ounce of violence in you...and that's the truth that is harder to keep... *(leaving)* Namaste.

Ethan: Hey wait!

Mo: Oh I shall return. Violence doesn't scare me-

Ethan: ...um- should I call you Gandhi?

Mo: I am Mahatma Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.

Ethan: Maybe I'll just call you Mo.

Mo: (smiling) Okay. Very well. Very well very well...

(Mo exits. The loud knocking returns)

Noor

Lights come up on Ethan's apartment. Ethan sits on his couch, anxious and agitated. He closes his eyes trying to concentrate. Opens his eyes and is disappointed to not see anything. Ethan begins to chant:

Ethan: Gandhi, Gandhi, Gandhi – – Mo, Mo, Mo

Realizing how stupid he looks, he stops.

Mo enters. Laughing.

Mo: Impressive concentration abilities Ethan! Did the Army teach you that?

Ethan: Awww yess! I'm a fuckin magician!

Mo: I should teach you a few Sanskrit chants so this concentration ability can actually give you peace of mind. Have you ever tried meditation?

Ethan: Its been two days – where have you been!?

Mo: First you tell me to fuck off and now you miss me? wah re wha!.. *(Smiles)* I've been seeing the world. It is very beautiful outside. How about you?

A knock at the door.

Mo: Ooh! I have to go! *Very very busy!*

Ethan: Hey!!! What- you just got here!?!?

Mo: Catch me if you can!

Ethan: *(screams)* where the hell do you think you are going?!?

Mo runs towards the door. Ethan chases after her and incidentally opens the door to see a petite young Middle Eastern-American woman standing there.

Noor: *(startled)* Oh my goodness!

Ethan: Whoa!

Noor: Hi. uh. Is this Captain Martin's residence?

Ethan: *(skeptical)* Yes..

Noor: Ethan Martin?

Ethan: Yes... Who are you?

Noor: Ethan?

Ethan: ... Please leave.

Noor: You're Ethan?? Ethan Martin?

Ethan: Leave me alone!

(closes door)

Noor: Captain Martin! It's very important that I speak with you.

Ethan: *(from the other side of the close door)* Go away!

Noor: Please open the door. I'm Noor. Naima's sister. Naima Al-Kaisi. You got to know her during your last deployment in Marja. Hai Allah! I can't believe I finally found you! Captain Martin, will you please open the door? I'm not here from the Army. I'm here for my sister. I have a letter here, the last letter Naima wrote. She never got to send it to you. It's why I came. . .

Ethan stands frozen in his apartment. Noor looks around. Doesn't know what to do. she leaves.

Ethan

Lights come up on Ethan's living room. Ethan stands at his window, looking outside. Mo appears behind him. She glances over his shoulder, then goes to sit on his couch, picks up his laptop, and leisurely browses through it.

Mo: I can't believe you would slam the door on Naima's sister? And to think, she was holding the last letter Naima ever wrote to you. Weren't you in the least bit curious?

Ethan: So what, you just come and go as you please?

Mo: No, I come and go as YOU please.

Ethan: If you're just gonna sit there and judge me-

Mo: No need for threats. Better get used to this coming and going. "All conditioned things are impermanent"...Heck - if I had a choice whether I could come or go - believe me I would *go*. Your mind and your little abode here is not exactly Mr. Roger's Neighborhood.

Ethan: (*looking at the door*) And who the hell does that woman think she is?

Mo: Don't hate the messenger!

Ethan: Fuck Scott Matthews. Big Hero. Died *trying* to save my woman. Didn't fuckin save her or save himself so what's the big commemoration about.

Mo: ... I'm speechless... and that's a first in a long time.

Ethan: Some Gandhi.

Mo: Some Soldier.

Ethan: Yeah well.

Mo: Namaste...

Ethan: Giving up so easy on me?

Mo: I'm not giving up -

Ethan: Then tell me how you did it.... I want to know how you did it...

Mo: Did what?

Ethan: How did you become a soldier of peace.

