

FAMILY DINNER

Written by
Curt Strickland

Curt@curtsview.com
Address: 214 Rogers Dr.
Stoughton, Ma. 02072
781-718-4489

Family Dinner
Copyright 2021
By Curtis Strickland

Curt@curtsview.com
Address: 214 Rogers Dr.
Stoughton, Ma. 02072
781-718-4489

FAMILY DINNER

AJAX BY SOPHOCLES:

Ajax: "...if only I could die after I had killed..."

King Hedley II by August Wilson:

Elmore: "See, when you pulled that trigger you done something. You done something more than most other people. You know more about life 'cause you done been to that part of it. Most people don't never get over on that side...that part of life."

King: "Anybody kill somebody is living without God. You ain't got no right to pray."

Elmore: "Anybody kill somebody is on their own."

Lies kill, and not just the body. Curt Strickland

TITLE: FAMILY DINNER

Character Breakdown:

MARTHA MACARTHY: Around 75 years old, married to the Colonel, victim of domestic abuse both verbal and physical--physical in the early part of their 50 year marriage.

COLONEL MACARTHY: Around 75 years old, married to Martha, and is haunted by his war memories. He is dying of lung cancer, after having worked in a factory most of his life.

KAREN MACARTHY: Martha's and the Colonel's daughter, fifty eight years old, and a lawyer.

BOBBY MACARTHY: Around 55 years old, a Vietnam vet who is a drug addict, resented by his father and coddled by his mother. He is mired in the trauma of his war experience and seeks a measure of peace, while also working to stop his son from returning to Iraq.

DYLAN MACARTHY: 23 years old, the son of Bobby and an Iraq war veteran who wants to re-enlist and re-unite with his brothers in Iraq.

RICHARD: Around 78 years of age, a war buddy of the Colonel who has remained close to the Colonel and Martha over the years.

COMMANDING OFFICER: Around 50 years old, can be played by same actor as Richard.

Karen, Bobby, Martha, and the Colonel all play themselves in a flashback scene when they were 25 years younger.

TIME: 2005, the Colonel's 75th birthday celebration.

SETTINGS: The home of Martha and the Colonel. It is a home build in the 60's and still has the remnants of that style lingering like a black cloud, as if time had stood still. The house is in West Virginia where there is a Dow Chemical plant.

To the right is a small alcove connected to the front door. Stage left is a small bedroom, with a vertical wall to give it some separation with the main living room. The living room is center stage, populated with basic furniture: couch, chairs, coffee table, a couple of tables for lamps, and the Colonel's wheelchair, an oxygen tank beside it.

During the play, the Colonel will insert and remove his oxygen tubes into his nose as the drama intensifies or abates.

There is also a mobile wall, with around 12 framed pictures of soldiers in uniform, all the sons of the Colonel and his factory's brothers. This wall is wheeled onto the stage at the appropriate times.

ACT I SCENE I

The year is 1946. The scene is an Army base, in the office of the COMMANDER. The action occurs in a small corner of the stage, the rest of the stage is dark. MARTHA MACARTHY, around 23 years of age, is waiting in a chair in reception, her face spotted with red splotches, the result of domestic abuse from her husband, the Colonel. The COMMANDER rises, comes out from behind his desk.

COMMANDER

I can see you now...Have a seat.

MARTHA comes in and sits, showing some discomfort as she lowers herself into a seat in front of the Commander's desk.

COMMANDER (CONT'D)

(Cold, unemotional)

What can I do for you Mrs.

McCarthy?

MARTHA

Well, I have a situation with my husband and I was hoping the Army could help.

COMMANDER

Tell me.

MARTHA

He beats me, and I'm afraid he's gonna kill me.

(Pause)

COMMANDER

Nobody's dying here. And I need you to be very careful about what you're saying about our soldiers. These men have come back from the war damaged, traumatized. They need time to heal. They defeated the Nazi's for god sakes.

MARTHA

He had me in a choke hold last night. I thought I was gonna die.

(On the verge of breaking)

COMMANDER

You need to calm yourself.

MARTHA

He was choking me to death.

COMMANDER

Did anybody witness this?

MARTHA

My two-year old son, and it wasn't the first time.

COMMANDER

Well, right now it's a he said, she said. If I bring in your husband, what's he gonna say? I understand what you're saying, but I can't emphasized this enough: these men sacrificed for our country; they're heroes. They deserve our undying gratitude and support.

MARTHA

(Enraged)

Heroes don't beat women.

COMMANDER

You need to calm down. Do I need to call security?

MARTHA

Are they gonna beat me up too? Is that why Mrs. Rosen is in your psychiatric ward--she wouldn't stay calm about the beatings?

COMMANDER

I can't talk about Mrs. Rosen.

MARTHA

I came here as a last resort sir.

COMMANDER

The military is not in the habit of getting involved in the living rooms of its soldiers. Assuming what you said is true, have you looked at how you might be triggering this?

MARTHA

(Incredulous)

What?

COMMANDER

Perhaps there is some action you do that sets him off, or however you want to describe it.

MARTHA

I describe it as violence. Am I being blamed for the fact my husband beats me?

COMMANDER

There's no blame here. I just want you to look if there is any action you do that might set him off?

A beat.

MARTHA

OK, I got one: I overcooked his steak the other night and he literally punched me in the face. Is that what you're talking about, actions like over-cooking steak?

COMMANDER

You're being way too emotional.

A beat.

MARTHA

I'm gonna let you in on a little secret: women can get very emotional when they are being beaten. Was Mrs. Rosen being too emotional? Is that why she is locked up in your psychiatric unit?

COMMANDER

We can't discuss patients currently under our care.

MARTHA

How many shock treatments have you given Mrs. Rosen? I bet she's not emotional anymore.

COMMANDER

This needs to stop. And I mean now.

She lowers her head and tries not to cry. The commander stands up, appears unsettled.

We have to care for these men. They need to heal. This nation owes them a debt of gratitude for their sacrifices. You need to understand that; these men need to heal.

Martha stands up, stares at the Commander for a moment, fighting back emotions, and exit

ACT I SCENE II

The year is 2005. MARTHA, much older now, enters from the alcove, having just returned from Church. She is dressed up, sporting a stylist hat. She goes into the bedroom and returns, pushing a suitcase which she hides behind a chair. At that point, the COLONEL walks in, noticing her rolling the suitcase.

COLONEL

What's that?

MARTHA

What's what?

COLONEL

The suitcase.

MARTHA

Just tidying up.

COLONEL

The suitcase doesn't go there.

MARTHA

I wish you had joined me in church
this morning, the priest truly
outdid himself today with his
sermon on forgiveness.

She looks over and sees that the COLONEL is dressed in his old Army uniform from the 2nd World War, his medals pinned to his lapel. The Colonel sits down in his chair, an oxygen tank to its side, and inserts breathing tubes into his nose. It is Martha's and the Colonel's 50th wedding anniversary.

Martha presents a nervous energy, tip-toeing around the Colonel, a lifelong habit.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

My, I haven't seen that uniform in
ages.

COLONEL

Well, since our grandson will be
signing up to go back to Iraq, I
thought it would be a good time to
show off my metals. I think he'll
get a kick out of them.

MARTHA

You've always been his hero, maybe
why he joined the Army. And that
uniform: you always looked so
handsome in a uniform.

COLONEL

Our grandson is a 5th generation
McCarthy soldier. I'm proud of that
boy.

(MORE)

COLONEL (CONT'D)

You spend time in the military, in combat, it makes a man out of you. And when you come back, you can write your own ticket.

A beat.

MARTHA

There's something I don't understand: why is our grandson reenlisting? He fulfilled his obligation.

COLONEL

Soldiering is never about obligation; it's about duty, a higher calling.

MARTHA

I just think there is no reason for us to sacrifice our grandson when we have already sacrificed our son.

COLONEL

You talk about Bobby like he's dead.

MARTHA

Bobby was never the same after Vietnam.

COLONEL

War has a cost. That's part of the deal. It was Bobby's duty to go, to serve. There is no higher purpose.

MARTHA

A beat.

I'll never forgive myself for letting Bobby enlist. I hope he can forgive us someday.

COLONEL

Forgive us for what? What happened to Bobby is not my fault. All I did was try to make a man out of him, teach him how to follow orders.

MARTHA

And how'd that turn out?

COLONEL

What does that mean?

MARTHA

Look at Bobby now. You made a man out of him alright.

COLONEL

I did everything I could for that boy.

MARTHA

Maybe if he hadn't gone to Vietnam, things might of turned out different for him. And maybe Dylan shouldn't be going back to Iraq. It would break my heart if he came back from the war like Bobby.

COLONEL

Dylan's a soldier; and soldiers do their duty....There's something you should know: Dylan's been stop-loss.

MARTHA

What does that mean?

COLONEL

It's when the Army is short of soldiers, they force enlisted men into doing another tour.

MARTHA

They can do that?

COLONEL

Yes.

(Pause)

MARTHA

But it's our grandson. I need to know that what he is fighting for is noble. We lost Bobby to a lie; I'm not gonna lose Dylan to another lie.

COLONEL

What are you talking about?

MARTHA

They lied about Vietnam and it feels like they're lying about Iraq.

COLONEL

Don't listen to that garbage.

MARTHA

Let me be clear: I'm not sacrificing our grandson to another big lie.

COLONEL

Bush and Chaney wouldn't lie. Who's telling you all this?

A beat.

MARTHA

A mother can feel these things. Our son said he won't allow Dylan to go back to Iraq. He says Dylan is gonna break the cycle.

COLONEL

What cycle?

MARTHA

That's the only reason Bobby is coming tonight, to stop Dylan from re-enlisting.

COLONEL

He abandoned that kid, and now all of a sudden he wants to be a Dad? We practically raised that kid and all of a sudden he wants to be father of the year?

A beat.

MARTHA

I stood silent that night. I hope Bobby can forgive me some day.

COLONEL

We're not talking about that night.

MARTHA

We sacrificed our son, and for what? FOR WHAT? And now our grandson. When does it stop? And why are we in Iraq in the first place?

COLONEL

Weapons of mass destruction.

Martha stares at him, suppressing her anger. The Colonel picks up his oxygen tube and inserts it into his nose.

The actors freeze and the back screen lights up with the below quotes.

