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DUTY

By Hal Parrott

Characters

DAVID CRENSHAW: 60 to 65 years old, attractive, intelligent, kind and financially successful. Father of Adam, husband of Ellie.

ELLIE CRENSHAW: 50 to 60 years old, attractive, intelligent and opinionated. Mother of Adam, wife of David.

ADAM CRENSHAW: 22 to 25 years old, attractive, fit and polite. Son of David and Ellie.

ROGER MELNICK: 60 to 65 years old, energetic, quick witted, outspoken and not overly attractive. Friend of David and Ellie.

ALI BIN NOUSEF: 35 to 50 years old. Polite, middle-eastern male. Former terrorist suspect.

JANE: 22 to 25 years old, attractive, fiancé to Adam.

ROBERT WILLIAMS: 40 to 55 year old radio talk show host. Unattractive, loud, insincere.

WAITRESS: Any age, any appearance.

INTRODUCTORY SOLILOQUY

(Spotlight lights David Crenshaw's face.)

DAVID

We came alone to our task. But we became more than ourselves after time. After loss. We came to be together. After a loss of one, or some, or many, we came to be diminished. But less alone. More able to reach to one another. And with our reach we became something different. Something beyond us. Our feeling of being a part of one another became an emblem, an identity unique to us. And it was our emblem, our identity. It was for us alone. Not to share with outsiders. Our collective emblematic identity was known to us and among us. Others in our

DAVID (Cont.)

branch recognized that we had become something apart. We had become something hoped for and dreaded. We had been bloodied, and we had bloodied others. We had lost and we had gained. We had somehow, with one another, honored our commitment. We spent our humanity on the task. And the task gave us our identity. Our task marked us forever. And that is who we are. Marked and made separate.

(Spotlight fades to black.)

ACT I

Scene One

(Telephone begins to ring in a comfortably furnished living room. Time is late afternoon, 2008.)

(An attractive middle-aged woman enters the room, moves to the telephone and answers.)

ELLIE

Hello.

(Pause)

Oh hi, Ginny. I expect them any minute.

(Pause)

Don't worry, we'll make sure he eats.

(Pauses then laughs)

Okay, one drink with dinner. No dessert. Got it. I love bossing Roger around. He'll come home to you lean and sober.

(Door opens and Roger and David enter with Roger carrying a garment bag.)

ROGER

Did you say mean and sober? That must be you, David.

(Moves to Ellie and kisses her on the cheek.)

ELLIE

(Hands the telephone to Roger and is kissed by David.)

Here, say hello to your wife.

ROGER

(Takes the phone while David begins making drinks.)

Hi sweetie. Just walked in.

(Pause)

I'm always considerate of these people. They like it when I visit. I'm the best thing that ever happens to them.

(Puts his hand over the mouthpiece.)

What do you have to do to get a drink around here?

(Uncovers the mouthpiece.)

David is forcing a cocktail on me before dinner. It means so much to him.

(Pause)

Yeah, you too honey. See you soon.

(Hangs up phone.)

DAVID

Forcing a cocktail on you?

(Hands Roger a drink)

Thanks again for coming.

ROGER

(Holds up his drink.)

Robert Letson.

DAVID

(Holds up his drink.)

Letson. Can I make you something dear?

ELLIE

No, not right now honey. I want to tell Roger about Adam. He doesn't seem to be talking much about the job search. It's been a few days since he's said anything about follow ups.

ROGER

And you think he wants to go in the service.

ELLIE

Yes.

ROGER

And that's no good.

ELLIE

Of course it's no good.

DAVID

Well we don't know. It's been just a couple of months since classes ended. A lot of graduates never find what they want. Maybe he's thinking of settling for something.

ELLIE

I'd be okay with that.

DAVID

Let's just ask him how it's going. It may not mean the service.

ELLIE

We're both worried Roger. I think we need to address this now. Before it goes any farther. And I thought you could help us. Adam thinks you're cool.

ROGER

What about it David?

DAVID

Yeah, I agree. You're not his parent. I think you may have a voice he'll listen to.

ELLIE

That's the hope.

DAVID

You want him to live with us forever don't you?

ELLIE
(Laughing)

Well sure!

DAVID

I guess I wouldn't mind it so much.

ELLIE

Now's the time for you to discourage him about the service.

DAVID

Of course.

ELLIE

I mean emphatically, David. That doesn't sound very emphatic.

DAVID

Serving in the military is not quite a disgrace, sweetheart.

ELLIE

And you know I'm not implying that it is. I just don't want it for my son.

DAVID

Do you mean all military or just the Marine Corps?

ELLIE

Especially the marines. Look what happened to you and Roger.

DAVID

I'm okay Ellie. So's Roger here.

ELLIE

How you both suffered. How you lost your friends. How you struggled.

DAVID

Our experience wasn't special. It wasn't common, but for our branch it wasn't so unusual.

ELLIE

That's what I mean. It's not unusual for people to get killed or crippled. Not to mention the separation and worry.

ROGER

Ellie, of all the people who serve, very few actually fight. And if he were to go in, which I hope will never happen, he could join the navy or the air force. They allow young officer candidates to make specialty selection requests before entering. He could serve onboard a ship or as a supply officer in the air force. He needn't ever be exposed to combat.

ELLIE

So you both think it would be okay?

DAVID

I would be very proud of Adam if he decided to serve his country. But I wouldn't be pleased about his decision. I would rather see him in graduate school.

ELLIE

Well thank goodness. What about you Roger?

ROGER

Ellie, please don't work so at being some kind of snob.

ELLIE

Snob? Because I don't want my son killed?

ROGER

I think there's more to your objection than the remote prospect of Adam's death on some middle-eastern street corner.

ELLIE

Of course there is. I want to see him have a life. And not a life of recovery and emotional distress. Your friends, our friends from David's marine days, are wonderful, successful people. But they're all troubled. Many have been physically hurt. And of course I've never met the people who didn't survive. But your friends, the other lieutenants and the men who served with you all seem damaged. And I like them. In fact I think they're the very finest people. But what kind of parents would we be if we exposed him to the same kind of awful experience you and your friends are still trying to overcome?

DAVID

I think most of us have put our combat experiences behind us and moved on.

ELLIE

I don't think I agree.

DAVID

It's not forgotten sweetheart. But it's history. In fact, Vietnam was so long ago, 1969 was so long ago, that I can't imagine it was really me. It's like an old movie that I never watch. I know it happened but I don't get maudlin about anything.

ELLIE

I don't think Adam has your ability to compartmentalize. And I don't want him to have to deal with things like this. Life is difficult enough for young people without military service.

ROGER

Oh yeah, how so?

ELLIE

Don't be cute, Roger. You know it's hard to get through school, find work.

DAVID

It's always been hard Ellie.

ELLIE

He thinks he should be able to support himself. Adam's embarrassed about living at home. Roger, you're not going to glorify going in the service are you?

ROGER

Glorify?

ELLIE

That's right. You think it's pretty neat that your godson maybe wants to follow you and David.

DAVID

Yeah Roger, knock it off.

ELLIE

David, please.

DAVID

Sorry. The truth is I don't want him to go in the military. I want him safe in graduate school or with a job he likes. Maybe you can help us Roger.

(The door opens and Adam enters the room.)

ADAM

Well hey Roger. What a surprise. What are you doing here?

(Adam moves quickly to Roger, shakes his hand and receives a hug from Roger.)

ROGER

How are you, buddy? You look great!

ADAM

I'm good. Except for this job thing.

ROGER

No good news yet?

ADAM

I'm getting embarrassed. Not a word. Nobody calls back.

DAVID

That's okay. It's a family tradition. I didn't think I'd ever get a decent job.

ELLIE

It takes time.

ROGER

What are you looking for?

ADAM

Something in marketing. But so far nobody wants to hire a business graduate with no experience. Unemployment seems to be a trend I'm working on.

(Pause)

ADAM (Cont.)

And I know you won't like this, but I don't think I want to go to graduate school.
(Adam moves to the chair and sits.)

ELLIE

Oh?

ADAM

It's mostly about the money. I hate to borrow and I don't want you guys paying for more school.

ELLIE

Your father and I want to help. We think it would be terrific if you go. We were just talking about it.

DAVID

Yeah, your mother wants you to live here forever.

ADAM

Well, that seems to be happening.

ROGER

Would a masters be about a year and a half?

ADAM

At best. But probably a little longer if I work too.

DAVID

Well then, how about it? It'll make you a lot more employable.

ADAM

I wonder.

DAVID

Well, of course it would.

ADAM

Dad, I'd just be one more guy with an MBA and no work experience.

DAVID

You've always worked.

ADAM

I don't think lifeguard or grocery bag boy count for too much in the financial world.

DAVID

It's still work experience. Employers don't expect young people to have a lot of experience.

ADAM

What would you think about me going into the service?

ELLIE

I knew it.

ADAM

I could get some solid management and leadership experience. And then use the benefits for more school when I get out. I could even work on an MBA while I'm in.

ELLIE

Your father and I don't want that for you Adam.

ADAM

Why not?

ELLIE

Lots of reasons. But mostly it's too dangerous.

ADAM

Dad?

DAVID

A lot of people find returning to school tough after the service.

ADAM

You didn't.

DAVID

Actually, I did. It was hard to make the change. I was used to working hard but not studying too much. Shifting gears was tough. A lot of people can't do it.

ADAM

I think I could.

DAVID

And then there's the part about being older. You're twenty two now. Three or more years of active duty would have you starting graduate school at twenty six at the earliest. Then you'd be twenty eight or nine before you started earning any money.

ADAM

And?

DAVID

As opposed to going to work now and enjoying some material satisfaction from hard work you've already done.

ADAM

What if I can't find a decent job?

DAVID

You will. It always takes a little time to find the right thing.

ADAM

But what if I don't? Six months from now I could still be looking for a decent job. Or longer, or maybe never.

ELLIE

You're very employable, sweetheart. Your grades are excellent and you have wonderful people skills.

ADAM

I think it's the people part of me that is pulled toward the marines, mom.

ROGER

Joining the Marine Corps is certainly a good way to get close to others.

ELLIE

Oh Adam, please don't threaten us with this.

ADAM

(Adam stands and turns away and then turns back.)

Mom, I would never want to hurt you or dad. That's why I haven't said anything to either of you about this.

ELLIE

Oh no. David, Roger, you two can say something here.

ROGER

I want to hear him out.

ADAM

Thanks Roger.

DAVID
You haven't done anything have you?

ADAM
Not really.

DAVID
What's that mean?

ELLIE
Oh my god. You haven't signed up have you?

ADAM
No, mom. But I've spoken to the officer selection recruiter twice.

DAVID
The marine recruiter?

ADAM
Yeah.

DAVID
How about the Navy or the Air Force?

ADAM
I haven't spoken with them.

DAVID
How come?

ADAM
I guess I'm just not as interested.

DAVID
Ellie, nothing has been signed.

ADAM
Dad, mom. Would you be so upset if I went in?