Mo: It was a long violent journey Ethan.

Ethan: You think I can't handle violence?

Mo: Its really not about the violence..

Ethan: I can't even open the fuckin door... *(breaks down)* spell it out for me....

Mo: Where's the fun in spelling it out for you? *(Ethan groans)* Trust your truth, take your chances and see what happens.. I *will* tell you that I too began with a belief in the army.

Ethan: Yes. Right. The Army. I wanted to meet women. To travel. To understand people who lived outside of Arkansas...

Mo: I don't blame you - if I lived in Arkansas... *(off of Ethan's look)* ...Well you did meet a woman -the woman- your Naima. she changed your life.

Ethan: Yeah, and then I lost her to this.. It's like the thing that brought us together..... War fucking sucks.

Mo: You're wise for your age you know that?

Ethan: I am?

Mo: Yes, I mean look at you...barely twenty six and already on a journey to peace. I should be reading *your* books.

Ethan: yeah except I've locked myself in this cage for like two months.

Mo: You're wise to be grieving. But not so wise to be doing it alone.

Ethan: I don't even know how to talk to a human being anymore.

Mo: So you have placed yourself in solitary confinement? Where you shall never connect with another living soul? In my country that is only used as the most horrible of punishments.

Ethan: Yeah... In my country too.

Mo: Violence against others – I've seen all kinds really. Army brutality – tribal warfare – mob riots– but violence against *oneself* – to this I am a first time witness.

Ethan: Violence to oneself.

Mo: And as I have said: An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind.

Mo picks up Ethan's laptop again

Ethan: What are you doing?

Mo: Checking your itunes. You need to step up your music game.

Ethan: ... Whatever.

Mo: OMG I love this one! (she clicks the play icon, *turning on Bruce Springsteen's "My home Town"*)

Ethan: What?

Mo: *My Home Town!* I Looove this song!! (*begins Mimicking a guitar*)

Ethan: Wait. *You* love the Boss?

Mo: Mister, this man might be talking about Jersey but it takes me right to my own bapu's village in India, you know what I mean? Right to the soul you know what I mean?
(sings) *...Into the bus stop to pick up a paper for my old man
I'd sit on his lap in that big old Buick and steer as we drove through town
He'd tousle my hair and say son take a good look around
this is your hometown, this is your home town
this is your hometown, this is your hometown.*

Ethan starts to laugh....he laughs so loud that Noor, who has returned to his doorstep, hears him.

There is a loud knock at the door - Ethan looks at Mo, who stops the music. A note is suddenly slipped under the door. They both stare at it.

Mo: Wow lookie here..

Ethan: What the hell?

Mo: What does it say?

Ethan: (*goes and slowly takes the piece of paper: reads to Mo*)

Dear Capt. Ethan Martin,

I understand your pain. I loved her so much so. I simply want to deliver what belongs to you. It is of great importance to Naima. And to me.

Best, Noor

(Yells toward the door) So deliver the damn letter, then!! (goes back to couch) She can just slip it under the door... What does she want from me?

Naima

Lights up on Ethan's living room. Ethan watches Mo as she tidies up his living room.

Ethan: What are you doing?

Mo: Shouldn't you clean yourself up before you let anyone in?

Ethan: I haven't said I was letting anyone in.

Mo: What is her name, Noor? That little thing is so sweet. She's American Afghani?

Ethan: I suppose so. Naima was.

Mo: She's muslim?

Ethan: Yeah. Her family was very progressive.

Mo: Persistent too...(*motions toward the door*)

Ethan: Oh yeah, her father worked for our government in DC. He was a strong advocate for the Islamic peace movement, a poet. Inventor.

Mo: I bet. Runs in the family.

Ethan: Yeah...

Mo: You got so proud when you said that.

pause

Ethan: I am... Proud.

Mo: She was proud of you too!