"The PENTAGON PAPERS revealed that senior officials asserted in the 1960s that the Vietcong were dying in record numbers, enemy leadership was decapitated and there was "light at the end of the tunnel." Defense Secretary Robert McNamara and his commanders, who knew the reality, continuously called for even more force from 1961 to 1969."

"H.R. McMaster, in his classic study of Vietnam decision making, excoriated the military for not bringing the truth to President Lyndon Johnson, for presenting Johnson with the "lies that led to Vietnam."

PENTAGON PAPERS

The screen goes blank and the actors continue their roles.

ACT I SCENE III

The year is 1968. The action takes place in the McCarthy living room. The setting is reflective of 1968, with a small TV, coasters, Life magazines, and a self-made poster on a stick labelled: STOP THE GENOCIDE.

The spotlight focuses in on the four main characters, who are all twenty-five years younger. The rest of the stage is in shadows. As the scene opens, Martha is handing out appetizers, including some bean dip.

KAREN

Bobby, you don't have to go to Vietnam.

BOBBY

I was drafted.

COLONEL (TO KAREN)

You have no say in this.

KAREN

Yeah I do; he's my brother. Bobby, you have a choice. I know people in Canada that can take you in, give you a job. You don't have to do this.

BOBBY

This is what I'm suppose to do. It's my duty.

Bobby is in anguish, conflicted. A beat.

KAREN

We are bombing villages over there, killing women and children, poisoning their farms with Napalm. It's genocide.

BOBBY

Why does she say that Dad?

COLONEL

It's a lie. Americans don't do those things; the gooks do those things. She's twisting it around.
(MORE)

COLONEL (CONT'D)

We're the good guys; don't let her
turn this around with lies.

KAREN

Whether you believe it or not, it's
true: atrocities are being
committed by American soldiers.

COLONEL

Don't listen to her son. It's your
patriotic duty. There's nothing
more sacred.

MARTHA

(Tentatively, meekly)
Maybe you should listen to your
sister Bobby.

COLONEL

You stay the fuck out of this.

KAREN

Don't talk to her like that.

MARTHA

(Meekly)
It's OK.

KAREN

It's not OK.

BOBBY

I just want to do the right thing
for everybody.

KAREN

That's not how this thing works
Bobby.

COLONEL

It's a privilege and an honor to fight for our country, perhaps the highest calling there is.

KAREN

Bobby: women and children are being slaughtered, raped. Is that how you wanna prove your manhood?

BOBBY

(Pause, in anguish)

I just wanna do the right thing.

COLONEL

Then you know what to do son.

KAREN

Why is it so important for Bobby to serve? I don't get it. This is your son. You're suppose to protect him, not serve him up to some false prophet to be slaughtered.

COLONEL

You don't get it cause you hate this country.

KAREN

I love this country. That's why I'm telling my brother not to participate in American made genocide. This I know: if Bobby goes over there he will come back with permanent scars.

COLONEL

When Bobby comes back, I'll set him up with a good paying union job. He can work in the factory, start a family, buy a home. He won't have any time for nightmares.

(MORE)

COLONEL (CONT'D)

He'll be a war hero, with a good paying union job, ready to write his own ticket.

KAREN

He's not gunna work in the factory. It's too unhealthy.

COLONEL

We're making a product, Agent Orange, that will end the war, save lives. The President, General Westmorland, have all said this is gonna win the war. It's patriotism, something you will never understand.

KAREN

You're manufacturing poison, not patriotism.

COLONEL

The factory and the VA have all guaranteed it is safe. That's good enough for me, and it's the best paying job in this town. Its union. Why wouldn't he wanna work there?

MARTHA

Bobby, you can work anywhere you want, become anything you want.

COLONEL

You're not part of this discussion.

KAREN

Sure she is. This is her son.

COLONEL (TO MARTHA)

Whose side are you on?

KAREN

She's on her son's side. He's not gonna work in your factory of death.

COLONEL

It was good enough for me; it should be good enough for my son. How do you think we own a home, a car? How do you think your college is paid for? That factory has given you everything.

KAREN

Because of that factory, women and children are being poisoned. Dad, Dow is lying, and the government is part of the cover-up.

COLONEL

They wouldn't lie.

KAREN

If I was making the profits Dow was making, I'd probably lie too.

BOBBY

Maybe Dad's right--it's my duty.

KAREN

You decide what your duty is. Don't let him bully you into some false duty.

BOBBY

Mom?

MARTHA

Maybe you should listen to your sister.

The Colonel threatens to hit his wife. Fighting back tears, Martha begins to leave the room in shame, but holds back. Bobby grabs him, pulls him away from Martha.

BOBBY

What the hell you doing?

KAREN

(Defiant, to the father.)
You coward. You need to leave him
Mom.

BOBBY

Mom, you OK?

MARTHA

Martha walks away.

I'm fine.

COLONEL (TO MARTHA)

(Unapologetic)
Don't you ever do that again. I'm
the man of this house. Don't you
ever fuckin' forget it.

KAREN

Mom, you need to move out.

COLONEL

I don't wanna hear another word out
of you Karen.

KAREN

I don't care what you want. Mom,
you need to move out like
yesterday.

MARTHA

And where am I supposed to go?
Who's gonna support me? You? I was
out of line. You act like he does
this all the time.

COLONEL

Bobby, you're going to serve your
country. That's an order. I didn't
raise you to be a coward; I raised
you to be a man, and a man does his
duty, no questions asked.

Bobby looks at him, defeated.

BOBBY

What should I do Mom?

KAREN

Bobby, let me drive you to Canada.

BOBBY

(In anguish, pause)

Mom?

MARTHA

Maybe you need the Army, like your
father said. Maybe things will be
better for you if you do this.

KAREN

(Forceful)

This is your son. Why are you
offering him up?

COLONEL

You ready son?

KAREN

Bobby don't.

COLONEL

Let's go son. You don't want to be late for induction.

MARTHA

Maybe this will be for the best Bobby.

COLONEL

Lets go.

Bobby drops his head and gathers his bags.

MARTHA

No, wait.

BOBBY

It's OK Mom. Dad's right. I need to do this.

Bobby and the Colonel exit. Martha sits down, silent. A beat.

MARTHA

What did I just do?

KAREN

You sent your son to be executed... if he is lucky.

The lights fade and shine on the Colonel. After a few beats, the Colonel, holding a framed picture of Bobby, plus a hammer and a hook, walks over to the picture wall and hangs Bobby's picture. He kneels, crosses himself, and says a silent prayer.

THE ACTORS LEAVE THE STAGE AND THE SCREEN ON THE BACK WALL DISPLAYS THE BELOW TWO QUOTES.

"THERE WAS NO DOUBT THAT SADDAM HUSSEIN HAS WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION." DICK CHANEY

"THE INFORMANT WAS SOON DISCREDITED, AND THE URANIUM DOCUMENTS WERE DISCOVERED TO BE OBVIOUS FAKES, BUT THE WHEELS WERE ALREADY IN MOTION. IN 2002, PRESIDENT BUSH TOLD THE COUNTRY THAT SADDAM NOT ONLY HAD STOCKPILED DEADLY CHEMICAL AND BIOLOGICAL AGENTS, BUT THAT HE HAD ALSO BEEN BUILDING NUCLEAR BOMBS. IN 2003 THE UNITED STATES LAUNCHED WAR AGAINST IRAQ. IT'S NOT CLEAR WHO KNEW THE EVIDENCE FOR WMDS WERE FALSE, OR WHEN THEY KNEW IT. REGARDLESS, THE FINANCIAL AND HUMAN COST WAS DEVASTATING."

The lights come back on the stage, the Colonel and Martha continuing their conversation.

COLONEL

How 'bout pouring me a drink?

MARTHA

You know what the doctor says.

COLONEL

(Angry and forceful)

I didn't ask you what the doctor said. (Furious) Pour me a fucking drink.

Martha is flustered, walks over to the liquor cabinet mumbling to herself as she makes his drink. She puts ice in his glass.

COLONEL (CONT'D)

No ice.

MARTHA

Just a couple of cubes. You shouldn't be drinking this straight.

COLONEL

I SAID NO FUCKIN' ICE...
(Suddenly with a pained
look)

I'm sorry. It helps with the pain.

Martha's cell phone rings. She picks it up.

MARTHA

Hello...yes, I'm Bobby's mother...I'll tell him as soon as I see him. He's coming over tonight...Thank you for calling.

COLONEL

Who was that?

MARTHA

Bobby's doctor. Said she's been trying to get ahold of him for three days. I'm the emergency contact.

Martha and the Colonel digest this information. Martha pours out the ice and pours the scotch into the glass. She brings his drink over.

COLONEL

Who's all coming?

MARTHA

The kids, and your old Army buddy
Richard.

COLONEL

Why would you invite him?

MARTHA

I just thought it'd be nice. I
always thought he was the nicest
man.

COLONEL

How the hell you get a hold of him?

A beat. The Colonel looks over his wife with deep scrutiny.

MARTHA

Oh, I don't know. He's here for
some reunion. You should go to
those reunions, get yourself out of
the house.

COLONEL

All they talk about are the good
old days. I don't remember them as
the good old days. The good old
days are what gives me my
nightmares...Freshen up my drink.

MARTHA

Now it's a long night, and your
Doctor...

COLONEL

This isn't a debate. Get me my
fuckin' drink.

(MORE)

COLONEL (CONT'D)

I got six months to live and I'm sure as hell not going on any wagon.

MARTHA

Please don't say that. I just wanna have a nice evening, a nice family dinner where everyone gets along.

She cowers away and begins to fix him his drink. He is upset and puts the oxygen tube back into his nose. He stares at her.

COLONEL

What time will our grandson arrive?

MARTHA

He said around 7.

COLONEL

That's a good kid. It was an honor to take him to the recruiter's office three years ago, just like I did with Bobby.

A beat.

MARTHA

I just wish you wouldn't...be so hard on your son--at least not tonight. I really think he is better. He's trying; I know that.

COLONEL

I love my son, but he broke my heart. I did the best that I could. I raised him to love this country. But I can't even look at him anymore because I can't help him and that breaks my heart.

MARTHA
(MORE)

COLONEL (CONT'D)

(Straining for optimism)
Bobby's gonna make it back this
time. He'll be the old Bobby; I
just know it.

A beat.

COLONEL (CONT'D)

You never told me how you got a
hold of Richard.