ELLIE
My god, Adam. It would be the worst thing imaginable. The worst.

DAVID
Yeah, I'd be upset.

ADAM

Dad, I thought you might be proud of me.

DAVID

I'm already proud of you. You don't need to go in the service to make me proud of you.

ELLIE

Adam, you are my son. You will always be my child. I know you're a fine mature young man. But goddammit, you are not going in the marines. You can not do this to yourself and I'll be damned if you will be allowed to screw up every single hope we have ever had for you.

(She stands)

You have an obligation to us. You owe us. You owe us your life. You owe us for your education. You will owe us a lot for your future happiness. I wouldn't remind you of these debts but you are making me remind you. It may seem selfish of me to demand that you behave reasonably. But you do not have the right to screw up the plans I have for you. You can not pay me the debt...ever. But I'll be satisfied to see you grow through your middle years without bad dreams or worse. I'll be paid by watching you work or study each day. By watching you earn your place. You'll pay me back by getting married and having kids. And loving your wife and behaving honorably and not letting your kids enlist in the goddamn Marine Corps.

(David stands and moves to Ellie. He puts his arm around her shoulder.)

ROGER

Well Adam, there you have it.

ELLIE

(Ellie shrugs out of David's grasp.)

Why can't you be serious?

ROGER

Sorry.

ADAM

So you're here to talk me out of this. Right, Roger?

ROGER

Pretty much.

ELLIE

I need your help here, David. This is a time for parenting.

DAVID

I know.

ADAM

You're really not opposed to it are you Dad?

DAVID

Look son, the military can be very good for some people. It helped me. It can teach a person to work hard. There's something to be said for it.

(David sits on the sofa.)

ADAM

I think so too.

DAVID

But now is not a good time.

ADAM

Because we're at war?

DAVID

Mostly.

(Pause)

The trouble with all of this is not just timing. There seems to be continued spots...tough places where people are sent. And when you're there, you're pretty much alone. We used to say that marines never die alone. That's generally true because there are other marines around at the time. And maybe a navy corpsmen. But you won't find any politicians around. And you won't find any civilians slapping you on the back for what you've done.

ADAM

I guess I know that.

DAVID

Maybe you think you know about it, but you really don't. It's not just the danger and separation. I appreciate you wanting to be of service, but I think your future is best spent in graduate school or even under-employed.

ELLIE

That's right. Besides, this family has done enough. My father served. Your dad's father was in world war two and your father was wounded in combat. Roger here got hurt too.

ADAM

I think that's a big part of my thinking of this. I knew you guys wouldn't want me to go in. But I feel like I should serve. Just like my dad and both of my grandfathers. And like you Roger. I'm proud of what dad did. I would like my son to be proud of me in the same way. And I think my country needs me. We don't have enough manpower. We keep deploying reserves and guard

ADAM (Cont.)

units. A lot of the regular active forces served second and third tours in Iraq. They need people like me.

DAVID

This sounds like recruiter speak.

ADAM

How about a little respect, okay? I know they want me to join but I can watch the news. Maybe this is a big mistake...not me going in...I mean our mission. But if it's a mistake my country made, the mistake was made for the right reasons. And now we need to fight our way out. I believe our intentions are good. And were good when we went in. We had faulty intelligence.

ROGER

Yeah, that.

ADAM

Can you refuse to serve your nation just because it maybe made a mistake?

ELLIE

Of course.

DAVID

It's an interesting question.

ADAM

You agree with me don't you, Roger?

ROGER

I almost do. If the argument didn't involve my godson it would be easier to embrace.

ADAM

Will you talk to the recruiter with me, Dad?

ELLIE

Of course he won't.

DAVID

Ellie, I am against this. Adam, I've told you that I would prefer that you go back to school or find work. And if you refuse to do that I will still love you. But your mother and I will be wrecked.

ELLIE

It will be the very worst thing that could happen.

DAVID

I feel that if you go through with this, that if you get through the training and then what comes after, you'll never be the same. The person who is sitting in this room will stop existing.

ROGER

That's if you survive.

ADAM

Sounds pretty dramatic.

DAVID

I guess so.

ELLIE

I can't believe this is happening.

DAVID

How about giving yourself a little time to see how you feel? Every time I want to buy a new car I wait a couple of weeks and the urge passes.

ELLIE

David!

DAVID

Hey I mean it. Please give yourself a month before making any kind of decision about this.

ADAM

You know I don't want to. But I'll wait. Could you at least talk to the recruiter with me?

DAVID

I'll make a deal with you. If you'll delay your decision for thirty days or so, I'll talk to the recruiter with you. In fact your mom and Roger and I will all talk with him.

ADAM

Okay, when?

ROGER

How about right away? Tomorrow morning. We'll go over and listen to him make his pitch.

ELLIE

I can't believe you're allowing him to do this.

DAVID

We're just talking Ellie.

ADAM

I'm sorry if I've upset you, mom.

(Adam stands, moves over to Ellie and takes her hand.)

But I don't want to be hanging around here like some kind of overgrown adolescent while I go back to school. I want you to be proud of me.

DAVID

Nothing could make me more proud of you than an MBA. While we're going through our thirty day recess, I think it's fair that you continue your best effort to find a job you feel good about. And please, think as objectively as you can about continuing your education. I expect real effort from you Adam. Don't just kill time for a month.

ADAM

Okay dad. I'll continue to look for something and keep the MBA window open.

DAVID

I'm glad. How about some dinner? Something that will go well with a beer I think.

ELLIE

Alright, but no more talk about the marines.

(David, Ellie, Roger and Adam begin moving to the front door.)

DAVID

Okay sweetheart.

ROGER

Maybe we can talk about the infield fly rule.

ELLIE

Shut up, Roger.

(Lights go down with Ellie, Roger, David and Adam moving through the door.)

Scene Two

(Early evening of the same day, Ellie, David and Roger enter the living room and Roger goes to the bar and begins making drinks.)

ELLIE

I think dinner went well. I appreciate your effort to steer away from more service talk.

DAVID

Please sit down, Ellie.

(David takes a seat on a chair facing the sofa as Ellie sits on the sofa facing David)

I think we have a rough patch ahead.

ELLIE

You can stop this, David. I know you can.

DAVID

Ignoring the issue over dinner or delaying a conversation for a month won't help.

ELLIE

It might help.

(She rises from the sofa and walks across the room, takes a drink from Roger, turns and faces David.)

It's a month to find a job. A month to change his mind about school. It gives us time to think of a way to talk him out of it.

(Ellie moves back to the sofa, sits facing David and takes his hand.)

But it has to be you who talks him out of it. He's stopped listening to me. He's decided I'm background noise. He doesn't want to hurt me, but that's not going to be enough. You're the one, David. You are the only person he'll listen to about this. With maybe some help from Roger.

DAVID

Maybe Roger can help a lot.

ELLIE

(Releases David's hand)

I'm afraid Roger might accidentally make this whole thing more attractive.

DAVID

I don't think so.

ELLIE

Roger thinks you're the greatest. He thinks you're the greatest because he saw how brave you were in combat. We don't want that.

DAVID

I wasn't so brave.

ROGER

You were kind of brave.

ELLIE

We both know who you are. Roger knows who you are. That's part of the problem. Adam wants to be a war hero like his dad.

DAVID

That's not who I am. But I agree that may be part of the problem. Roger could take some of the varnish off that.

ELLIE

Would you Roger?

ROGER

Probably not.

ELLIE

But you've been thinking about this haven't you?

ROGER

Well, of course.

ELLIE

I mean you've known what was up. And you've been thinking about what to do.

ROGER

I have an idea about what to say. I think I can remove some of the romance about going in.

ELLIE

Well, maybe it can work. I hope to god it can.

DAVID

And there's something else.

ELLIE

What?

DAVID

I'd like to appeal to Adam on another level. I think what we do might sometimes be wrong. I mean as a nation.

ELLIE

Keep going.

DAVID

(David stands and begins pacing.)

If he really wants to serve...okay. And I admit that there are times we need to defend our country. But not for serving something immoral. And I'm not indicting the marines. It's just the truly awful things they are ordered to do. Killing others is not okay. It's not okay that some character who was too good to serve, decides it's time to kill others. And it's the law. The law we follow says that if the president or congress, or sometimes both, tell the marines to land and fight, they need to do that. If you take the oath to serve in the military, you have to serve and serve honorably. Even if the resultant deeds you perform are questionable. American servicemen are required to follow orders. Not illegal orders, but it's tough for them to decide what's illegal. And as to immorality, nothing is worse than taking a life. I think it's the most immoral thing a person can do. The servicemen who actually fight are told to take life and then the taking of life is celebrated when it occurs. They have worked so hard to get to the point where killing is accomplished...All of their peers are focused on successful killing. And when some of these friends are killed or wounded, it makes the life-taking of the enemy even more significant. The process becomes something that is fed by a frenzied enthusiasm. The whole thing gets wrapped in some kind of cloak of patriotism. And these people are patriotic. It's just that our national political ideals don't always reach to being patient. We fight because we're told to. We fight because our national leaders feel that it's the next extension of diplomacy.

ELLIE

You're making my point.

DAVID

Sweetheart, I think you will embrace any argument to keep your son from going in the marines.

ELLIE

So, you got a problem with that?

DAVID

(David laughs.)

Only a little. I think we should do what we can as parents to help him with his decisions. But I don't think I'm quite ready to lock him in the house.

ELLIE

We only have a month.

DAVID

Yeah, one month. He's got the itch and he really didn't want to wait to talk about it. I think he would have signed up today if I had supported it.

(Pause)

What do you think Roger?

ROGER

I'm concerned. I'm pleased that Adam wants to serve, but I don't want him to do it. And we need to stop him.

ELLIE

Bless you.

ROGER

Yeah.

ELLIE

What's the matter?

ROGER

With me it's a little different. I see some things differently than David.
(Ellie moves to the sofa and sits.)

ELLIE

No kidding.

DAVID

Go ahead, Roger.

ROGER

I appreciate his desire to be of service. And as much as I admire the people who have served, and are serving, I don't want him to do it. I'll make a case about the wrongness of the whole thing.

ELLIE

That's it?

ROGER

Hey Ellie. What else is there? You've tried to make him feel guilty about leaving you. That's not keeping him home is it?

ELLIE

But with me it's different. You two have something that Adam wants. There's nothing that I have or have experienced that he wants. It's like a club with you. And he wants to get in. He's not going to listen to me.

ROGER

Maybe you're underestimating your ability to persuade, Ellie.

ELLIE

You're so full of it. Even if I say things to discourage him, he'll still want to do it because of you two. Your example of obligation and sacrifice is appealing to him. We haven't been in a world war lately but we keep fighting all over. And he wants to be in the club. It's stupid. But he won't listen to me say it. It has to be you guys.

DAVID

I'm sure Roger's right. You don't think Adam acts on what you say, but he does. He listens for a couple of reasons. He's a good boy who wants to do what his mom tells him. And he respects your judgment. He knows you're a smart cookie. You're scary smart to him Ellie. You've got that big brain. And a nice figure too, don't you think, Roger?