Ethan: I know! And I always found it so crazy that she said that! I was just a paratrooper, following orders, trying to make the best of what I had –

Mo: But she saw you for your visions Ethan- your dreams

Ethan: The army was just a stepping-stone. I had bigger dreams.

Mo: And you have heart!

Ethan: *No. Scott Matthews had heart...*

Mo: *Is that coming from envy or compassion?*

Ethan: Does it matter?

Mo: It would matter to Naima.

Ethan: What do you think?

Mo: What would Naima think?

Ethan: I am sick of your socratic method.

Mo: Don't worry, I'm not going to be around much longer..

Ethan: ..compassion. Naima she..

Mo: She believed in bridges. Built over the rivers of languages.

Ethan: Her name meant tranquil.....

Noor has returned. She knocks on the door. Mo looks to Ethan

Ethan: ... no.

Mo: That is fine. *(beat)* her name meant tranquil...really...

Ethan: Yeah... Her name was music, her face was sculpture, her voice was hope.

Mo: Beautiful...

Ethan: Beautiful isn't the half of it. She was inspiration.

Mo: *(beginning to fade)* Yes...

Noor Knocks

Ethan: When my sense of humanity was so compromised, she made me believe everything would be alright...

Mo: *(fading)* There, see... there she is ...

Ethan: ... like the world maybe isn't as fucked up as it seems... I could have saved her life... had I still been on the ground...

Mo: But you haven't lost her,

Ethan: ...and I can't forget her.

Mo: otherwise you might as well be a ghost ..

Ethan realizes Mo has stopped responding. He looks around and she is gone.

Noor knocks again, then begins to talk from outside.

Noor: Capt. Martin? Look, I won't bother you again. I just hoped you would eventually... (slides Naima's letter under the door) Just take it, it was the last letter Niama wrote...it belongs to you... (begins to leave, but stops herself) The memorial service is in two days. For Scott Matthews, the marine who died trying to save her.....My family was hoping...

Ethan opens the door.

Noor: Captain Martin.

Ethan: Noor.

Noor: Can I come in?

Ethan steps out of his apartment, passes her and stops.

Ethan: Let's take a walk.

Ethan walks off. Noor follows.

The Service

Lights come up on the setting from the play's beginning - the memorial. All characters are seated, except for Nate, who has not yet arrived. Ethan stands a few feet from the service entrance, reading his letter in silence. Nate arrives, stopping feet away from Ethan. He takes in the memorial space, but won't enter. Nate and Ethan acknowledge each other's presence. Ethan considers how he might break the ice.

Ethan: You look tired.

Nate: ... Yeah.

Ethan: It is kinda early i guess.

Nate: ...

Ethan: I don't even know if I should go in. What do you think?

Nate: ... I'm sorry, but do I know you?

Ethan: Me? Nah, I'm just... *(starts to laugh)* I'm just tryin' to be social. *I'm* sorry.

Nate: Gotcha...

(awkward pause. Nate feels guilty)

Nate: How do you know Scotty?

Ethan: *(holds out Naima's letter)* He died trying to save *her*.

Nate: Is that right? Who's *She*?

Ethan: Naima. *(Opens the letter)* Listen to this, "Ethan, what is home like? Who is looking after you? Your unit takes good care of me, and so I can't complain. All that is missing is you. But I am happy, too embraced by life to worry about death. Content with your spirit alone. And so I am at peace, and wish you the same. I love you." ... It's good to know that my boys took care of her.

Nate: ... Yeah.

Ethan: And Scott Matthews, I don't even know this dude. He took care of her too.

Nate: ... You can argue that.

Ethan: Nah this isn't an argument. Especially if you knew Naima. The man's a hero... It was a pleasure talking to you. *(Ethan enters the space)*

Nate processes the conversation he just had, then takes in the space once again. He has experienced a profound perspective. He enters the memorial space, where Donovan, standing at the front and mid-speech, immediately notices. They share a look of acknowledgement.

Nate then takes the empty seat next to Matty and quietly fist bumps him.

Lights go out.

-End of Play-