*Before she can answer, BOBBY enters from the front door,
stage right, Martha noticing him first. His personality, his
energy, and his charm lights up the room.*

*Martha walks up to him after he enters. Bobby spreads his
arms wide and gives his mother a big hug.*

MARTHA

Hello dear. I'm so happy you made
it.

BOBBY

Let's dance Mom.

*He then starts spinning her around, leading her in a dance,
which she resists, embarrassed, but laughs all the while. She
breaks off the dance, still giggling. Bobby turns towards his
father. KAREN enters at this point, standing, observing the
dance spectacle.*

KAREN

Hey Bobby.

They hug.

Mom.

They hug.

Martha escorts Karen into the living room. With enthusiasm.

MARTHA

Look who's here.

Karen walks over and gives her father a hug.

KAREN

Hey Dad. You're looking good.

COLONEL

I look like shit, but thanks for lying.

Colonel gives a smile.

MARTHA

Doesn't she look good?

COLONEL

She always looks good. How's the firm?

KAREN

Our Dow Chemical case is ramping up.

COLONEL

When are you gonna join one of those big firms in New York so you can make some real money?

A beat.

KAREN

I do alright Dad. I need to talk to you about the suit though.

COLONEL

I've said all I'm gonna say to your lawyers.

A beat.

KAREN

How's the rashes and nausea?

COLONEL

They're never gonna go away. I just wish the headaches would stop.

When's my grandson gonna be here?

MARTHA

He's on his way.

BOBBY

Dad, what's with the uni? Are we invading Granada again?

Colonel gives him a frosted stare.

MARTHA

Your doctor called, said it was important. She wants you to call right away.

BOBBY

Everything is a four alarm fire with them. She probably wants to tell me that my constant headaches are all in my head. That's what the VA doctors tell all the Vietnam vets now--the rashes, the nausea, the memory loss: all in our fuckin' heads. But this is a celebration; who's serving drinks?

KAREN

I thought you were in rehab.

BOBBY

I'm doing my own rehab.

KAREN

Can't wait to see how that turns out.

BOBBY

Hey, this is a special anniversary. Why is everybody so glum?

COLONEL

Where you working now Bobby?

BOBBY

If you must know: it just so happens I find myself between jobs at the moment.

KAREN

That's a shocker. I guess that gives you plenty of time to do your rehab program.

MARTHA

Be nice Karen. I'm sure Bobby has some jobs lined up.

BOBBY

Phone's ringing off the hook. I just play my Vietnam Veteran's trump card and the doors swing wide open.

Bobby, who has walked over toward the suitcase, slides it out.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

Somebody going on a trip?

MARTHA

Put that back.

Martha walks over and puts the suitcase back behind the chair.

BOBBY

OK Mom. Not saying a word.

Bobby takes off his jacket, revealing a holster with a gun. He places the jacket on a table and then removes the holster and places it on his jacket. The family freezes, staring at Bobby. Martha stares at the gun and Bobby, mortified. The Colonel looks on with disgust, slowly shaking his head.

KAREN

Since when do you carry a gun?

BOBBY

Since I started living in crime-infested neighborhoods.

KAREN

You live in the suburbs, in a townhouse, with neighborhood patrols.

COLONEL

(Firmly, like a drill sergeant)

Put the gun away Bobby...NOW!

BOBBY

I'm just exercising my 2nd amendment rights. You never know when some crazed, doped-up veteran starts shooting up some mall.

COLONEL

Now!

Bobby hesitates, then places the gun and holster underneath his jacket.

BOBBY

When's my son getting here?

MARTHA

He said he'd be here by seven...Bobby, there's something you should know: Dylan's been stopped-lossed.

A beat.

BOBBY

Those bastards.

COLONEL

In this house, we respect the military.

BOBBY

I just wanna make this very clear to everyone: this is the only reason I'm here: my son is not going back to Iraq. So whatever sales pitch you're planning to use to manipulate him into going back, you can forget it.

COLONEL

You have no say in this.

BOBBY

He's my son!

MARTHA

Bobby, this night is not about Dylan. We're gonna have a nice family dinner celebrating our 50th wedding anniversary.

COLONEL

Then why is Richard coming?

MARTHA

(Assertive)

You know what, I invited him so I don't wanna hear another word.

BOBBY

LISTEN EVERYBODY: MY SON WILL NOT BE GOING BACK TO IRAQ. IS THAT FUCKIN' CLEAR?

A beat, as everyone is a bit startled by the passion of Bobby's last statement.

COLONEL

His men need him; his country has called him to duty. And just to be clear, he will be reenlisting. That's what a McCarthy man does. He fulfills his duty, the oath he took.

BOBBY

His men don't need him. They are perfectly capable of killing innocent women and children themselves.

MARTHA

Stop it--NOW!

A beat.

KAREN

He shouldn't go back. A lot of soldiers are refusing the stop-loss. Some are ending up in Canada.

COLONEL

Over my dead body he goes to Canada.

BOBBY

He's not a soldier; he's a pawn, just like I was.

MARTHA

No more Bobby. We're not doing this now. Listen, I want everyone to have some of this dip I made.

Martha picks up a tray of appetizers and starts offering it to everyone, attempting to defuse the situation, trying to bring it back to small talk.

BOBBY

Yes, let's everyone have some bean dip; let's not talk about the genocide.

COLONEL

Well, we all did things. In war you do things. That's the nature of war. You do things and I won't apologize. I followed orders.

BOBBY

(Solemn)

Yes, we all did things Dad. We had no choice. I followed orders too, and nobody gets out of there whole.

Long pause. A fleeting moment of connection as they look at each other with understanding.

The actors freeze and
 a screen lights up on
 the back wall
 revealing the below
 quotes:

"On March 16, 1968, during a roughly four-hour operation in the Vietnamese Village of Son My, American soldiers killed approximately 504 civilians, including pregnant women and infants, gang-raped women and burned a village to ashes. Calley, though a low-ranking officer in Charlie Company, stood out because of the sheer number of civilians he was accused of killing and ordering killed."

"The most disturbing thing I saw was one boy and this is what haunts me...A boy with his arms shot off, shot up and hanging on and he just had this bewildered look on his face like what did I do, what's wrong...he couldn't comprehend."

Fred Wilmer. "Charlie Company"

The screen goes blank and the actors resume the play.

The following conversation takes place in the alcove, away from the Colonel's sight and hearing, the spotlight shining on Martha and KAREN. Bobby has moved off stage. During Karen's and Martha's conversation, the Colonel tries to get up, but is racked by pain.

He puts the oxygen tube back into his nose and takes a deep swig of his drink, as he recovers his breathe.

KAREN

How's Dad's breathing?

MARTHA

It's worse. He's needing more and more oxygen.

KAREN

How long?

MARTHA

Doctors are saying six months.

A beat,

KAREN

I'm sorry. You doing OK?

MARTHA

I'll be fine. You have to think positive. How's work?

KAREN

Busy. We're going after Dow Chemical.

A beat.

MARTHA

Now why would you sue your father's factory? People depend on those jobs. It's their livelihood?

KAREN

Mom, these jobs are literally killing the workers. Literally.

MARTHA

You don't know that.

KAREN

Yeah, I do. We tested the workers and most of them are filled with toxic chemicals.

MARTHA

Dow Chemical is the largest employer in this town, the last company standing. GM, the steel mill, the rug factory all left. If you shut the factory down, what do you think happens to these men? What do you think happens to this town?

KAREN

I'm saving them from themselves.

MARTHA

They don't need a savior; they need jobs. They need a place to go that will give them a paycheck, give them pride, dignity. They're not looking for a handout, and they would never sign up for welfare. They have too much pride. And maybe they choose to work in the factory, no matter what the conditions. It's their choice, because they're probably supporting a family and there was no other options. These men aren't interested in your little crusade, so stop playing God. Factory work are all that these men know. Why do you wanna take away that last shred of dignity?

KAREN

Their dignity will be restored when they get their check from the settlement.

MARTHA

A check won't restore their pride. By the time they get a check, they'll be dead. You know Dow will stretch this out for decades.

KAREN

I won't let that happen.

MARTHA

You don't have the power.

KAREN

Watch me. Mom, all these workers with cancer, their kids with birth defects. It never should of happened. Dow knew and they exposed the workers anyway. I just wanna help Dad; he doesn't deserve this.

MARTHA

Maybe he doesn't want your help. Where do you think the money came from to pay for your law school? You ever think of that? You should be grateful for Dow.

KAREN

I can't sweep this under the rug. Not only was it the factory workers, but our soldiers were exposed to Dow's products. These men served their country, and all the VA and Dow can do is wait for them to die so they won't have to take responsibility. It's shameful.

(MORE)

KAREN (CONT'D)

And it's not just American soldiers, it's the Vietnamese and their toxic farmland, as well as their deformed children.

MARTHA

We're not talking about this tonight. It's my 50th wedding anniversary. I just want us all to have a nice family dinner, no arguments or upsets.

KAREN

OK Mom. But I still need to talk to him at some point. The factory needs to take responsibility.

MARTHA

The factory has been good to us, and the community.

KAREN

Mom, we're living in a cancer cluster.

MARTHA

You don't know that.

KAREN

Yeah, I do.

MARTHA

I'll tell you what the factory gave us: it gave us a living; it gave us this home, a roof over our heads. It gave us respect; it gave us pride.

KAREN

At what cost Mom? At what cost?
They were the victims Mom, these
sick men were the kids we grew up
with, Bobby's friends, kids who
answered the call for their
country, and who either died in
Vietnam or are dying now because of
the poison in that factory, poison
the military knew to be deadly. I
know of a unit where more died from
Agent Orange than died in combat. I
could never help Bobby, but I could
help other veterans. I was always
pro-veteran, but anti-war. And now
they're being flushed away, with
Dow Chemical waiting for them to
die. Mom, I'm not gonna let them
get away with it.

DOW KNEW, AND THEY BURIED IT, AND
MY FATHER IS DYING BECAUSE THEY
LIED.

A beat.

MARTHA

I just want us all to have a nice
family dinner. We're not talking
about the factory tonight. No
upsetting your father.

KAREN

OK Mom. So who's all coming?

MARTHA

Your brother and Richard, Dad's old
army buddy.

KAREN

That's it?

MARTHA

Your father doesn't have many friends.