ROGER

I've always said that.

ELLIE

You two are such assholes.

ROGER

Did they teach you to talk like that at Smith?

ELLIE

No, I learned it from being around you two.

DAVID

I hate it when she's mean Roger.

ROGER

It must be difficult, David. How about a beverage? I think maybe something tall.

(Roger moves to the bar in the corner of the room and begins making a drink.)

DAVID

Please help yourself.

ROGER

So what am I going to say?

DAVID

Yeah.

ROGER

I think a little more candid conversation about how unpleasant it can really be.
 (Roger hands David a drink and remains standing.
 Roger holds up his drink in a toast.)

William Harran.

DAVID

(Raises his glass)

William Harran.

ROGER

(Takes a large sip.)

Damn, that's terrible. I'm not sure I can drink a lot of this.

DAVID

I'm sorry. I know it must be a hardship.

ROGER

Okay, here's what I'm thinking. I don't think young men really want to go in the corps. It's just something they end up doing because they can't get anybody to argue them out of it hard enough. Hell, I'd have never gone in if somebody would have paid enough attention to me. When I told my dad he thought it was terrific. He told me about how he used to watch marines get killed on the beaches from his ship in WW2. He thought it might be good for me to almost get killed.

DAVID

That's not funny.

ROGER

Yeah, but it's the truth. My mom was pretty busy drinking and feeling sorry about what a turd I was. She thought it was okay if I almost got killed too. I don't think she believed I might get killed...but she was able to accept the almost part. I remember watching her smile at the thought. Nobody else cared at all. Well, I take that back. The old guy on the corner had been a rifle company commander at Tarawa, and he tried to talk me out of it. I couldn't pay much attention to him because he was so old of course. Must have been nearly forty five.

ELLIE

That's young.

ROGER

Not then. Anyway, I took my bachelor's degree and my turdness over to the marine recruiter and he seemed like such an interesting man. And all of his friends seemed to wear colorful clothing and say things like "motivated and squared away." I was just certain that I could wear those colorful clothes and enjoy myself with these interesting fellows.

ELLIE

And the rest is history. And now Adam.

ROGER

Yeah. Well, let's go see the recruiter tomorrow. We'll listen to him make his pitch.

DAVID

What if Adam decides he wants to join based on this guy's presentation?

ROGER

That's where I come in. And you. And maybe this recruiter when he finds out who we are.

DAVID

Oh yeah? Who are we?

ROGER

We're a couple of busted up old rifle platoon commanders who have actually served in combat. I'll bet this recruiter hasn't.

DAVID

Don't sell these recruiters short. The marines and army are stretched thin. Most of the marine recruiters have served in combat. And some go back away.

ROGER

Okay. But when he finds out who we are, he's got to come a little clean in front of Adam.

DAVID

Come clean?

ROGER

You know, not talk about being "squared away." Maybe tell Adam a little about how crappy it can really be. How really awful it can get.

DAVID

I wouldn't expect much of that from a recruiter. He's got a quota.

ROGER

Anyway, I think we have a starting point. I'm tired. I better get to bed. Night kids.
(Roger leaves the living room.)

DAVID

Good night.

ELLIE

(Speaks loudly at the door Roger has walked through.)

Breakfast at seven thirty Roger.

DAVID

I'm glad he's here for this.

ELLIE

I'm worried about what he can do. There's really not much he can say.

DAVID

Yeah, I know. Let's go to bed.

(Stands)

ELLIE

There's something going on.

DAVID

Oh?

ELLIE

An undercurrent. An unspoken bunch of stuff.

DAVID

You've lost me.

ELLIE

You guys think this is kind of funny. You're putting on something of an exercise for me. There's really no commitment to keep him out. It's like you and Roger, and even Adam are conspiring.

DAVID

Ellie, I don't want him going in. How else can I say it? I've told him, and I'm trying to talk him out of it.

ELLIE

Not hard enough. You could have just said no. Forbidden him.

DAVID

Honey, he's twenty two years old. I can't forbid him.

ELLIE

You should have. Or at least tried. This going to the recruiter crap is not going to work. I believe you really want him to go in.

DAVID

That's not true, Ellie.

ELLIE

I believe you want to use up Roger's feeble arguments and then claim there's nothing more anyone can do to keep him out. I think it's an unspoken plan you and your friend have. It's a plan you have for our son.

DAVID

Oh please.

ELLIE

I mean it. I'm not going to sit around and watch you claim helplessness. And I think you're doing it to hurt me.

DAVID

What?

ELLIE

That's what I think. I think you're finding some perverse way of showing me how ethical, morally obligated people behave.

DAVID

You have absolutely lost me.

ELLIE

No I haven't. You think everybody is filled with honor except me. And you are making me pay. But you're making me pay with your son. With our kid. What kind of honorable behavior is that?

DAVID

Ellie, none of this is true.

ELLIE

Oh, it's true David. You and your little band of brothers bullshit. You can't get enough of it. You're so noble and long-suffering. Do you care so little about your son? How can you live with yourself?

DAVID

The truth is, I'm okay living with myself, Ellie.

ELLIE

And I'm not, right?

DAVID

Sometimes I think it's hard for you. Like now.

ELLIE

It is hard for me. But not so difficult that I'd sacrifice my son. I think it's harder for you. You've never gotten over it. And this is payback.

DAVID

That's untrue.

ELLIE

But what has Adam ever done to deserve this? He didn't cheat on you. I'm the one who cheated. I'm the one who had an affair. And you're still punishing me for it. Are you okay with throwing him away? To hurt me? Why didn't you throw me away when you had the chance? If I leave now, will you keep him out?

DAVID

Ellie, I love you. I always have. And I think I show you.

ELLIE

You're showing me that you have an ability to extract a kind of revenge I never imagined.

DAVID

I can't believe you're saying these things.

ELLIE

And I can't believe you could be such a phony. Such a full-of-crap, say-the-right thing, bad person. That's right David. A bad person. That's who you are if you let this happen.

DAVID

Enough Ellie. I don't deserve this.

ELLIE

It's not about what you deserve. It's about our son. What you deserve? Can you hear yourself?
(Ellie runs from the room and David sits on the sofa.)

(Lights dim.)

Scene Three

(Late the next morning, Jane and Adam enter the living room, turn to each other while holding hands.)

ADAM

They're right behind us. They'll be here in a couple of minutes.

JANE

I dread Ellie's reaction.

ADAM

Me too. It should be awful. I saw mom's face when the recruiter talked about Afghanistan. Are you still okay with this?

JANE

Of course. But I'm afraid. I'm so scared. I hope we're doing the right thing. I can't stand to think of the mistake this could be. Of you being hurt. Of what can happen. Of what can happen to you. Maybe I should say no. But I love you. I want you to have a real life partner. That's who I want to be for you. And you can't promise me you'll be safe. I know you can't.

ADAM

Yes I can. I promise. I'll be safe. Nothing will happen to me. I have a reason to live. You're everything to me. I'll come back to you. I may not even be deployed for a long time. You can come and visit me. We'll have our time together. I promise. I won't get hurt. We'll have the life we want.

JANE

I love you. I'll support you. I'll always be here for you. I want you here with me. After your training we can be together. I don't want to be away from you. We belong to each other.

(Jane kisses Adam fiercely, and breaks off the kiss when Ellie, David and Roger enter the room.)

DAVID

Well I was impressed by that young man. But I don't like his message for you, Adam. What do we all think?

ELLIE

I think that recruiter has an impossible job. Trying to talk people into doing something insane. I wonder if he sleeps nights?

ADAM

I want to go in.

DAVID

Remember our deal.

ADAM

I know. Wait thirty days.

ELLIE

This can't be happening.

DAVID

Ellie, he's not going to do anything right now. We have some time.

ELLIE

But you're okay with this. You are just going to let him go in a month from now.

DAVID

I'm okay with none of this.

ELLIE

Jane, you can't agree with this.

JANE

I don't want to be away from Adam. But I want to support his decisions.

ELLIE

His decisions? What about you. You two are going to be married soon. Don't you think you have a voice? This is a shared decision for the two of you. Or it should be.

JANE

Yeah, it is. But he's never tried to stop me from doing anything. I want to have the best kind of life for us.

(Stands)

I don't want to start with me telling him he shouldn't do something. Or having him tell me later how much he resents my stopping him.

ELLIE

Well, forgive me for saying this. But how are you going to feel if he gets hurt? Or killed?

JANE

Ellie, is that a fair question?

ELLIE

Jane, you don't have a sense of what can happen. These two guys are survivors. Many, many of their friends were killed in combat. And that doesn't even begin to include the ones who can't eat by themselves.

JANE

I know Ellie. But that was Vietnam. This is different. They don't have the same casualties.

ROGER

Unless you're one of the casualties.

ELLIE

So you're willing to roll the dice?

ROGER

Hey.

JANE

No, Ellie. I'm not. But if I stand in his way, we'll never be close. We'll never have the kind of shared life I want for us. And I admire him for what he wants to do.

(Moves to the side of the sofa.)

ADAM

Mom, I'm an adult. I'm able to make decisions. Jane and I have talked about this. We want our lives to mean something. To stand for something.

ROGER

Whoa.

ADAM

What Roger? You don't think I can make this decision?

ROGER

You can make a decision. I know lots of guys who made the same decision you want to make. And bad things happened to too many of them. I think you need to know that I can't think more of you.

ADAM

So you'll think less of me if I go in?

ROGER

No. But I won't think more of you. Look, Adam, I went in because nobody was able to talk me out of it. In fact nobody really tried. But you are loved. And not just by your folks. You do have Jane. You guys are special together.

ADAM

So if I go in, I'm nothing special.

ROGER

Special is what you'll be. But not in the way you want.

ADAM

Sorry, I don't get it.

ROGER

People who serve in combat do become special. It's kind of an episodic uniqueness. The event that makes them special ends. But then the episode lives with them. And that makes them special in a not so good way.

ADAM

You're talking about adjusting to things.

ROGER

Yeah there's that. But mostly about surviving past the events.

ADAM

Look Roger, I've read the books. I've talked to you and dad. I know some of the guys you served with. I'm not a kid.

ROGER

You're pretty grown up. But, I know about the kind of things your dad hasn't shared with you.

ADAM

I know I can't imagine what combat would be like. I've thought about it a lot. And I've wondered about how I would hold up. Didn't you before you went?

ROGER

Yeah. That was the loudest part of those young man questions. How would I do? Would I be able to function? Would I be brave? Would I be killed? Wounded? Would I be a hero? And would I be recognized when I walked into a room because I was a hero? And what if I got killed trying to be a hero? Would that be so bad? And was I an ass because I wanted to think more of myself? And was I an ass because I thought of heroism instead of service? Or was it just the uniform? I really liked the uniform.

ADAM

Roger, I can't know what it was like for you and dad. I know I'll probably never be able to live up to my dad's example. But at least I can follow his example. He set a standard. He's lived by a code of honor. I admire who he is.

ELLIE

This is exactly what I was afraid of.

DAVID

Let's not overdo the high standard.

JANE

Your example is important to Adam, David. Really, to both of us.

(Moves behind the sofa and rests her hands on Adam's shoulders.)

ADAM

I'm not trying to embarrass you. I admire what you guys did. I think it helped create you guys. I think you were a lot like me. Out of college with decisions to make. I think you made your decisions and stayed with them.

ELLIE

More like they were stuck with them.

JANE

But Adam has more to say about how he serves. He can select his specialty and plan his path. It's different now.

(Moves to the front of the sofa and sits next to Adam.)

ROGER

Jane, Adam, I'm probably a good example of how the service can help somebody. And I can tell you that if I hadn't gone in the marines, I probably would have been some kind of bum. They taught me how to work. They taught me to stay with difficult jobs and not ever quit. They taught me to appreciate all kinds of people. They taught me how to lead and how to follow.

ADAM

And?

ROGER

Mostly they taught me that all of it was a mistake.

DAVID

What?

ROGER

David, what did you think when you saw your first dead person?

DAVID

Are we talking about a combat death?

ROGER

Yeah.

DAVID

I thought it was wrong.

ROGER

He was a dead North Vietnamese Regular, right?

DAVID

Yeah.

ROGER

Why did you think it was wrong?

DAVID

You know the answer to this.

ADAM

What's he talking about, dad?

DAVID

Son, I was struck by how pitiful his body looked. I thought about how he was some mother's son. That she didn't know he was dead because we had just made him that way, and unless she had some sixth sense she could only worry and hope this couldn't happen. I remember staring at him and realizing that this was a failure of diplomacy. We, and here I mean the collective we of the United States president and congress and the jerks from North Vietnam, should have worked harder to prevent us from killing this young man. So I stood there looking down at this mother's son who had flies in his eyes, and thought about our failures and my sudden understanding of the mistake being made.

ADAM

I've never heard you talk about that.

ROGER

I have. He told me about five minutes after the NVA was killed.

DAVID

I don't know that my opinion was universal. I kept it to myself except for telling Roger.

ROGER

Yeah. And a few minutes later there were marine bodies to think about.

ADAM

But dad, isn't that what you expected? I mean, you were at war. You were trained to do this. Expect a human cost. Right?

DAVID

That's the deal.

ROGER

Having somebody tell you about it, and even show you movies doesn't work.

ADAM

Did you feel that way too, Roger?

ROGER

Nope. I was never as touchy-feely as your pop. I figured they were coming south to kill civilians and they got what they deserved.

ADAM

Really?

ROGER

Well sure. But even if they had been honorable, I wouldn't have cared. If the Marine Corps told me they were my enemy that would have been good enough. My job was to kill the enemy. I was trained for it and paid to do it. And I was okay with it.

ELLIE

I don't think you were really so okay with it.

ROGER

Oh yeah?

ELLIE

We all know that there is more to this kind of situation.

ROGER

I agreed with the notion of mission, Ellie. It was my job. I was proud to do it. I was scared a lot. And pleased that I could do my job when I was afraid. And do it better than people who have never done this kind of thing could imagine. I found out who I was. I found out that I could face the fire. That I could hear the supersonic snap of a bullet passing by my face and still move forward. That was always hard. Harder than you can know. Moving against that fire the first time is hard. But then it gets harder. It doesn't get easier. At some point, moving against the fire feels suicidal. That's real bravery, I think. I served around a lot of really brave young men. And along the way, I'd stopped being a turd. And a lot of us stopped being alive.

ADAM

I understand.

ROGER

Do you? Maybe you just heard what I said. I don't think you can understand. No offense.

ADAM

I'm only a little offended.

ROGER

Look Adam. I told you what the service did for me. It helped make me a person I thought I could admire. But the other stuff happened too. I gave up ever having a day pass without thinking about things I don't want to think about. I'm filled with a sadness. I miss my friends. I can't bring them back. I can't bring back troops. These guys sacrificed everything. They've been gone a long time, but they're still with me. I think of them a lot.

ADAM

Maybe this kind of conversation is hard for you.

ROGER

No. What's hard is everyday. As years pass the memories become a bigger part of my daily life. You'd think these memories would kind of retreat into some kind of merciful fog. But that's not it. I'm not whining, just sharing. I don't have many bad dreams. It's the conscious memory of events and people that create a framework for the rest of my life. Recruiters didn't tell me about that.

ADAM

Don't you think it's different for everybody?

ROGER

Ask your father.

ADAM

How about it dad? Has it been so tough for you?

DAVID

I don't know. I think it helps to stay busy. I've always spent a lot of time thinking about your mother. That's helped.

ADAM

Really?

DAVID

No kidding, She's kind of a hottie.

ELLIE

Please be serious.

ROGER

Your dad has always kept his mouth shut about things. You'll never get much out of him. Ask me if you want to know what he thinks.

ADAM
(Laughing)

Okay.

ELLIE

Well let me tell you what he thinks. He thinks it's really okay if you go in. He won't admit it. David, you need to tell him not to do this. This is so stupid. It's just a lot of nonsense. Adam, you know better than to do this, but you want to be like these two. You can have a different life. None of what they put themselves through matters. They just wanted to do something. Like you do. But in the end it didn't matter. They almost didn't survive. They wanted to have some kind of special ID. They ought to put signs on people who go in that say, I'm a dope. But proud. If you want to do something really hard and not stupid, go to graduate school. Or join the peace corps. Or teach. I absolutely forbid you to do this.

(Looks at David)

Well David. Here's the time. Do you forbid Adam from doing this?

DAVID

Ellie, Adam knows I don't want him to go in.

ELLIE

Are you saying you won't tell him he can't go in?

DAVID

I'm unable to stop this young man from doing what he thinks is right. Adam, I don't want you to go in. I'm sincere about it. You will hurt your mother and me. I believe it will be a mistake if you sign up. Please listen to us and make a better choice.

ADAM

Mom, I can't stop wanting to serve. Nobody calls me back about a job. This is a place where I'm wanted and needed. I can really be of help. And there's more to it for me. I want you to be proud of me. And I want my wife to be proud of me. I don't want to be like everybody else.

ELLIE

You mean like all the successful, sane people? The people who live constructive lives? The people who respond to real challenges? Not made up stuff?

ADAM

Mom, those are the kind of people who go in. That's who I want to be.

ELLIE

Adam, you're as wrong as you can be. I won't go along. You don't have my blessing. I hate this. We will all regret this.

DAVID

Please remember your promise son. Thirty days. So it's not okay to make a decision today.

ADAM

I know dad. But this is what I want to do.

DAVID

And I know Jane is being supportive, but I don't think you're being fair to her.

ADAM

Well, she's really okay with it. She won't like the separation but she says she understands.

ELLIE

She understands nothing.

JANE

Please Ellie. Give me a little credit.

ELLIE

No. You have to earn it. You can't just go along. I promise you that you will regret this, Jane.

DAVID

Honey, maybe that's enough for now. Should we all go have some lunch?

ELLIE

Lunch? No thanks David. You go ahead. You and Roger. And Jane. And your boy.
(Stands and walks quickly through the front door.)

DAVID

(Stands and speaks to the closing door.)

Ellie.

ROGER

(Stands)

Come on you guys. Let's go get something to eat. Cool off a bit.

ADAM

Dad, should I go after mom?

DAVID

Maybe not right now. Let's give her some time.
(David, Roger, Adam and Jane walk toward the door as the lights come down.)

Scene Four

(Time is one month later. David and Ellie are in their bedroom with Ellie brushing her hair at a vanity and David reading in a chair.)

ELLIE

I hate this more than I can say.

DAVID

I know you do.

ELLIE

It's not too late to tell him he can't go.

DAVID

Yes it is dear. All the paperwork is done. He's been sworn.

ELLIE

He's your son. He might relent if you tell him you won't allow him to throw his life away.

DAVID

Ellie, we've tried to talk him out of it. He's not twelve years old. He's a grownup. We've tried everything.

ELLIE

You never told him not to go in. You just said you didn't want him to.

DAVID

Look. I tried to talk him away from it. I suggested alternatives. The Peace Corps, graduate school, work. But he doesn't want it. He wants this.

ELLIE

(Slams her hairbrush down on the vanity.)

It's what you want.

(Stands and faces David.)

You've always wanted this to happen. For bad reasons. I'm sorry. I've told you I'm sorry. I think you stayed with me out of a sense of obligation. You believed you were supposed to stay with your wife no matter what. I made a mistake. I was stupid. And now you're making me pay.

(Kneels next to the bed and holds David's hand.)

I know you can stop him from going. Please, you have to do this.

DAVID

I can't stop him Ellie.

ELLIE

(Jumps to her feet and leans over David, yelling.)

You won't try. You bastard. I'll never forgive you for this. This cheapens you David. You and all of your false crap. It's all hollow. Your claims about a life of service is just empty talk. When it's time to really do something worthwhile you fold. You just quit.

(Slumps back to her knees, puts her head on the bed and begins sobbing.)

You just quit.

DAVID

I'm sorry Ellie. I think Adam's made a decision because it's what he wants. He does want to be of service. He believes in the values you and I have taught him. He wants to help. He thinks this is his time.

ELLIE

(Sobbing)

Oh please.

DAVID

We have to accept it now, Ellie. We have to go forward with our lives. And we have to let Adam move on with his. I'm very proud of him and worried for his safety. But let's do our best for him.

ELLIE

(Looks up)

I'm not accepting anything about this. This is on you. He knows he has my love. And he knows I don't want him hurt. But he doesn't know that about you. So you get to live with that. See how you like going forward with that.

(Stands, grabs a teddy bear from the vanity and rushes from the bedroom to the living room . Sits on the sofa and begins speaking to the teddy bear.)

Adam, my baby boy. My sweet child. I can still feel and smell you in this teddy bear. When you were a baby you loved to be held. And I held you so much. I would come into your room at night to look at you. To listen to your soft breathing. To touch you. To hold you. When you were born everything changed. My world was a world that held you. You were my new world. You were the center of everything. I wanted to hold you always. Keep you safe. Keep you warm and safe. To listen to your soft breathing. To look into your sweet, sleeping face.

(Begins to sob softly.)

And now I can't protect you. I'm your mother and I can't keep you safe. I can't keep you safe.

(Buries her face in the teddy bear and begins to cry.)

(Lights dim.)

ACT TWO

Scene One

(Roger is seated at a table in a coffee shop.)

(Ali enters the coffee shop, sees Roger and moves to his table.)

ALI

Roger?

(Roger rises and shakes hands with Ali.)

ROGER

Ali. At last, we meet. Please join me.

WAITRESS

(Waitress approaches the table with a coffee pot.)

What can I get you?

ALI

Coffee please. Black.

(A waitress pours the coffee and exits.)

You are as I imagined.

ROGER

Probably a little more handsome and vigorous though. It's hard to convey all this over the phone.