KAREN

Wait, Richard? Is that the guy you ran into in Florida?

MARTHA

He's up here for a reunion. Come on. Lets go back .

ACT I SCENE V

Bobby and the Colonel re-enter, Bobby with a slew of medals around his neck.

Martha is mixing the Colonel another drink while Bobby fixes his own. Karen is sipping her drink.

Martha has grabbed a cheese plate and brings it over, placing it on the coffee table between Bobby and the Colonel.

KAREN

What's with the medals Bobby.

BOBBY

Isn't that what we were fighting for--medals? Ain't that right Dad? I'm suppose to feel good about myself because of my medals.

COLONEL

I don't care how you feel about yourself.

MARTHA

Try this cheese everyone. I got it on special from Stop & Shop.

BOBBY

Mom, not now.

MARTHA

Well, just take something. I got all this food. And let's talk about something nice.

BOBBY

(Irritated)

Mom, I'm not hungry now. Dad and I are right in the middle of something.

MARTHA

(Flustered)

Nobody in this family is ever hungry. I don't know why I even bother cooking. I just wanted a nice family dinner with your father's favorite dish, pot roast, but I guess that is asking way to much of this family.

BOBBY

Mom, Karen and I are vegetarians.

MARTHA

I've never met a vegetarian addict. I thought that was a passing fancy, or just another way to spite me.

BOBBY

We've been vegetarians for thirty years--how is that a passing fancy?

MARTHA

Everything has to be about you,
doesn't it Bobby? Would it kill you
to eat some meat with your father?

Is that too much to ask?

(Frustrated, sarcastic)

All anyone does around here is
drink and not eat meat.

Martha throws the plate of bean dip against the wall.

A beat.

KAREN

What the hell Mom?

MARTHA

I just want our family to be a
family for one night. That's all
I'm asking.

Karen begins to clean up the wall.

KAREN

I'm sorry Mom.

BOBBY

Mom, enough. Dad and I need to have
a conversation about Dylan.

MARTHA

No you don't. I can see where this
is going.

COLONEL

Your son's a soldier. And he will
do his duty.

BOBBY

I'm not gonna let you bully him. I won't let you sacrificed him like you sacrificed me.

COLONEL

(Defensive)

Sacrifice? I tried to make a man out of you. I have nothing to apologize for.

MARTHA

(Forceful)

Listen to your son dear, and answer the question! Why was Bobby sacrificed? Why were all those boys sacrificed? WHY?

A beat, as everyone is shocked by Martha's statement.

Dylan arrives, coming through the front door. He is greeted like a conquering hero, but he appears jittery, though putting on a brave front. Bobby stands off to the side, sullen, staring. The Colonel is beaming. Martha goes over and gives him a big hug.

DYLAN

Hey everybody.

MARTHA

Looks who's here. Welcome home Dylan.

DYLAN

Yes, sorry I'm late.

KAREN

(Hugging Dylan)

Welcome back.

DYLAN

Hello Grandpa.

COLONEL

(Shaking hands)

I'm proud of you son.

DYLAN

Thank you grandpa. (To his father)
Surprised to see you here.

BOBBY

Why is that?

DYLAN

You serious? You always miss the
big occasions.

BOBBY

That's not true.

DYLAN

You want me to list them?

MARTHA

OK, we're not doing any lists
tonight. Please take some of these
pastries.

DYLAN

OK Dad. How about my high school
graduation Dad? Remember that one?
Mom kept telling me you were on
your way. But you were never on
your way.

MARTHA

Dylan, it's our 50th wedding anniversary. This is a celebration, not a night of grievances.

DYLAN

I'm sorry. Happy anniversary.

MARTHA

I hope you're hungry. I'm cooking a big meal.

DYLAN

Looking forward to it...why is there food all over the walls?

KAREN

Yeah Mom: why is there food all over the walls? Dylan, I hope you don't have a hankering for bean dip.

DYLAN

I don't know what that means?

BOBBY

It means, the bean dip ship has sailed.

MARTHA

(Oblivious to the humor)
Don't listen to them. There's nothing they like better than to make fun of their mother.

BOBBY

Dylan, can I talk to you a second, privately?

DYLAN

About what?

BOBBY

I just wanna talk.

They walk toward the side room, stage left.

DYLAN

You want to be my buddy now? Sorry
Dad, I got plenty of buddies and
they're all in some god-forsaken
foxhole in Iraq.

*The spotlight focuses on Dylan and Bobby, the rest of the
characters remain on stage, occasionally looking over at
Bobby and Dylan. Dylan's hands are shaking, and he has a
slight tic.*

BOBBY

You OK Dylan?

DYLAN

No, as a matter of fact.

BOBBY

Why are you shaking?

DYLAN

Side effects from the meds they put
us on.

BOBBY

Why they putting you on meds?

DYLAN

Nightmares, anxiety, can't sleep.

BOBBY

What are you on?

DYLAN

Xanax for my panic attacks, Zoloft,
Adderall for my depression, Trodden
for pain, Prozac, Paxil,
Adderall...one's for sleeping,
another for pain, another for
anxiety, nightmares, headaches,
paranoia...

BOBBY

What the fuck!

DYLAN

They prescribe them to keep us on
the battlefield, even got one that
helps us forget, and there's a
helluva lot to forget.

The stage goes dark except a spotlight on Dylan. He is in Iraq, holding a sniper's rifle, and is aiming it out a bombed out window. He has a helmet on, with a mouth and earpiece so he can communicate with other soldiers. In the background is the sound of war: bullets, explosions, etc. It then quiets as Dylan's sergeant, off stage, speaks into his ear plugs.

SERGEANT VO

You see that kid, the one with the
bulge?

DYLAN

Yeah.

SERGEANT VO

Shoot him.

A beat.

DYLAN

He's just a kid.

SERGEANT VO

What do you think that bulge is
under his shirt?

DYLAN

Could be anything.

SERGEANT VO

It's an IED.

DYLAN

You don't know that.

SERGEANT VO

I know. Shoot the fuckin' kid
before he blows everybody up.

Long Pause.

I gave you a fuckin' order soldier.
Take the motherfucker out.

DYLAN

What if it's not an IED?

SERGEANT VO

Shoot the fucker. That's a fucking
order.

DYLAN

Why can't someone check him out?

SERGEANT VO

BECAUSE HE HAS A FUCKIN' IED. He's
gonna blow up our entire battalion.
(MORE)

SERGEANT VO (CONT'D)

Now shoot the fucker. That's a
goddman order!

A beat. Dylan pulls the trigger.

SERGEANT VO (CONT'D)

Somebody check the kid. But be
careful about the bulge.

A beat.

SOLDIER VO

Sarge. It was just food. He was
carrying fuckin' food.

*Dylan drops his head, drops his rifle, sits down, and puts
his head in his hands. The spotlight comes up on the whole
stage. Dylan reengages with his father.*

BOBBY

You don't have to go back.

DYLAN

I don't fit in here.

BOBBY

Your family's here.

DYLAN

My family's in Iraq. Those are the
people who will always be there for
me.

BOBBY

They'll be fine. You have to get
well Dylan.

DYLAN

You don't understand: I don't fit in here. I'm a soldier. That's the only thing I know, the only thing I have ever been good at, that I could take pride in. My brothers are my family. I had no family when I left. You were gone; Mom wanted me out of the house. I found my family in Iraq. They are the only people I can ever talk to about what I saw or did over there.

A beat.

BOBBY

I won't let you go back.

DYLAN

What's that supposed to mean?

BOBBY

It means I'm not letting you go back. I love you too much to let you go back.

DYLAN

I don't know what that means. And who the fuck you think you are? You think you can just walk back into my life and start giving orders. Fuck you Dad. I'm not abandoning my brothers.

BOBBY

You owe them nothing.

DYLAN

I owe them my life. They were always there for me. Where the hell were you?

A beat.

COLONEL

It's his decision Bobby. You need to respect that.

BOBBY

NO! I won't. I was sacrificed for a big lie; I won't allow my son to be sacrificed for another big lie.

COLONEL

Bobby, your son has been given his orders. End of discussion.

BOBBY

No. Those orders are wrong.

COLONEL

It's not up to us to determine if the orders are wrong. You do your patriotic duty no matter what.

BOBBY

I never questioned an order; I never question anything, and because of that, I can't get through the day without getting high; because of that, I can't pull myself out of this nightmare.

COLONEL

Why do you have to be so weak? Be a man for once in your life.

BOBBY

For once? I did everything you told me to do: I joined the army. I followed orders. I killed women and children, and I was just following orders. Dad.

(MORE)

BOBBY (CONT'D)

I will not let my son be put in that position. That's the one thing I know.

COLONEL

You have no say in this. Dylan brings honor to this family. I wish I could say the same about you.

BOBBY

Dylan, they're lying. You can't be fighting a war that is based on a lie.

COLONEL

Our country is always wrong isn't it Bobby? Go live in Russia. See if that suits you.

BOBBY

Dylan, I won't let you sacrifice your life to a lie.

DYLAN

I'll sacrifice my life for my brothers. That's not a lie.

COLONEL

I'm proud of you son.

Bobby has moved over to the table and picks up the gun and holds it against his temple.

BOBBY

Dylan, I love you but I can't let you go back. I will pull the this fuckin' trigger if you say you're going back. I have nothing to live for if you do this. Don't make me do this.

Everyone freezes. Martha and Karen gasp. The Colonel stands up.

COLONEL

Bobby, put the gun down.

BOBBY

What's it gonna be Dylan?

KAREN

(Terrified)

Bobby, what's going on?

A stand-off ensues, everyone staring at Bobby.

BOBBY

Dad, we're not sacrificing our sons to lies anymore. It has to stop. I love him too much to let him go back.

He places the gun against his temple.

COLONEL

Go ahead. You don't have the guts.

DYLAN

Dad, what are you doing? I don't know what I'm gonna do. Put the gun down.

BOBBY

Karen, you need to take Dylan to Canada. If Dylan goes back, he's coming back in a body bag.

(MORE)

BOBBY (CONT'D)

Dylan, there's a lot of shit that went down that I find it fuckin' hard to live with and I don't want people like you coming back and having to face the rest of your lives with that kinda shit.

COLONEL

Dylan took an oath.

BOBBY

Fuck the oath.

COLONEL

He needs the military.

BOBBY

They're fuckin' drug pushers. Your grandson is a pill addict so don't tell me he needs the military.
(Holding the gun to his temple)
Your choice.

DYLAN

(Shaken)

DAD, I CAN'T SEE ANYMORE DEAD BODIES. PLEASE PUT THE GUN DOWN.

A beat.

Dad!

There is a long pause as everyone freezes.

MARTHA

(Petriified)

Bobby, please. I'm sorry. I'm the one who caused all this. I'm the one who sent you in Vietnam. I could of stopped it.

BOBBY

You didn't do anything Mom. I went
in the Army under my own free will.

KAREN

No you didn't. You were a scared,
seventeen year old kid and you were
shamed into going.

MARTHA

Bobby, please forgive me?

BOBBY

You didn't do anything Mom.

MARTHA

Your Dad and I served you up and
put you in Vietnam. You had no say.
We put you there.

BOBBY

I'm not blaming you.

COLONEL

Let him pull the trigger. Put him
out of his misery. Put us all out
of our misery.

MARTHA

(In anguish)

This is your son.

COLONEL

He stopped being my son a long time
ago.

Bobby suddenly points the gun at the Colonel.

KAREN

(Screams)

BOBBY!

COLONEL

Go ahead. I'm ready to go. Go ahead
and do it.

(Pause)

BOBBY

No, you don't deserve to die. I'm
gonna let your cancer kill you.

DYLAN

I DON'T WANNA GO BACK, BUT I HAVE
TO GO BACK. DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND? I
HAVE TO GO BACK!

A long beat.

BOBBY

Dylan, I understand. My troop
became my family and we were loyal
to each other, loyal to a fault. We
covered up each others sins, and we
were forever bound in blood. And
that's why I can't let you go back.
You'll be bound in blood and
there's no coming back from that.

*Dylan starts to break down, covering his eyes. Bobby slowly
lowers the gun, shaken by his son's emotion. Long pause.
Bobby takes the gun and puts it back on the table.*

KAREN

What the fuck Bobby.

Long pause as everyone decompresses.

KAREN (CONT'D)

(Breaking down)

Bobby, you scared me. Let me help you.

BOBBY

You can't help me. How you gonna help someone who can never forgive themselves?

KAREN

I can't watch this Bobby. You're my brother.

BOBBY

It's too late for me. We need to help Dylan.

Long pause. Karen drops her head. Bobby stands away, his head down. Martha walks over and tries to hug Bobby. Bobby walks away.

MARTHA

Bobby! Please. You can beat this thing.

BOBBY

Way to late for that, Mom.

There is a very long pause, as everyone is emotionally exhausted, not knowing what to say or do. Martha quietly picks up the cheese tray and starts offering up the cheeses. Everyone looks dumbfounded as she parades around the room with the platter.

MARTHA

Lets finish up these last appetizers everyone.

KAREN

Mom, what the hell you doing?

MARTHA

I have to do something. I'm sorry, but I don't know how to keep this family together, and I don't know how to help my son and that breaks my heart.

Bobby is leaning against the wall, spent.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

I just need my son to be OK.

BOBBY

I'll never be OK Mom. Don't waste your time.

MARTHA

You can't tell me to stop loving you, to stop trying to help you. That's not what mothers do.

COLONEL

Don't torture yourself. He's never gonna change.

MARTHA

But I knew. I knew! Everything Karen told us turned out to be true. I should of listened. I'm sorry Bobby.

BOBBY

Mom, stop it. We need to save Dylan. That's what we need do.

DYLAN

I don't need anybody to save me.

BOBBY

Yeah, you do. You've been
brainwashed.

DYLAN

No, I took an oath.

BOBBY

What's the difference?

COLONEL (TO BOBBY)

Listen to your son.

DYLAN

I took an oath to never leave a
soldier behind. It's a sacred oath
and I intend to fulfill it.

BOBBY

I took the same oath and it's
bullshit. And the reason its
bullshit is the fact that it's
based on a lie.

DYLAN

You don't know that.

BOBBY

Yeah, I do. I'm a walking,
breathing victim of that lie.

MARTHA

Dylan, I don't want you to go back.

COLONEL

You shut the fuck up. You're not
part of this conversation.

MARTHA

No, this is my grandson. Dylan, you don't have to go. We will take care of you.

DYLAN

I WILL MAKE MY OWN DECISION. YOU GOT THAT EVERYBODY?

Dylan storms out. Karen stops him.

KAREN

Dylan, hold on a second. I got something for you.

DYLAN

What?

KAREN

She gives Dylan a folder with a bunch of articles.

I want you to read these.

DYLAN

What are they?

KAREN

Just read them.

DYLAN

What is it about?

KAREN

It's about your life.

Dylan takes the folder and exits, without acknowledging Karen. *Martha picks up a tray and starts offering everyone food.*

KAREN (CONT'D)

Mom, please put the tray down.

MARTHA

I have to do something. I can't just stand here while my family is being torn apart.

KAREN

Mom, we need to talk about this.

MARTHA

No we don't. We're gonna have a nice family dinner. Why can't we just have a nice family conversation without someone pulling a gun?

The family stares at her.

BOBBY

OK Mom, so what you wanna talk about, the weather? Would everyone please take some fuckin' cheese.

Karen, Dylan and Bobby walk over and each takes a piece of cheese.

BOBBY (CONT'D)

I'm going for a cigarette.

KAREN

No you're not. You're going out for a joint, or to put a needle in your arm. Why can't you just stop? Just fuckin' stop. People do it all the time.

(MORE)

KAREN (CONT'D)

You have any idea how much pain you have caused this family? But an even better question: do you even care?

COLONEL

You can't help him Karen. He won't accept help. He'll just waste it.

KAREN

He's my brother. I'm not giving up on my brother.

BOBBY

You think I like being an addict, that this is somehow fun, that I enjoy the daily shame? I just want the pain to stop. I'll fuckin' stop when the nightmares stop, when I don't see images of dead women and children. You don't understand: I pulled the trigger. I pulled the fucking trigger, and there's no going back.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going out for a cigarette.

Bobby turns away and leaves. Martha and Karen continue to stand, absorbing what just happened. Martha turns to the Colonel.

MARTHA

Our son is in pain. You need to do something.

COLONEL

Do something? I love my son, but he doesn't want my help.

MARTHA

We are the ones who sent him. We have to fix this.

COLONEL

I'm sorry. I can't. As much as I hate to say it, it's too late for our son. He's lost.

A beat. The phone rings and Martha picks it up.

MARTHA

Hello, this is Martha...yes, Let me get him.

Martha goes to the door and calls Bobby to come in. Bobby enters. She hands the phone to Bobby.

It's your doctor.

BOBBY

I'll call her back.

MARTHA

She said it was important.

BOBBY

Bobby comes in and takes the phone.

OK...This Is Bobby...and you're sure?...What kind?...how do you get that?...

Bobby takes the phone and flings it across the room. A beat as the characters stare, wondering what was said.

MARTHA

What's happening Bobby?

BOBBY

I can't talk about it.

MARTHA

But Bobby.

BOBBY

No Mom. Not now.

Martha drops her head. Bobby slowly walks over to the table, picks up the gun, places the nozzle against his head, and pulls the trigger. A click is heard. Bobby throws the gun down and walks out, the rest of the characters stand silently, stunned, unable to move. Karen finally walks over to the gun; picks it up, examines the chamber and turns to the rest of the characters.

KAREN

There's one bullet in the chamber.

Karen opens the chamber, removes the bullet, and places it in her pocket.

The actors freeze and the back screen lights up with the below quotes.

*"We may be the first army in history that has had to keep fighting for our lives after the war was over." Wilcox, *Waiting for an Army to Die**

"And we know that shortly after they began spraying Agent Orange in Vietnam the chemical companies sent a letter to the government advising them that there could be health problems from the herbicide...what the government doesn't want to admit is that it is responsible for killing its own troops...They Have completely forgotten about us. I think they're waiting for us to die..."

"But they do remember being doused with herbicides or walking through defoliated moonscapes...The Army told us the stuff was harmless. And we were told it was supposed to be saving our lives."

"More than three million Vietnamese are suffering from exposure to Agent Orange/dioxin, including at least five hundred thousand to one million children."

"The Veterans Administration denied any connection between exposure to Agent Orange and human illness..."

"I went because my country wanted me to go, and because at the time I just never, never believed that my own country would lie to me."

END OF ACT I

ACT II, SCENE I

A father walks to the wall of the framed military photos of sons, the number of pictures having been reduced to half. He takes one off the wall, sits down in a chair, stares at the picture, and then breaks down wailing.

ACT II, SCENE I

The year is around 1978, ten years after the 1968 incident. Martha walks up to Karen's front door, pulling a suitcase. Karen answers the door.

MARTHA

I'm done with him.

KAREN

What are you talking about?

MARTHA

I'm never going back there.

KAREN

I thought you said he's been better.

MARTHA

It never lasts. Can I stay here?

A beat.

KAREN

It's really not a good time Mom.

MARTHA

Yeah, well, it's not a good time for me either.

KAREN

Mom, I'm going through some shit with Mark. It's just not a good time. I'm sorry. I just can't.

MARTHA

I'm your mother. I'm asking.

A beat.

KAREN

Mom, it's just not a good time for
me. Listen, I gotta go.

*Karen slowly closes the door. Martha slumps down, looks
around, lost and broken.*

ACT II, SCENE III

The spotlight shines back on the living room. The Colonel, alone, walks over to the table holding Bobby's jacket, picks up the gun, examines it, and holds it against the side of his head for a few beats. He puts the gun down and heads back to his chair.

The doorbell rings. RICHARD enters, tentatively opening the door.

RICHARD

Hello...anybody home?

COLONEL

Who's that?

RICHARD

Richard.

The Colonel shakes Richard's hand and sits down in his chair. Richard remains standing.

COLONEL

Hey old man. Come in. You here to see my wife?

A beat.

RICHARD

Well, I'm certainly not here to see you.

A beat as the Colonel stares at Richard, wondering if he is being serious.

COLONEL

Another reunion?

RICHARD

Yup.

COLONEL

I can't go to them anymore.

RICHARD

I enjoy them. These are the only people I can talk to about the war. It's actually therapeutic for me, to talk about it. You should come, see the guys.