ALI

You seem to make a lot of small jokes. None are so humorous. I believe you are always concealing your feelings.

ROGER

Does being a Muslim make you a psychologist?

ALI

There is a concentration on actions I think. Maybe more than in many religions. Do you have a religion Roger?

ROGER

I was raised a Methodist but I don't attend services anymore.

ALI

Why not? Have you lost your faith?

ROGER

Not so much. I never had a lot of faith. I just don't want to give up my time. I have other things to do.

ALI

What other things?

ROGER

Well, golf, making breakfast, having sex. You know, other things.

ALI

Everything is funny with you. It is not always comfortable for me to hear the things you say.

ROGER

Well, that's life I guess. Do you like every conversation you have with other Muslims?

ALI

No. We have much to disagree about. But there is not so much levity. We feel an obligation to treat our discussions seriously. We have a duty to one another not to diminish our respect.

ROGER

Not us Methodists. Nothing is too serious with us.

ALI

Are you not serious about establishing friendships with Muslims?

ROGER

Well sure, but I have to be me. Nobody likes a phony.

ALI

I think we can agree on that point.

ROGER

And Ali, nobody likes to be around a gloomy Gus all the time.

ALI

Gloomy Gus?

ROGER

Yeah. You know. Can't you lighten up a little? Relax. Laugh once in awhile?

ALI

Yes, I laugh.

ROGER

I can tell. It must be quite an occasion.

ALI

So you think by making sarcastic remarks you can create a friendship?

ROGER

No, but maybe you'll say something back and we'll have something to build on.

ALI

Not everything has to be funny, Roger.

ROGER

You got me there.

ALI

You fought in Vietnam?

ROGER

I did.

ALI

As did your friend David?

ROGER

Yeah, both of us. That's where we met.

ALI

And you are both considered heroes.

ROGER

I think you could say that David is a hero. I don't feel like I'm special. But I served, and I'm proud of my service.

ALI

It seems to be a distinction for both of us.

ROGER

Oh, is there some kind of Muslim Marine Corps?

ALI

There you are. You stopped joking for a minute only. I only meant that many of my people regard selfless devotion and sacrifice above all else. They believe in an obligation to a higher power and are taught to respect this calling. For many, the calling to arms or martyrdom is the most honorable choice. Perhaps it was for you.

ROGER

Well not the martyrdom part. But duty, yeah.

ALI

For us as well. It is possible for me to respect your devotion to your sense of duty without agreeing with you. Your call to arms or duty happened before mine. But I understand.
(Waitress enters with coffee pot.)

WAITRESS

Can I get you fellows anything else?

(Waitress exits.)

ROGER

I don't understand acts of terrorism.

ALI

Perhaps you do. You understand what violence looks like. You understand what it's like to fight for something in which you believe.

ROGER

How can you kill civilians? Children, women, indiscriminately?

ALI

I have done none of these things.

ROGER

Sorry, I was speaking broadly. But I did mean Muslims who are suicide bombers or terrorists.

ALI

For them it is a sense of sacrifice against a sworn enemy.

ROGER

But why little kids?

ALI

I don't believe children are ever targeted. It is a sad event when they are lost.

ROGER

So you think this stuff is okay?

ALI

I think it is hard for you to understand why someone would blow themselves up. But what about diving on a hand grenade? Have you known marines to do such a thing?

ROGER

Yeah. We generally reward it with a posthumous medal of honor. But that doesn't involve killing civilians.

ALI

Did the United States bomb civilians in world war two? Or even Vietnam?

ROGER

World war two was strategic bombing. In Vietnam, the war lasted so long because we bombed military targets instead of civilians.

ALI

So, using the word strategic makes killing civilians, that is, to include children, acceptable.

ROGER

I don't think this country ever attacked another country because of religious differences.

ALI

Why then did you attack Iraq?

ROGER

It wasn't about religion.

ALI

Are you going to say it was to stop the use of weapons of mass destruction?

ROGER

No, I don't think that one works anymore.

ALI

Many thousands of civilians have been killed there.

ROGER

By both sides.

ALI

Perhaps, but you see my point?

ROGER

That dropping the A-bomb on the Japs was the same as you blowing up a school bus?

ALI

Of course you are trying to reduce my argument but perhaps you can see a similar type of devotion to something violent.

ROGER

Okay. Maybe I do. When you're on the end of the pointed stick you've got to believe.

ALI

And Roger, it's not just your or my pointed stick. There are many such sticks around our world.

ROGER

You aren't trying to lecture me are you?

ALI

I am trying to enlighten you.

ROGER

How about a beer?

ALI

I am a devout Muslim. Alcohol is forbidden.

ROGER

All the time?

ALI

Roger, do you think we Muslims can have a beer on Tuesday or something?

ROGER

Just checking. My folks tried not to drink on Sunday.

ALI

Are you serious now?

ROGER

Not really. I think they drank on Sunday too. But let's eat something.

ALI

Good, I will be your guest.

ROGER

Okay, but next time it's on you.

ALI

Next time I will be your host at my home. You can meet my family.

ROGER

Good deal. I'll be on my best behavior.

ALI

Really? I'll alert the media.

ROGER
(Laughing)

Look who made a joke!

(Lights dim.)

Scene Two

(Time is nine months later. Scene opens in Crenshaw living room. David is seated, reading a newspaper.)

(Ellie enters the room holding a sheet of paper.)

ELLIE

David, what is a remf?

DAVID

What?

ELLIE

It's in Adam's email. What is it?

DAVID

It's someone who stays in the rear with the gear, dear.

ELLIE

As compared to someone who goes to the front?

DAVID

I don't know that we have fronts anymore. But yeah, basically.

ELLIE

Adam should be here anytime. I wonder if he'll keep using these silly pieces of slang. I think it demeans him. And I wonder what he'll think about what you've done.

DAVID

I hope he's not upset. Where's Jane?

ELLIE

She should be here.

DAVID

I know. I wonder how she's taking all this.

ELLIE

It must be awful. How can you plan anything? But she keeps acting like it's just wonderful and interesting.

DAVID

Maybe for them it is.

ELLIE

Well now it's different. At least from your time. Right? I mean, you didn't make plans did you? You and Roger and your buddies all stayed single, right?

DAVID

Well, Roger and I did. But I had married friends.

ELLIE

What a waste.

DAVID

Yeah, I guess.

ELLIE

(Looks at the sheet of paper.)

What's an artillery fan?

DAVID

I think Adam shares too much in his emails.

ELLIE

He's really caught up in it all. All these acronyms. He has this odd vocabulary. And he's smug about it. He must know I can't understand what he's saying. Did you all have some secret handshake?

DAVID

I guess that's part of the fun. Keeping your parents and civilian friends out of the environment. But giving them just a glimpse.

ELLIE

I don't see the fun. What's a GT line?

DAVID

Gun target line dear.

ELLIE

He talks about adjusting fire from the GT line.

DAVID

Well, he's an artillery officer now. He'll be doing a lot of that kind of thing.
(Doorbell rings, and Jane enters.)

JANE

Hi guys. Adam just called me. He'll be here in a minute.
(David stands.)

DAVID

Hi Jane. Can I get you something? Ellie's made some iced tea.

JANE

No thanks. Hey David, what's a daisy cutter?
(David laughs.)

DAVID

Adam really wants to give you guys a peek.

ELLIE

I hope this is a phase.

JANE

You mean like teething?

ELLIE

More like bed-wetting. Did you know they have a secret handshake?
(Jane laughs.)

JANE

It's too easy to make fun. He's so earnest.

DAVID

Yeah.

(Door opens and Adam enters carrying a seabag and wearing the uniform of a marine lieutenant.)

ADAM

Well hey everybody.

(Jane and Ellie quickly move to Adam and give him hugs. David waits and then shakes his hand and hugs him.)

Have you lost more weight?
ELLIE

No, mom. I don't think so.
ADAM

(Jane laughs.)
JANE

He does look a little scrawny.
ADAM

Why thanks, honey.
DAVID

You look great, son.
ELLIE

Well of course he does.
ADAM

Thanks. Should we go eat?
DAVID

Yeah. I was thinking of Uncle Jose's Taco Palace.
ELLIE

Oh David.
DAVID

What?
ADAM

I love that place. I'll buy. It's still cheap, right?
DAVID

Yeah, and unclean too.
ADAM

Perfect. Let's go.

ELLIE

Wait a minute. Before we go anyplace, I think your father has something to tell you.

ADAM

Uh oh. What's he done?

ELLIE

Jane, I'm a little surprised you haven't heard about this. So this is a good time to let you both know.

JANE

Wow, David. What did you do?

DAVID

Nothing as exciting as the buildup.

(Pause)

Well, I have done something.

ADAM

(Laughing)

Okay, please. What is it?

DAVID

Well, the past year has really been something for your mother and me. It's brought a lot of thoughts and feelings forward that I have not examined in a long time. I've come to act on some of these things. I think in a good way. At least I feel good about it.

JANE

Others know about this?

ELLIE

So far, a few. Some have heard about it from the people David has contacted.

DAVID

So here's the deal.

(David stands.)

I've started an organization. It's called Former Marines for Peace in the East.

(Pause)

It's an act of conscience Adam.

ADAM

Wow.

ELLIE

One of David's acts of conscience.

JANE
This is kind of funny.

ELLIE
They have a slogan.

ADAM
I'll bet.

ELLIE
Do you want to hear it?

JANE
I do.

DAVID
Look Adam, you don't have to worry about this. It shouldn't affect you. It's a completely civilian deal.

ADAM
How many members does your organization have Dad?

DAVID
Well, that's kind of a surprising thing.

ADAM
What's the surprise?

DAVID
Well, there's been quite a response. I started out by posting my idea on my old unit's website. A lot of the people who have served together stay in touch there.

ADAM
Yeah?

DAVID
It's kind of a nice way to keep connected without having to attend a reunion.

ADAM
So what happened?

DAVID
Well, you'd be surprised by the number of people who responded.

ADAM

Are you going to tell me?

DAVID

Of course. But the big response came when the guys shared the information on other marine websites. So far there's been over eighty people sign up.

ADAM

My god, what did you say?

DAVID

Here, I'll get it for you.

(David leaves the room and leaves the door open.)

ELLIE

It's something, isn't it? Your father is really quite a personality.

ADAM

Yeah.

(David enters the room with a sheet of paper.)

DAVID

I tried to keep it simple and just ask if they would serve again.

ADAM

Serve again?

(Adam laughs in a confused way.)

How?

DAVID

As warriors for peace.

(David pauses.)

Pretty corny.

ADAM

So what's a warrior for peace do?

DAVID

Well, my goals are pretty simple. I'd like each guy who signs up to be responsible for making one Muslim friend. That is, a friend of someone who doesn't like us. Turn them around.

ADAM

How are you going to find out who doesn't like us.

ELLIE
(Smiling)

That's been the easy part.

DAVID

We'd like to make friends with the most visible clerics but they keep pretty much to themselves. So we've established a kind of pen-pal network with some of the inmates down in gitmo.