COLONEL

Sick old men on oxygen tanks, heart monitors, sick from chemo treatments, talking about the good old days. I can't think of a more depressing thing, and I don't remember them as good old days. Too many bad memories.

RICHARD

How come you never go down to the VFW Hall? They told me they never see you there anymore.

COLONEL

Those anti-war Vietnam pricks look down on us, especially when we walk in with our uniforms and medals. They call us pussies. Fuck them. We're the ones who actually fought. We didn't run away. They're proud of the fact they threw their medals away at some damn protest. That's fuckin' treason. I'm not going where I'm not wanted.

A beat.

RICHARD

How's the cancer?

COLONEL

They're giving me six months.

RICHARD

I'm sorry.

COLONEL

I'm ready to go. I'm tired; tired of trying to breathe; tired of the pain; and I'm tired of all the nightmares. They never stop. And I'm tired of all the doctors saying its all in my head. Even before they diagnosed me for cancer, they use to say the nausea and the headaches were all in my mind, that the nightmares weren't real. If they weren't real, how to you make them stop?

RICHARD

I don't know. I just try to push them away. It's the things that I did over there that still haunts me.

COLONEL

Yeah, it's the things we did...

A beat.

You still think about the camps?

RICHARD

Every goddamn day. I just keep seeing those dead bodies piled up, and the children. It's the children I can't stop seeing.

COLONEL

I never stopped seeing those kids.

RICHARD

We all bore witness; but we never signed up for that.

COLONEL

Those kids, wailing from hunger. I'll be glad when this fuckin' thing is over and I can stop seeing those kids' eyes. You never should of brought me in there. I'll never forgive you for that.

RICHARD

I was just following orders.

A beat.

COLONEL

You wanna drink?

RICHARD

Thanks. Scotch. No ice.

Colonel walks over and fixes Richard his drink while refreshing his.

COLONEL

Who's all coming to the reunion?

RICHARD

The usual. We do enjoy ourselves, telling our stories. Our stories get more heroic every year...

RICHARD

You part of that lawsuit?

COLONEL

No.

RICHARD

No? You don't think the factory caused your cancer?

COLONEL

I know it did.

RICHARD

You're living in a cancer cluster. Why the hell didn't you join the suit?

COLONEL

I didn't like the way those lawyers treated us, looking down on us, judging us for working there, like we had all these fuckin' options. I was a ninth grade drop-out. How many fuckin' options you think I had? I couldn't just quit. Fuckin' management knew that. They had us by the balls because we all had families, mortgages, fuckin' bills. We fought their fuckin' wars, came home to work in their factories, and nobody ever told us we were breathing poison. And then the next thing that happens is those shitty factory jobs go overseas. GM left town, the rug factory left; the candy factory closed; and the steel mill closed. And most of them were profitable. So I worked for Dow; what other choice did I have? It was a paycheck, a lifeline, and a trap. I've been used all my life and I wasn't gonna let those lawyers use me too.

RICHARD

That's not a reason not to join the suit. You sure you didn't misinterpret them?

COLONEL

I misinterpreted shit. I know when somebody looks down on me, wants to use me. They look at me and they see dollar signs. I've experienced that shit all my life. Beside, who the fuck you think pays my pension, pays my doctor bills. You think I'm gonna lose that for some bullshit law suit that will take decades to settle. I know how these things work.

RICHARD

That's stupid. You're screwing yourself; you're screwing Martha.

COLONEL

Keep Martha out of it.

RICHARD

Isn't your daughter a lawyer for the plaintiffs?

COLONEL

Yeah.

RICHARD

I don't understand why you're not pissed at the factory?

COLONEL

I am pissed but here's the thing: they gave me a job with a decent paycheck; no one else was willing to do that. They stayed, when all the other fuckin' companies left.

A beat.

RICHARD

You ever talk to anyone?

COLONEL

About what?

RICHARD

The shit we did over there.

COLONEL

I have nothing to apologize for. I followed orders.

RICHARD

We had a choice.

COLONEL

No we didn't. If we didn't follow orders, we could be court marshaled.

RICHARD

I wasn't gonna do it.

COLONEL

Well, that's what I was taught. You follow orders no matter what.

RICHARD

I choose not to participate in those executions.

COLONEL

I told you: I didn't have a choice.

A beat.

RICHARD

You should talk to someone about the war.

COLONEL

I don't believe in that shit, letting someone get all up in your business. I have my own way of dealing with it. It's called scotch.

RICHARD

I talked to my priest. After my son died in Nam, I had to talk to someone.

COLONEL

Did it help?

RICHARD

I think so, but I think about Danny every day. We were very close. I could tell he was really suffering at the end.

COLONEL

Whataya mean?

RICHARD

He went to Nam all gung-ho, looking forward to winning the war, stopping Communism. He was a ture believer. The last time I talked to him, two weeks before he was killed, he called me. I could feel there was something off. He said: "Dad, something is wrong here, and I don't know what to do." And then he hung up. That was the last time I spoke with him. That phone call broke my heart.

COLONEL

But he made the ultimate sacrifice. As a father, isn't that what we're suppose to do: prepare our sons to do their duty?

RICHARD

I don't know about that anymore. I felt betrayed, and I started to question why we were over there in the first place. Danny never should of died. I started to ask myself: did I mold my son to be sacrificed for a lie? That makes it hurt more, thinking I failed my son, that I raised him up to be killed. If my son had died for a noble purpose, like we had done, I think the sting wouldn't be so painful.

A beat, suddenly on the verge of grief.

I lost my son John. I lost Danny. I think about him every day. And I blame myself.

COLONEL

It feels like I lost Bobby too, even though he's still alive. I'm lost Richard. But your son, he wanted to serve. I tried to do that with Bobby.

RICHARD

I can't help thinking we failed our sons. We set them up to die, and for what? For fuckin' what?

COLONEL

What do you mean?

RICHARD

Our government lied and my son is dead.

COLONEL

Our leaders would never lie about something this big...

RICHARD

I don't know. Maybe they did... How is Bobby? I know he had a rough patch there for awhile.

COLONEL

He's still not right. I don't know if he'll ever be right. Something happened to him in the war, and he's never recovered.

RICHARD

You can't blame yourself.

COLONEL

I don't know. These soldiers that came back from Vietnam are different...maybe cause they felt betrayed. We never felt betrayed; we were stopping fascism. It was all black and white to us We knew who the bad guys were.

COLONEL

Richard, how'd you do it?

RICHARD

What do you mean?

COLONEL

I mean, how'd you do it? Your company, your whole life? Your success. What's the secret?

RICHARD

There's no secret. I became a workaholic--worked my ass off for 10 years, 80 hour weeks, always on the verge of bankruptcy until I figured it out.

COLONEL

But everything fell into place for you. Why were you so lucky?

RICHARD

There's no luck, just hard work, but there's a price: my wife left me, my kids stopped speaking to me. Working 80 hour weeks helped me forget about Danny, but it cost me my family.

A Beat.

RICHARD

Martha told me about Bobby.

COLONEL

She told you--when you see my wife?

RICHARD

When you were in the hospital.

The Colonel stares at him for a few moments.

COLONEL

I've given up hope.

RICHARD

We did the best that we could.

COLONEL

I wasn't gonna be the only father in my factory unit whose son didn't go into the service. We took pride in that; we considered it our duty to have our sons serve. Was I wrong?

RICHARD

I wonder about that now. Am I responsible for Danny's death cause I raised him never to question authority, to always follow orders? Did we serve up our sons up to die for some cause that was based on a lie?

COLONEL

There's nothing more sacred than serving your country.

RICHARD

I don't know. Maybe our leaders were wrong.

COLONEL

You know, at work, we had a row of pictures in the break room of each son who went into the service, all dressed in their Army or Marine uniforms. I was so proud the day I hung Bobby's picture. It was like a full circle. If I knew how it was gonna turn out...

A beat.

You're here to see my wife, aren't you?

RICHARD

I know about the beatings.

COLONEL

What are you talking about?

RICHARD

I know about the beatings. She told me.

COLONEL

How dare you. That was a long time ago. You think you're better than me, don't you?

RICHARD

Yeah, I do. I don't beat women.

COLONEL

Fuck you.

RICHARD

You don't deserve her.

COLONEL

Who the fuck you think you are? I won't be judged by you or anyone else.

Martha and Karen walk into the room, Martha carrying a new tray of bean dip. The Colonel stares at Richard.

MARTHA

Richard, you made it.

She puts the tray down and hugs him, tightly, and a bit long, making everyone a bit uncomfortable. Bobby walks in, slightly high, observing the long hug, followed by Dylan.

BOBBY

You guys wanna get yourself a room?

The Colonel glares at Martha and Richard.

MARTHA

Bobby, that's enough. Richard, you remember my daughter Karen?

RICHARD

Why yes, the lawyer, haven't seen you in ages.

MARTHA

And you know my son Bobby.

RICHARD

Yes. Your father could never stop bragging about you two.

BOBBY

I think you have our father mixed up with someone else.

RICHARD

No, it was the old man. He was always showing me your pictures, what you were up to. Karen, when you graduated law school, he was so proud. He literally would not shut up about your achievement.

BOBBY

Yeah, that's not Dad. Who wants a drink? Let's all toast to that agent of peace, Agent Orange.

KAREN

What are you talking about Bobby?

MARTHA

Pease don't drink Bobby.

KAREN

But the rehab was going so well.

COLONEL

(Angry, raising his voice)
Why do you bother? He's not gonna
change.

A beat.

MARTHA

Is Carrie coming tonight?

BOBBY

My ex-wife is not part of this
family.

KAREN

There's a restraining order on
Bobby regarding Carrie.

BOBBY

I don't remember that.

KAREN

You hit her.

BOBBY

I don't remember hitting her.

KAREN

That's not what the restraining
order said. I was your lawyer
Bobby, remember?

BOBBY

(In anguish)
I don't remember.
(MORE)

BOBBY (CONT'D)

I don't remember things. Do you understand: I can't remember things.

KAREN

How could you not remember? It was five years ago.

BOBBY

I don't remember a lot of things. And I don't know why.

Bobby makes his drink and Martha picks up the tray and walks around to the guests offering them appetizers.

MARTHA

Please step away from the liquor cabinet. Have some of these pastries I got from Shermans. You kids used to love Shermans.

BOBBY

Who needs their drink freshened up?...Nobody? Well, since there's no more bean dip, I guess I'll have another drink.

MARTHA

Let's talk about something nice?

BOBBY

Yes, let's celebrate the old man. Tell me Richard, how'd my father get all those medals? In Vietnam, they gave medals out like they were candy. I think they were trying to distract us from the cluster fuck we were in.

COLONEL

When are you gonna stop feeling sorry for yourself?
(MORE)

COLONEL (CONT'D)

Doesn't it get tiring after awhile,
always playing the victim?

MARTHA

STOP IT. STOP IT RIGHT NOW. Bobby's
gonna make it back this time. I
know this. (Tearful) Aren't you
Bobby?

(Pause)

BOBBY

Sure mom, sure. I'm gonna be fine.
I'm gonna beat this thing: the
headaches, the memory lost, the
nausea. Piece of cake.

MARTHA

I know you are. And right now, we
are celebrating our anniversary.

BOBBY

OK Mom. We'll talk about something
nice. Richard, tell us how Dad got
all those medals?

RICHARD

Battle of the Bulge. I don't know
if you know this, but your father
went into the Army when he was
fifteen years old.

KAREN

How is that possible?

RICHARD

The army needed bodies back then to
meet their quotas and they would
look the other way as to age. Plus,
it was the patriotic thing to do at
the time. Everyone wanted to serve,
beat the bad guys and be home in
six months. I felt such pride the
day I first put my uniform on, that
I was doing something important.

(MORE)

RICHARD (CONT'D)

I felt I was part of something special.

So I always admired your father, being in the Army so young. That took a lot of courage.

COLONEL

I was happy to serve.

BOBBY

And grandpa and grandma let you do that? At fifteen?

MARTHA

Can we talk about something else?

Martha brings a tray of food over.

MARTHA

Dylan, try these miniature cup cakes. They're from Shermans.

DYLAN

Thank you Grandma. I'm just not hungry right now.

MARTHA

How 'bout you Karen?

KAREN

Not now Mom.

BOBBY

Would someone please take some fuckin' food off the tray?

Bobby grabs a whole handful.

DYLAN

I'll take some Grandma.

KAREN

Thanks Mom.

BOBBY

See, that wasn't so hard now was it? So Richard, continue. I think Dylan would be interested in hearing that story, especially the part where he joined the service at 15.

MARTHA

That's a long time ago; we don't need to dredge all that up.

BOBBY

Dredge? Just a little family history. You don't mind, do you Dad? Dylan should know about his grandfather.

COLONEL

(Sullen)

I don't care what you do.

BOBBY

Dad, you never told us about this. Why would your parents let you join the Army at 15? What kind of parents would do that?

MARTHA

He had fine parents, what are you saying?

BOBBY

Why are you answering for Dad?

COLONEL

(Rising anger)

My parents supported me one hundred percent. They were proud of me for serving.

BOBBY

Never said they weren't.

KAREN

Wait, so that means you never graduated high school.

MARTHA

It never held him back.

BOBBY

Why you keep answering for Dad?

MARTHA

I don't like where this is going.

BOBBY

Where's what going?

MARTHA

Your father doesn't talk about that period.

BOBBY

OK, but answer me this: when did Grandma and her new boyfriend move to California?

COLONEL

April 15th, 1943.

Long silence as they digest the date.

BOBBY

But you joined the service in October...Why didn't you move to California with them? You were only 15 years old.

MARTHA

Stop it Bobby.

BOBBY

I don't think so Mom. What did you do all those months? I mean, where were you living?

MARTHA

Bobby, don't.

COLONEL

The Colonel puts his oxygen tube in. With emotion.

I was living on the streets. That's where I was living. And you know why I joined the Army? I joined the Army so I could eat.

A beat.

BOBBY

They left you?

COLONEL

(Anger rising)

My mother's new boyfriend didn't want me to go to California with them. I was too much of a bother.

KAREN

She just left you?

COLONEL

She gave me ten dollars and told me I could live in the apartment for another month, but after that, I would have to find my own place.

BOBBY

Jesus!

A beat as everyone absorbs the last statement.

The Colonel starts grasping for air. Martha tends to him, the others stand shocked, not sure how to respond. He slowly comes out of it. Martha makes him drink some water.

MARTHA

Here you go.

(To Bobby)

You satisfied?

BOBBY

Dad, I'm sorry.

COLONEL

That's why you never met your grandfather.

BOBBY

So, you got all those medals as a fifteen year old?

RICHARD

That came later.

BOBBY

What are you talking about?

RICHARD

The camps...

The actors freeze and the back wall is lit with photographs of the concentration camps, each image staying for about fifteen seconds.





The screen goes blank and the actors resume their roles.

RICHARD

Our unit was one of the first to liberate the camps. I'll never forgive myself for taking your father into those hell holes. He was way to young to witness such evil.

MARTHA

You never told me about the camps.

COLONEL

It's not something you talk about. I tried to bury it.

A beat.

DYLAN

What did you do when you discovered the camps Grandpa?

COLONEL

(Robotic, with a far away look)
We were just following orders. We had no choice.

BOBBY

What are you talking about?

COLONEL

We were given orders.

BOBBY

To do what?

RICHARD

You don't have to talk about this.

COLONEL

Someone was gonna pay for those camps.

BOBBY

Who was gonna pay?

COLONEL

German citizens from the town. We brought them in to see the camps, had them cart the dead bodies to a mass grave. And whenever a German said they didn't know about the camps, we shot 'em. (Angry) How could they not know, what did they think the ashes were that rained down from the sky? They knew!

BOBBY

And children?

COLONEL

(Defiant)

Men, women and children. I was just following orders. They denied any responsibility for the camps. Well, we made sure there was consequences for looking the other way.

BOBBY

Women and children too?

COLONEL

I was a soldier; I followed orders.

BOBBY

(Somber, pause)
So were the Germans who put the
Jews in the ovens. Everyone
followed their fuckin' orders.

A beat.

COLONEL

(Trance like)
I keep seeing her eyes. They were
blue.

BOBBY

Whose eyes Dad?

COLONEL

I shot her so she would stop
staring at me. I shot her son, and
I see her face every day.

The Colonel starts to break. Long pause.

BOBBY

We all followed orders Dad. I knew
right from wrong, but I couldn't
say no. I never said no Dad and I
live with that fact every goddamn
day.

A beat as Bobby starts to break down.

COLONEL

I understand son.

A beat.

BOBBY

Why was it so important to you that
I go into the army?

COLONEL

It was the patriotic thing to do.

BOBBY

No, I'm not gonna let you hide
behind that hollow phrase. Why dad?
We were lied to. And after all the
dead, all the carnage, you keep
holding onto the lie. Why? Why do
you keep telling me the factory was
safe, the product was safe, the war
was just. I need a reason as to why
you sacrificed me.

COLONEL

I tried to make a man out of you.
That's why.

BOBBY

No, you're not answering the
question.

COLONEL

What are you talking about? You
weren't sacrificed. You made it home
alive. I prayed every night you
would make it home safely. And when
I met your plane from Vietnam, that
was the happiest day of my life.
You brought honor to the family.

A beat.

BOBBY

Until I didn't. You never told me
that Dad.

COLONEL
Every goddamn night I went on my
knees.

A beat.

BOBBY
When you stop?

COLONEL
The day you threw those metals away
at the Pentagon.

A beat.

BOBBY
Dad, I need to tell you something.
I got cancer.

MARTHA
No Bobby.

COLONEL
You blaming me for that too?

BOBBY
Dad, just listen to me for once.

COLONEL
You got cancer. We can beat this.
You just can't be a quitter.

BOBBY
This isn't something you beat. Dad,
my cancer came from Agent Orange.
It came from your factory. It's
why I had memory loss, nausea,
constant headaches. It explains why
my first child was born deformed,
and lived for only two months.
(MORE)

BOBBY (CONT'D)

We use to bathe in those canisters, breath it, smell it. It was all over. We walked through defoliated fields, breathing in that shit. The safe product you manufactured, that was suppose to win the war, will kill your son.

COLONEL

(Shocked, defensive)

What are you talking about? That can't be true.

BOBBY

Dad, Agent orange caused my cancer. There's no disputing that, even the VA admits it after denying it for decades.

COLONEL

Breaking down.

I didn't know son. You have to believe me. I didn't know. They told us it would save lives, win the war.

Breaking down more, almost wailing.

I killed my own son Martha. Don't you understand? I killed my own son.

MARTHA

You didn't know.

COLONEL

I could of known.

MARTHA

Honey, he's gonna beat this. You didn't kill him.

COLONEL

He breaks down, almost uncontrollably. Everyone freezes, not knowing what to do. Martha goes over and comforts him.

I'm so sorry son. I worked there so you had a roof over your head. It's the only way I knew to support the family. They told us it was safe. Agent Orange was suppose to save lives.

He breaks down again.

BOBBY

That's what they said when they dropped the atom bomb on Hiroshima, about all the lives it would save. Why was I sacrificed Dad?

COLONEL

A beat.

I didn't know son. What was I suppose to do?

BOBBY

You were suppose to not kill your flesh and blood; you were suppose to not kill American soldiers with that poison.

COLONEL

I'm just a working stiff. I had no control over that. I was just doing my job.

BOBBY

Everyone was just doing their fuckin' job. That's the problem with the world: everyone's doing their fuckin' job.

A beat

BOBBY

You happy now Mom? Your husband spent his whole life making a product that killed soldiers, American soldiers, including his son. And not to mention Vietnamese farmers and their kids born with birth defects. Congratulations Dad, for a life well lived. Karen told you all this, and you still forced me into going. And you call me unpatriotic, at least I didn't kill American soldiers.

*Bobby takes his medals off and throws them toward his father.
Here's your blood money Dad.*

COLONEL

Wait!.

MARTHA

(Emotional)

You need to forgive your father Bobby. He didn't know. He didn't know Bobby.

A long beat.

BOBBY

Dad, we were all victims to things we couldn't see. I can't judge you Dad. I have my own sins and I can't pin that on you. I forgive you Dad and maybe someday I can forgive myself.

He kisses his father on the cheek. The Colonel exhales and quietly weeps. A beat.

MARTHA

So this is what your lawsuit is all about?.

KAREN

Yes. Dow can't cover this up any longer. What was done to American soldiers, to American workers, is unconscionable.