ADAM

You mean you're writing our enemies?

DAVID

I suppose. And we're also planning on visiting them if we're allowed.

ADAM

My god dad, these are the people I'll be fighting.

DAVID

Well, not exactly these people. A lot of these guys have been locked up for years. And their first response is good.

ADAM

What do you mean?

DAVID

Well, they seem glad to hear from us. And surprised.

ADAM

I'm surprised.

(Adam sits in chair.)

DAVID

I hope you're not disappointed son.

ADAM

Dad, is this legal?

DAVID

Well, so far nothing has happened to any of us. But we really haven't done much, except write a few letters and try to call people on the phone.

ADAM

Do they let you talk to them?

DAVID

No, not very often. But we're finding out about personal visits.

ADAM

I don't know what to say.

DAVID

You might think of it as a way to de-fang some of these people. We're not getting anywhere locking them up or killing them.

ADAM

You don't think we've made progress?

DAVID

Son, I think that anytime you put a round in a chamber, and start sighting on other humans, you're taking an action that could be wrong.

ADAM

This is so strange.

(Adam stands and begins to pace.)

Of all the people in the world.

DAVID

Look son. You know how you feel like you're doing the right thing? Well I feel like I'm doing the right thing too. It doesn't mean I think you're wrong. It means that I think what we're doing as a civilization is wrong. I'm proud of you, and what you are trying to do for your country. I hope you'll be able to be proud of me too.

ELLIE

And Roger too.

ADAM

You're kidding!

DAVID:
(Laughing)

Yeah, Roger's enjoying himself. He's been meeting Muslims and making friends.

ADAM

Is Roger in town?

DAVID

Yeah. He came in to be with me for a radio interview.

ADAM
Radio?

ELLIE
Yes, honey. Your dad will be interviewed by Robert Williams who has the radio show.

ADAM
Oh my god. Are you serious?

DAVID
Tomorrow at ten.

JANE
So what's the slogan?

DAVID
Make friends, not bodies.

ADAM
Oh man.

ELLIE
Kind of an act of conscience slogan.

ADAM
Wow.

(Lights dim and scene ends.)

Scene Three

(The next morning, David, Roger, and Ali enter a radio studio. The radio host, Robert Williams, is wearing a headset and there is a microphone in front of Williams on a long table.)

WILLIAMS
(Stands to welcome the guests.)
Hello. You must be David Crenshaw?
(Shakes hands with David.)
And Roger Melnick?
(Shakes hands with Roger.)

ROGER

Hello.

WILLIAMS

And this must be Ali Ben Nousef.

(Williams pronounces Ali's name correctly and shakes hands with Ali.)

ALI

Hello, Mr. Williams.

WILLIAMS

Okay fellows, please have a seat.

(David, Roger and Ali sit at the table on each side of Robert Williams, with Ali on his right.)

This microphone is very sensitive, but you might want to speak up just a bit. Ready? Okay, here we go. Thank you, Ben.

(Moves a switch on his control panel.)

Now friends let me introduce our next guest. His name is David Crenshaw and he heads an organization that's starting to cause something of a buzz. His organization, or maybe it's a club...Is it a club Mr. Crenshaw?

DAVID

I don't think I'd characterize it as a club.

WILLIAMS

Okay then, not a club. Folks, Mr. Crenshaw's organization is called Former Marines for Peace in the East. Is that right Mr. Crenshaw?

DAVID

Yes.

WILLIAMS

And today, Mr. Crenshaw has brought along two friends. Mr. Roger Melnick and Ali bin Nousef. Did I pronounce your name correctly Mr. Nousef?

(Pronounces Ali's last name incorrectly)

ALI

(Looks at Williams with surprise.)

Close enough, Mr. Williams.

WILLIAMS

So let me see if I have this right. Your organization Mr. Crenshaw, Former Marines for Peace in the East, is dedicated to making friends with our enemies. Right?

DAVID

Well, not just our enemies. Mostly we're dedicated to making friends with people who don't like us.

WILLIAMS

So you're making a distinction.

DAVID

Sure. There's an important distance from not liking to becoming enemies.

WILLIAMS

How about that, Mr. Nousef? Do you agree?

ALI

Of course. David's position is simple. You don't have to agree to see things the same way.

WILLIAMS

And Mr. Melnick, you have the same perspective.

ROGER

Sure. Ali and I don't agree on much. But we don't have to kill each other.

WILLIAMS

So you can be friends with Ali?

ROGER

Why not?

WILLIAMS

Well, I suppose the reason, or at least one reason, may be that Ali hates you because you are an infidel.

ROGER

I think he would prefer I share his religious views. Ali doesn't believe the path to eternal life depends on the acceptance of Jesus Christ as the son of God, or as his personal savior. But, he's agreed not to hate me because of our differences. And I think we can have a friendship that's based on understanding and acceptance of each other. A friendship that doesn't condemn or criticize religious beliefs.

WILLIAMS

How about it Ali? Can you put your differences aside?

ALI

I think we should.

WILLIAMS

Were you incarcerated at Guantanamo, Mr. Nousef?

ALI

I was.

WILLIAMS

And they let you go? Weren't you being held as an enemy combatant?

ALI

Actually no. I was being held under suspicion of belonging to a terrorist network.

WILLIAMS

How did you come to be released?

ALI

My lawyer was providing pro-bono legal work to free people illegally detained at Guantanamo. He finally persuaded the justice department to release me.

WILLIAMS

Could they not make a case?

ALI

Not one that could be assembled under the terrorist act provisions, and certainly not under any form of due process evidence gathering. They couldn't make a case and were just holding me.

WILLIAMS

And Mr. Crenshaw, you find this detainment to be morally wrong?

DAVID

Well, we don't have a position on jailing terrorist suspects or enemy combatants.

WILLIAMS

Well then, why are you hooking up with Mr. Nousef?

DAVID

Mr. Nousef is here because he agrees with our effort, and is in fact, one of the first people we were able to speak with about our plans. We've written many of the detainees in Guantanamo. And we've attempted to establish a dialogue.

WILLIAMS

Many Americans may feel that you are extending an olive branch to sworn enemies. What is your response?

DAVID

We want to show the world how to behave toward people we can't agree with. We mean to demonstrate that you can be friendly without having the same beliefs. And we feel the only effective way to do this is to make this kind of demonstration, one person at a time. Mr. Nousef here was contacted by Roger. And after the initial period of skepticism found himself in agreement with us. We believe that it's okay to disagree, but it's not okay to kill.

WILLIAMS

I suppose it should be noted here that you and Mr. Melnick are former marines who served in Vietnam. I for one, would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your service. Is this peaceful disagreement position hard to defend to your marine friends?

DAVID

I've heard from a few that don't think you can be friendly with guys like Ali here. But most who have responded, think we're doing a decent thing.

WILLIAMS

Are people really volunteering to help?

DAVID

Yes, Mr. Williams. Our website, Former Marines For Peace In The East dot com, has information on how to volunteer. And people don't need to be former marines to sign up.

WILLIAMS

And isn't your son a marine getting ready to go to the Middle East?

DAVID

Yes he is.

WILLIAMS

What does he think of your activities?

DAVID

My son is prohibited by regulation from discussing political issues publicly. He's a fine young man and I'm very proud of him. He is doing what he believes to be in the best interests of his country. So am I.

WILLIAMS

So you believe that you can get guys like Ali here to like you?

DAVID

Maybe not. But maybe he can appreciate our gesture of friendship enough to not want to kill us. Maybe he, like most people responds to kindness, understanding and tolerance. Maybe guys like Ali and Roger here, find that they have something in common. And it's not bomb-making or an appreciation of automatic weapons. Maybe they can come to tolerate each others cultures and

DAVID (Cont.)

views. But we believe that we need to extend our hand, and then keep it out there. If each of us in our little organization can become friendly...not become best buddies, but become familiar in a kind and friendly way with one incarcerated combatant, or Muslim who believes that we are bad, then we will have started changing an unhealthy dynamic.

WILLIAMS

Mr. Melnick, you obviously believe all of this.

ROGER

I do. It would all be harder to believe if it weren't for David. He's a person who has always stood by his friends and lived up to his obligations. So I wasn't surprised when people responded to him. Without David, I wouldn't have given you much chance of any of this working. The guys who served with him know that he sees this as a moral obligation. And these are men of conviction who believe in old-fashioned values. They want to help with this. They want to be of service. David has shown them how to do that.

WILLIAMS

So you think this sense of friendship, or obligation, these former marines feel for David, is enough to get them to behave in a friendly way toward people who hate them.

ROGER

So far, we haven't had to deal with much hatred. Mostly the Muslims are just skeptical. They've not been impolite or hostile. They do seem surprised. But the neat deal here, is that talking to these hard core Muslims isn't so bad. I've talked to a lot of our guys who have made real friends. They've been surprised how fun it all is.

WILLIAMS

Fun?

ROGER

Yeah. After we get to know these Muslims, there's room for some give and take. We don't make fun of anybody's beliefs and don't try to be overly personal. Just taking an interest in one another is very constructive. The barriers are relaxed a little. Trust is established, and then we begin to enjoy a new friendship.

WILLIAMS

So Ali, you like spending time with Roger?

ALI

I find much that I don't dislike about Roger. I believe he is a man of principle.

WILLIAMS

Don't you consider him an infidel?

ALI

Yes I do.

WILLIAMS

And don't all infidels deserve the same fate?

ALI

I can not speak for all infidels. But I believe that these men do not deserve to die.

WILLIAMS

What makes them different? They helped get you out of jail?

ALI

Mr. Williams, they did not help get me out of jail. But they did extend to me a form of friendship I hope existed, but I feared did not. I admire them for what they are trying to do. Many Muslims will not be influenced by their gestures. But many, like me, will. It is difficult to hate people who will take you into their homes, feed you, ask you what you think, and introduce you to their friends as a friend.

WILLIAMS

Roger, you say that Ali was a little hostile at first. Tell us about that.

ROGER

Well, he was suspicious. We talked on the phone a few times before we met in person. He didn't want to trust me. But I understand that. It helped when I told him I really thought his religion was interesting but not for me. It let him know that I couldn't agree with him about a lot of things. But that we could still treat each other decently.

WILLIAMS

Are you a religious man, Roger?

ROGER

Not particularly.

WILLIAMS

How about you Mr. Crenshaw?

DAVID

Not very, I'm afraid.

WILLIAMS

But Ali, you are?

ALI

I am.

WILLIAMS

What do your Muslim friends think of your new friendships?

ALI

Not all are in agreement.

WILLIAMS

How about the notion that these fellows are planting a seed of friendship that will grow? Any chance of that happening among your friends?

ALI

It is already happening. Roger Melnick became my friend. I became his. I told others of my faith about this friendship. A few are now open to friendship like I am. We are not naive. We have a responsibility to our faith, to Allah. And we have a responsibility to our children. We are challenged by our faith to convert non-believers. Christians are given a similar challenge. Both religious factions contain statements about violent treatment to non-believers. But both religions also teach kindness and mercy. There is more discussion of positives than negatives in both religions. I hope I am representing my faith in a constructive manner.

WILLIAMS

Mr. Crenshaw, do you really like this guy?

DAVID
(Laughing)

Well sure. Don't you?

WILLIAMS

I'm having a hard time getting past who he is.

DAVID

Well, maybe that's part of the problem. I think we all do. On both sides. How tough is it for a guy who's grown up in a sheltered educational environment without benefit of much world-wide contact to be open-minded? I'd say almost impossible. Ali here was educated in the U.S. and in Tehran. But he's unusual. Most of the people who really hate us have never been far from their mosque schools or their homes. They are taught the same kind of intolerance message that is sometimes taught here. But at least here most kids are exposed to television news and the internet. Many of the kids in the middle east have no opportunity to learn about Americans in a positive way. That's why, if we can make friends with the Ali's of the world, they can talk to the kids who haven't had his education. Or maybe their fathers. Their fathers have a hard time listening to us.

WILLIAMS

Mr. Melnick, Roger, if you had a chance to be friends with one of your old enemies, say a North Vietnamese officer who had led a unit against you guys, could you do it?

ROGER

It would be tough.

WILLIAMS

Aha! So it would be tough. So is this only for Muslims?

ROGER

Look, I'm not perfect. In fact, Ali's not perfect. But we're working at something here. I still think the North Vietnamese were murdering punks. They killed thousands of civilians and we kicked their asses in every battle we fought. If I were a better person I'd be able to embrace uncle Ho or whatever asshole you bring to me from North Vietnam. But I'm not that guy yet. I think I'm okay never being that guy.

WILLIAMS

How about you Mr. Crenshaw?

DAVID

It would difficult for me too. But I believe I would try. I've found that I can be friends with almost anybody. I have to try. It's not always as easy as I would like.

WILLIAMS

So you believe that Ali here will contact others, and they will contact others, and then there will be peace in the east?

DAVID

I believe that Ali will tell other Muslims about his experience with us. And maybe some of them will call us on the phone and we can get a bite or have coffee. Or just talk. I believe it's a start. We've got over eighty former marines. These are focused men who are contacting militant Muslims right now. Each one of these former marines is attempting to make friends with at least one person like Mr. Nousef here. It won't be impossible. In fact it's fun. These guys are serving again. And if we can get more guys to serve, then we can contact more people like Ali. We like the challenge.

WILLIAMS

What about the legality of your actions?

DAVID

We don't think we're breaking laws. And we don't want to. We're not trying to conduct foreign policy. We're just trying to make friends.

WILLIAMS

Mr. Nousef, do you believe David and Roger here are a little too optimistic?

ALI

Perhaps.

WILLIAMS

What advice would you give them?

ALI

None. I believe many groups have tried various peace initiatives, but I've never witnessed an organizational effort that did not have an agenda. David, Roger, and their friends have no hidden political or religious goal that I can see. They are just trying to make friends. So I can offer them no advice. They know what they want to do. They do not seem confused. They seem to have left the confusion to others, Mr. Williams.

WILLIAMS

If that is directed at me Mr. Nousef, you are right. I am confused. I'm still a little troubled by two people going out to contact professed enemies of this country. And offering to break bread or whatever in the name of peace. Pollyana would love this. How about it Roger? Do you think you can really trust the Ali's of the world?

ROGER

I hope so. I think we need to move forward. I think Americans want peace.

WILLIAMS

Oh? At what cost? And what about what's already happened to us? You seem to believe we should forget about Muslim terrorist activities.

ROGER

I don't think David or anyone else has forgotten what's happened. I admit that many people will have different ideas about this. But I believe we have to do everything we can to stop these terrorist acts. And I am pleased. Almost everybody we've spoken to agrees with what we're trying to do.

WILLIAMS

Now David, you were wounded in Vietnam, right?

DAVID

I was. So was Roger here.

WILLIAMS

And how are you going to feel if, heaven forbid, your son is wounded in Iraq or Afghanistan?

DAVID

Awful, of course.

WILLIAMS

Won't you feel hatred for the people who have harmed him?

DAVID

I might.

WILLIAMS

Aha! Now we're getting somewhere. Do you see a problem here? A contradiction perhaps?

DAVID

Nope.

WILLIAMS

Nope? What do you mean, nope?

DAVID

Mr. Williams, you do realize I'm human?

WILLIAMS

Yes Mr. Crenshaw. I do realize you are human. And I believe it's possible that you may be in error here.

DAVID

Maybe.

WILLIAMS

Maybe? Do you mean that you admit that you could be wrong about this whole effort?

DAVID

Maybe, but I don't think so. It seems to be going pretty well. I know there are going to be challenges. We just have to keep moving forward. We have to keep making friends. Or try to make friends. I think that even if we're rejected by some militant Muslims, they'll be affected by our effort. I hope they'll be touched by it.

WILLIAMS

Do you really think Muslims won't take advantage of this? Do you really believe all of this flapdoodle?

ROGER

Mr. Williams, I think you should be ashamed of yourself. We're trying to do something good. Why do you feel required to act like a jerk? Don't you want there to be peace in the world? Must you attempt to diminish the good that others are doing?

DAVID

Roger.

WILLIAMS

Well folks, we have two very naïve and potentially dangerous, well-intentioned men, who are trying to make peace with militant Muslims. We can only hope their naiveté won't backfire. How about it Ali, do you think this whole thing can create an opportunity for our enemies? Militant Muslims who haven't been domesticated?

ALI

Did you say domesticated? Do you really wish to know what I think Mr. Williams?

WILLIAMS

Why yes, Mr. Nousef. What do you think?

ALI

I now believe you are a difficult personality. I believe you are not polite. I don't think anyone should harm you, but I believe you hide behind a microphone. That is what I think. I will not apologize for offending you.

WILLIAMS

(Pause)

Well, there you have it folks. The real Ali has just stood up. And he's a guy who was being held at Guantanamo for terrorist activities. You can't tame these people. You can't become friends with people like this. Little Muslim children are taught to hate Americans. It's no wonder the grown-ups say and do hateful things. Before I call security, let's go to break.

(Moves a switch on his control panel and takes off his headphones. Stands to say goodbye to his guests.)

Well thanks fellas. That was a good segment. Hey, no hard feelings there Ali. It's just to shake them up. You know, part of the business.

ALI

Oh?

DAVID

(Standing)

Come on Roger, let's shove off. Thank you Mr. Williams.

WILLIAMS

Thank you fellas.

(Gives them a wave across the table and reaches out to shake Ali's hand.)

Take care now. You too Ali.

(Ali slowly accepts Williams handshake.)

(Lights come down as David, Roger and Ali move to the door)

Scene Four

(Time is four months later. Lights come up on Crenshaw apartment. Ellie is bent over in a chair with her face in her hands. David is sitting beside her with his arm around her shoulder.)

(Ellie is crying.)

DAVID

Would you like a drink sweetheart?

ELLIE

No, nothing.

DAVID

Maybe we should go lie down for awhile.

ELLIE

Go ahead.

DAVID

I guess we've got all this food.

ELLIE

You eat.

DAVID

I don't want to eat without you.

ELLIE
(Raises her voice.)

Please. You eat. Leave me alone, can't you?

DAVID

Ellie, please. I need you now. I think maybe you need me.

ELLIE
(Stands quickly.)

Damn you David. Damn you. When I needed you, you let me down. You weren't there.

DAVID

Ellie, I don't think that's true.

ELLIE

(Turns away and then whirls back to face David.)

How stupid you can be. When I needed you, you weren't there. When your son needed you, you weren't there. You let him down. You failed us. You didn't take care of us.

(Shouting)

You failed us David. Do you hear me?

DAVID

(Standing)

Ellie please.

ELLIE

You allowed your son to be destroyed. You. You allowed it. Nobody else. You could have saved him. You could have saved his life. You could have stopped him. Your stupid Marine Corps crap killed him. Aren't you proud? Aren't you proud of what you've done? Aren't you proud of your beautiful dead son? What's left of him is buried in his dress blues. Isn't that beautiful?

(David reaches out to touch Ellie.)

ELLIE

(Yelling)

Don't you touch me. Don't you ever touch me. You failed in your duty to us. You failed in your real duty. Not some stupid marine or peace thing. You failed to take care of us. You're a shirker David. You failed to save your son. That's right. You refused to save him.

(Falls sobbing on to the sofa with her face in her hands.)

Your real duty.

DAVID

Look, nothing is worse than this. But it's the worst for both of us. This is a time for me to be helping you. And Ellie, for you to be helping me. But you won't do that.

ELLIE

(Sits up quickly and speaks harshly.)

Helping you? You think you deserve my help? This isn't about you.

DAVID

And it's not about you, Ellie. It's about our son. Our beautiful, dead son.

(Sits down next to Ellie on the sofa and faces her.)

Adam was a fine person. He had ideals. He lived a life we can be proud of.

ELLIE

Oh my God.

DAVID

And it's not okay to diminish who he was. It's alright to grieve. But Ellie, please try to realize that when you assign blame, you demean this son of ours.

ELLIE

Are you stupid enough to believe what you just said? He lived a life to be proud of. Of what? His grades? His little league batting average? He didn't get to have a life. It got taken away.

DAVID

He did have a life. And it was filled with goodness. He leaves a legacy. He did things other people wouldn't. He did them for good reasons. He was selfless.

ELLIE

You are such a fool. I hope you really believe what you're saying. It may give you some solace. But I don't have any. I only hurt. I've lost my son. And I've lost him to your silly crap about ideals and service. None of what you think matters. Don't you know that? You're a joke. Your ideas are wrong. Nobody cares about your stupid ideas.

DAVID

(Standing)

I believe you're wrong, Ellie. I think Adam and I are the same. I think he lived by a code. I don't think many people do. But some do. I didn't want Adam to go in the Marine Corps. I tried to stop him. But I'm proud of him. He was a good boy and a good man. His life is gone. But his example is with us.

ELLIE

(Puts her face in her hands.)

David, please. Go on believing that crap. It must help you. It doesn't help me.

(Looks up at David.)

Can't you hear yourself? Please, enough. Just leave me alone now.

DAVID

(Sits on the sofa next to Ellie and starts to put his arm around her.)

Ellie...

ELLIE

(Jumps to her feet and shouts.)

Enough! I've had enough from you. Leave me alone.

(Ellie walks quickly to the door, opens it and exits, slamming the door. David puts one hand over his eyes as the lights come down.)

Scene Five

(Time is one month later. David is seated in a chair in his living room with a drink when the doorbell rings.)

DAVID

Come in.

(Roger enters the room with a garment bag.)

ROGER

Hi!

DAVID

(Rises from his chair and shakes hands with Roger.)

Roger! What are you doing here?

ROGER

I thought I'd surprise you. Drop in. See how you're holding up. You got another one of those?
(Roger nods toward David's drink.)

DAVID

Well sure. Let me get it for you.