A beat. The father looks down, gathering his emotions.

BOBBY

Dad, whatever happened with the wall.

The spotlight shines on the picture wall, stage left. A father comes in, takes the last picture off the wall, stares at the picture, sits down in a chair and starts wailing.

COLONEL

Most of those boys died, most in Vietnam. The ones that didn't, later on had all kinds of problems...Karen, I'll join your suit.

A beat.

BOBBY

Dad, the truth is: you didn't make me go; I did it. I pulled the trigger on those villagers; I put the needle in my arm. I did it; no one else. It's just that, I've been trying to wash away this shit for thirty-five years, but it doesn't wash out. How do you wash it out?

A beat.

I could of said no.

COLONEL

You were too young to say no. I bullied you into going. That damn wall. We all sacrificed our sons to that damn wall, like it was some kind of altar to the gods.

A beat.

BOBBY

But why would you keep working there? I don't get it. You musta known it wasn't healthy.

COLONEL

And go where? Where the hell were we gonna go? If we quit, the factory had a hundred people lined up to take our jobs. I'm a factory worker son, and a 9th grade dropout. What do you think my options were? GM moved to Mexico; the steel mill closed; the rug factory closed. Our city was becoming a wasteland. We all knew we were breathing poisons, and we all had our reasons for staying... We were the bread winners for our families. And that factory was the only place left for breadwinners.

BOBBY

Is that why you worked all those double shifts, why you were never home?

COLONEL

I was willing to breathe anything if that meant your sister stayed in school. There was no way I wasn't gonna give my kid the same opportunity as those rich kids had. And I would of done the same for you.

KAREN
(With a glimmer of
understanding)

I never knew that Dad.

COLONEL
I wanted you to be anything you
wanted to be.

A beat.

Our eyes were wide open. And the one thing that gave us pride, that gave our sacrifice some meaning was that goddamn wall. We were looking for something to believe in and it became that wall, our sons who were gonna stop the spread of Communism, bring honor to this town. It became our reason for breathing that shit. Son, I'm sorry. Our generation always followed orders. Maybe that was wrong.

BOBBY
We all did Dad. We all followed orders. That's how boys are raised.

A beat.

COLONEL
Bobby, we can't let Dylan go back.

BOBBY
Yes.

BOBBY
Did you read what Karen gave you?

DYLAN
Is all that true?

KAREN

You have to decide that.

BOBBY

What you gonna do son?

DYLAN

I don't know what I'm gonna do. I can't stop taking these pills...Dad, I need help.

BOBBY

I know that, son. We're gonna help you.

KAREN

Dylan, I'm gonna have you stay with me. We're gonna take care of you.

A beat.

The room gets quiet as the Colonel regains his composure, puts his oxygen tubes back into his nose.

BOBBY

Maybe Agent Orange is our punishment for what we did.

COLONEL

We all pay for our sins.

A beat.

The Colonel reacts, trying to suppress his emotions. Martha goes behind the chair and rolls out her suitcase.

KAREN

Going somewhere?

MARTHA

I'm moving to Florida.

KAREN

Moving to Florida?

COLONEL

Your mother is having an affair.

RICHARD

You don't deserve her. I know what you did.

KAREN

What is he talking about Mom?

COLONEL TO RICHARD

Martha, put the suitcase away.
You're not going anywhere.

MARTHA

It's not your decision.

COLONEL

I SAID PUT THE FUCKIN' SUITCASE
AWAY.

Long pause.

MARTHA

You can't order me around anymore.

KAREN

Mom, what's going on?

MARTHA

What do you care? You knew what your father did to me. You were a witness. I tried to leave before but you couldn't be bothered. So don't act like this is some big shock.

KAREN

I have never stopped thinking about that night.

MARTHA

You broke my heart.

KAREN

I know Mom. You didn't deserve that.

COLONEL

Deserve what? What the hell you talking about? I was never good enough for you, was I Martha? You always looked down on me.

MARTHA

No, I felt pity for you.

COLONEL

I don't need your pity.

MARTHA

I pitied you because of what you had gone through, where you came from. I never looked down on you.

A beat.

COLONEL

(Ignoring her)

Your mother has been having an affair with this cockroach. And she thinks she can make some kind of clean getaway.

RICHARD

She can do whatever she wants.

COLONEL

You shut the fuck up.

The Colonel rises out of his chair and goes after Richard. Dylan steps in between them and helps the Colonel back to his chair, breathing heavily as he puts the oxygen tube into his nose. He is grasping for air but soon regains his composure.

RICHARD

Let's go Martha.

He grabs her suitcase.

KAREN

Mom, how long have you been planning this?

MARTHA

Fifty years.

COLONEL

(Pleading, vulnerable)

You can't leave. I'll be all alone.

MARTHA

Who's fault is that?

COLONEL

Put the suitcase away. Please.

The Colonel starts to stand up but stumbles. Karen and Dylan rush over and help him back into his chair.

COLONEL

I gave you a home, a family. I don't deserve this. I worked my ass off in that factory. I breathe fuckin' poison for you. You owe me. You have to forgive me. I love you. You can't leave me here all alone. Not now. You know how much I love you.

MARTHA

No more. I came back all those other times, but not this time.

RICHARD

Let's go Martha.

Martha walks over to the Colonel's chair.

I'm leaving. You can never make me feel small again. You can never ever hit me again. I don't know how many years I have left, but I won't live them feeling small.

COLONEL

Please. Don't leave me here all alone. You owe me that. I can't be alone. You know its not right.

The Colonel starts to break down, totally stripped of defenses, vulnerable. Martha hesitates, starts to look down on him with pity.

COLONEL

You can't leave. Please. I love you. You know that.
(MORE)

COLONEL (CONT'D)
We got fifty years together. Don't
throw that away.

Martha is conflicted.

RICHARD
Let's go Martha.

COLONEL
You can't go. Who's gonna take care
of me. What's gonna happen to me?

MARTHA
I owe you nothing.

*Richard goes over and tries to hit him but Dylan and Bobby
intervene.*

BOBBY
Let's everybody just calm down.

COLONEL
I'll die without you.

A long beat, as Martha looks away, conflicted.

RICHARD
Are you actually considering this?

MARTHA
There's no one else. We've been
through so much together. It's not
that simple.

RICHARD

It is that simple. I am offering you something here...you need to take it. If I leave, I'm not coming back...don't break my heart.

MARTHA

I can't leave him all alone.

KAREN

Mom, you need to go.

MARTHA

Who's gonna take care of him?

RICHARD

You deserve this Martha. Don't let him do this to you.

A beat.

MARTHA

I'm sorry, but I can't leave him here all alone. I just can't do it. I'm sorry.

There is a long pause, Richard staring at Martha. Richard finishes his drink, picks up his jacket, and storms out. Martha can't look at him as he leaves.

DYLAN

I should go too. I still have three weeks before I go back.

BOBBY

Have you decided?

DYLAN

No, but I have three weeks to come to a decision.

BOBBY

That's fair.

Bobby goes to the door and calls out.

BOBBY

Richard. Don't go yet. Please come back.

MARTHA

What are you doing?

Richard comes in the door while Bobby grabs Martha's suitcase and rolls it to Richard.

BOBBY

Richard, change of plans, Mom's going with you. Mom, we're gonna take care of Dad.

MARTHA

No, I have to take care of him. His medicine, his shots.

BOBBY

Remember, I happen to be between jobs at the moment. I'm gonna move back into my old room. We'll bring a nurse in every few days. It's OK. It's your time. We got Dad. Now say your goodbyes.

MARTHA

You gonna be OK?

BOBBY

Sure Mom. My son might not be going back. This is a good day.

KAREN

Mom go. You deserve it.

Karen comes over and gives her a long hug.

COLONEL

You can't leave.

Martha is hesitant.

KAREN

We got this Mom. Dad, I love you for what you did for me, but I can't forgive you for what you did to Mom. I can't forgive myself for standing by. Your wife is moving to Florida. You're gonna be taken care of. Mom, its time to hug your son and grandson goodbye.

She hugs them both.

KAREN

We'll come down to see you. Take care of my mother.

RICHARD

Yes, and thank you.

BOBBY

OK. I'm going up to my room...but wait, where's a trash bin?

MARTHA

There's one behind the couch.

Bobby walks over to the trash bin, takes his medals off and dumps them into the bin. He pauses for a beat.

BOBBY

Yes!

Bobby then grabs his jacket and gun. Martha is suddenly frightened.

MARTHA

Please don't take the gun.

BOBBY

It's OK Mom. Everything's gonna be all right. We did something good here today: my son is not going back to Iraq searching for those weapons of mass destruction. And that's a good thing. And my mother is gonna find peace in the Sunshine State.

DYLAN

I didn't say that.

BOBBY

I know. But I have hope now.

MARTHA

Please Bobby. I never should of let you go to Vietnam. I hope you can forgive me someday.

BOBBY

Mom, I never blamed you. Stop blaming yourself. Everything is gonna be alright. I'm just going up to my room. It's all good.

MARTHA

But stay down here for awhile.

BOBBY

It's time Mom. It's time.
Everything's all right now. Now go
be with Richard. I love you Mom.

MARTHA

A beat.

I love you son.

Bobby looks at his family and exits.

The actors freeze and the back wall screen is lit with the below quotes. Leonard Cohen's song, *The Story of Issac*, plays.

"A Confidential trove of government documents obtained by The Washington Post reveals that senior U.S. Officials failed to tell the truth about the war in Afghanistan throughout the 18-year campaign, making rosy pronouncements they knew to be false and hiding unmistakable evidence the war had become unwinnable."

"We were devoid of a fundamental understanding of Afghanistan--we didn't know what we were doing." Douglas Lute, a three-star Army general who served as the White House war czar during the Bush and Obama administrations, told governments interviewers in 2015.

He added: "What are we trying to do here? We didn't have the foggiest notion of what we were undertaking."

"If the American people knew the magnitude of this dysfunction...2400 lives lost," (20,589 wounded) Lute added, blaming the deaths of military personnel on bureaucratic breakdown among Congress, The Pentagon and the State Department. "Who will say this was in vain?"

"Several of those interviewed described explicit and sustained efforts to deliberately mislead the public. They said it was common in the military (to say) the United States was winning the war when that was not the case."

The Afghanistan Papers 9/13/2020 The screen goes blank.

END OF PLAY