ROGER

I can do it. You always make them too weak. Are you really so cheap or do you just worry about my sobriety.

(Roger moves to the bar and makes himself a drink.)

DAVID

(Sits in his chair.)

I quit worrying about that a long time ago.

So what the hell happened?
ROGER

You mean with Ellie?
DAVID

Yeah.
ROGER

DAVID
She'd always felt I could have kept Adam out. I guess being with me just got to be too much. She's staying at her sister's. We still talk every day, but she's having a tough time.

ROGER
And you feel responsible for Adam.

DAVID
Yeah. I should have worked harder at keeping him out of the service. Especially our branch. I knew better and didn't work hard enough to save my own son.

ROGER
That's not true David. I was here. We all tried to talk him out of it. He was just like us.

DAVID
He was better.

ROGER
He was a good boy. And we loved him.
(Roger raises his glass.)
Adam Crenshaw.

DAVID
(Raises his glass slightly.)
Yeah, Adam.

ROGER
Ali is coming over.

DAVID
Ali?

ROGER

Yeah, I called him and told him I was coming in. He thought maybe he could come over and see you.

DAVID

I haven't seen him since the funeral.

ROGER

I'm going to offer him a drink.

DAVID

You should stop with that.

ROGER

He tells me I'm an infidel.

DAVID

He's got you nailed.

ROGER

So what's going to happen?

DAVID

With Ellie you mean? I don't know. Things have not always been good for Ellie. I think things between us have always been better for me. At least until a few years ago. Really, we've both had a tough time.

ROGER

You mean when she was unfaithful?

DAVID

Who told you that?

ROGER

She did.

DAVID

When?

ROGER

Years ago.

DAVID

You never said anything.

ROGER

I didn't want to intrude. But I did listen to her. She made a mistake and felt like an ass. She's never stopped regretting it. She loves you. She thinks you took her back because of your sense of moral obligation.. Because you thought it was the right thing to do.

DAVID

I've always felt lucky just to be with her. She has so many wonderful qualities that other people don't even know about. I love her.

ROGER

Have you guys talked to a grief counselor?

DAVID

I haven't, and if she has, she hasn't told me about it.

ROGER

How about a marriage counselor?

DAVID

No.

ROGER

You need somebody to tell you both that you didn't fail Adam. It's not enough if I say it.

DAVID

I appreciate you saying it. I just can't quite believe it.

ROGER

Would you have wanted your dad to feel guilty for the rest of his days if you would have been killed in action?

DAVID

Of course not.

ROGER

Well maybe you should listen to Adam. He wouldn't want that for you.

DAVID

You're speaking for the dead now?

ROGER

Why not? I understand what he did, and his decision. It had nothing to do with you being unable to stop him. He gave his life for something. He knew it could happen. Sometimes it does.

DAVID

You're a little flippant.

ROGER

Grieve for your boy, David. But don't blame yourself. You did your best to keep him out. So did I, and so did Ellie. How's Jane?

DAVID

Oh, okay I guess. I see less of her now. It makes her sad to see me.
(The doorbell rings and Roger opens the door and Ali enters the room and shakes Roger's hand.)

ALI

Hello Roger, you old devil.

(Crosses the room to a now standing David and shakes his hand.)

Hello David. It is very good to see you. How are you?

DAVID

I'm okay. Thanks for coming to see me. And thank you for coming to Adam's funeral.

ALI

I was saddened by his death. He must have been a fine young man.

ROGER

He was the best. How about a drink, Ali?

ALI

Thank you, no, Roger. Do you offer me alcohol to tease me? Alcohol will never touch these lips.

ROGER

Your loss then. I'd never let religion get in the way of a little relaxation.

ALI

You and I are vastly different.

DAVID

What an understatement. Please sit down, Ali.

(Ali sits on the sofa.)

ALI

David, I want to tell you about what has been happening with your peace effort.

ROGER

Well, we know what's been happening Ali.

ALI

I mean among my people. People you haven't contacted. People you don't know and couldn't know.

DAVID

You mean people like you?

ROGER

You mean quasi-terrorists?

ALI

You are not always funny Roger. But yes, people who would not be interested in initiating a friendship with you or your former armed forces friends. These people would not necessarily be interested in harming you or other people like you, but they would not weep at your harm. And, they may contribute money to those who would like to harm you. Not you individually of course, but all non-Muslim Americans.

DAVID

You have our interest, Ali.

ALI

So many, it is something of a surprise. Many are willing to know you better. They have been contacted by others like me. They believe there is room for discussion about friendship.

ROGER

Wow, that's great Ali.

ALI

I make no promises or pledges. But I have learned something from my Muslim friends. That is, my friends who may be more strident. More given to violence or indiscriminate retribution. It is this. That inside every person, that is, every kind of person, there exists something which can be touched. Not always successfully. I fear that often this touching excites the wrong passions. Passions of hate and retribution. But often this touching, or effort to touch with friendship, has a different result. I only hoped for this result. And now I am surprised.

ROGER

Me too. Are you ever going to get to the point?

DAVID

Roger, please.

ALI

It is alright David. Roger has no patience. It is part of his personality. The point is this, Roger. Fifteen Muslims are willing to meet you. They now know about you, and what David and your organization have done. But they know also about the outspoken Roger who wants to be friends.

ROGER

Gee.

ALI

They know what you have said and they want to know what is in your heart. They believe that if a man like you can desire friendship there must be a benefit to everyone.

ROGER

(Turning to David)

A man like me?

DAVID

Don't take it personally Roger. Ali, could it be that Roger just doesn't seem to bow to political correctness? And some of your friends have moved to a conclusion?

ALI

I believe that to be true. But I also believe that Roger is the kind of man who can surprise people with his friendship. There is nothing false in him. He is often impolite. And he is a friend.

DAVID

Pretty typical American.

ROGER

You said they want to meet me. Meet me how?

ALI

They wish for you to speak with them at the Mosque of Abraham at eight o'clock on Thursday night.

ROGER

You're kidding.

ALI

No Roger. It will be a chance for you to take a very few minutes and express your proposal of friendship.

ROGER

The Mosque here?

ALI

Yes Roger.

ROGER

Wow.

DAVID

A presentation from Roger.

ALI

David, I would suggest Roger speak for twenty minutes, no more, of your organizational views. On why friendship can work between our people. And then Roger should be prepared for some questions. And then I suggest that Roger should leave. I don't think Roger should elaborate overly much on his cultural notions.

ROGER

Gee, that would be the best part.

DAVID

Would they want to hear from anyone else?

ALI

They have been told that you started the Marines for Peace effort, but I think Roger is a person they would listen to. They would certainly like to speak with you at some point David, but Roger is the one for this opportunity.

DAVID

He'll tell them what he thinks.

ALI

Yes. And then, if that doesn't do too much damage, there exists one other possibility. These people will each follow your example and talk to one other of their followers or friends. And they will ask this of each whom they contact. And so, immense good will could result. And they will also ask that each Muslim contact an American and extend the hand of friendship. I have proposed that the names be assembled in a data base for us to use as a growth platform. That is, your organization David, and ours.

DAVID
Yours?

ALI
Yes, Muslims as Friends. Simple no?

ROGER
I don't think it sounds as good as ours.

ALI
Oh Roger.

ROGER
And I'll bet you we can get more members.

DAVID
Roger, please.

ALI
And to begin, I have asked that our organization provide an annual \$3000 scholarship for peace studies named after your late son at Al-Azhar University in Cairo.

DAVID
I'm stunned Ali.

ROGER
Me too Ali. \$3000 isn't much tuition help.

ALI
I know Roger. But perhaps you and your friends would provide a similar small scholarship to one of your secular institutions.

ROGER
Okay. You're on. We'll pass the hat and see if we can top yours. I'm sure we can. Your feelings aren't hurt are they?

ALI
David, would you like to get something to eat? You could bring your obnoxious friend if you wish.

DAVID
Thanks, but I better not. I thought I'd drive over to our family plot. But I know a terrific Mexican restaurant. It's not too clean but it's cheap and the food is great. Roger knows the place. I'll walk you out.

(Ali, Roger and David stand and begin to move toward the door.)

ROGER

Yeah, and I can try out a couple of my jokes on you that I might use on Thursday.

ALI

Roger, please none of your jokes.

(Roger laughs while the three men leave the room through the door. The scene ends.)

Scene Six

(David speaking to his son's grave.)

DAVID

Well son. Here we are again. I don't like to leave you alone out here. Even though dad's right over there. When you were little, you hated to be alone. You used to crawl under our covers and stay as long as we'd let you. You loved to be with us. I always had to carry you to bed and then tell you a story. You knew all of the stories but you just didn't want to be left alone. You didn't want to be alone. I wish I could keep you company. But I know I'm not really any company.

(Sinks to a knee.)

Before my dad died he asked me how often I would visit him. I think he had a sense that he would be lonely here. I told him I would visit him a lot. It seemed to make your grandpa feel better. But I don't think he needed me so much. I think he liked my company, but not like you. He really was a grownup presence. You've always been my boy. Even when you grew up. You seemed innocent and vulnerable. I never felt that way about my dad. But you two had a lot in common. You were good students. And then after school you both decided to go in the Marine Corps. And you both went through all of that training. You would have looked like brothers at twenty two. And I know you had the same kind of focus. A sense of purpose. You did well in your training. You really seemed to respond. You were smart and physically hard.

(Pauses and stands)

And I know you and grandpa both did the job. Adam, I had a long talk with your commanding officer. He said so many very good things about your service. And about you. I know you did your best. Just like your grandfather. You've been brave. When you were little you always tried to be brave. When you'd hurt yourself. Your mom and I both told you how brave you were. Maybe we were wrong. Maybe we should have told you to go ahead and cry. Be a little kid. Don't try to be so brave.

(Pause)

And now, here we are.

(Pause)

DAVID (Cont.)

You made a contribution son. You inspired people to do good deeds in your memory. Because you gave everything. And we let you. Your mom was right I guess. I could have done more. But somewhere back when we were trying to talk you out of this, I kind of relented. I think I wanted it for you. Not death. Not this. But the other. The acceptance of a code. A code of honor. Of living by a set of rules that require selfless devotion. To accept for yourself this form of obligation, this duty to your country. To understand that there are still bad people in the world. People who hate us because of their ignorance and intolerance. To know that our country needs to be protected from these people. To be available night and day. Anywhere in the world. To know that any day could be the last. To know that you are going in harm's way. To face the fire. And move forward. To know that this is your call to duty. For all your life.

(Pause)

And I wasn't wrong. You died for us. And you died for others. Your life meant something. I'm so very proud of you, son.

(Pause)

I miss you so.

(Pause)

I know you're not hearing me. You're gone. Gone forever. The body that held you is wrecked. The part of you that lived in that body is gone. The little boy and the grown up boy. Forever gone. But I won't leave you alone. I know you would hate it. So, I'll be back. Tomorrow. And the days after. As long as I can.

(David looks to his father's grave and then to Adam's before he slowly assumes the position of attention.)

(Lights dim.)

THE END

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