

The Messenger

By

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1 INT. EXAMINATION ROOM. ARMY MEDICAL CENTER - DAY 1

WILL MONTGOMERY, Staff Sergeant, 26, is looking up.

He squeezes an eye drop bottle over his scarred eye. A few drops rain in.

He rubs his eye, looking at objects, then blinking to see them come into focus.

A KNOCK ON THE DOOR. He turns.

2 INT./EXT. ENTRANCE. HOSPITAL - DAY 2

We are moving in Will's POV toward the door, a flag, A FEW PATIENTS and into the blown-out light of day. In and out of focus.

3 EXT. ARMY MEDICAL CENTER - DAY 3

Army-issued cane in his hand, Will steps out of a modern, institutional building.

He removes his Oakley sunglasses. Squints. Then puts his sunglasses back on, takes a few steps forward.

He waits. And waits.

We hear A CAR STOP OFF-SCREEN.

KELLY (O.S.)

Here, right here. Just wait.

Will turns to see:

KELLY, 25, pretty, athletic, presently jumping out of a cab.

Will's SHADED POV instantly wanders to the odd splash of color in her hand: Fresh flowers.

KELLY (cont'd)

Sorry. I'm late.

She gives him the flowers.

WILL

I ain't dead yet.

He walks to the cab. She follows.

(CONTINUED)

3 CONTINUED:

3

KELLY

It's also for healing. And
celebration, you know.

He hands her the flowers back. She holds them like a bride.

4 INT. BEDROOM. WILL'S APARTMENT - LATER

4

Kelly and Will have sex on the bed. She's on top of him,
leaning in, doing most of the work. Gently, as if trying not
to hurt him. They're familiar with each other's bodies yet
somehow out-of-sync. It's been awhile.

Hard to tell if he's in pain or not as he gasps and she
moans. Their lips meet and they kiss deeply, hungry for each
other.

5 INT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

5

RESTAURANT MUSIC. Discreet. The MAITRE D' indicates a table
in the middle of the room. It's not too close to any other
but it feels exposed.

MAITRE D'

This way.

KELLY

Thank you.

Will points to a table OFF SCREEN in the back, with direct
view of the front door.

WILL

I'd like to sit at that table.

KELLY

Why?

WILL

Because I'd like to sit at that
table.

KELLY

I know, but they're still eating.

WILL

I can see that.

(CONTINUED)

5 CONTINUED:

5

Can't argue with that.

6 INT. RESTAURANT - LATER

6

They're sitting side by side, their shoulders touching.
Dinner in progress.

KELLY

I don't know, I think - I think in
like a year or so I'll be ready. I
really want to get married,
eventually you know.

Will's working his way through a skirt steak, pacing himself
all wrong A-1 sauce-wise. It drips down the side of his
mouth.

Kelly laughs as she wipes Will's mouth with her napkin.

KELLY (cont'd)

I don't - I just don't want to
right now. Plus we're kind of on
this cruise control, you know.
Which is normal, it happens to
every couple. It happened to us.

WILL

Where did you tell him you were
going?

KELLY

To see you.

WILL

Yeah, right.

KELLY

Visit my father.

WILL

He believed that?

KELLY

I *invited* him. Turns out he was
real busy.

Will laughs.

(CONTINUED)

WILL
You always were a terrific liar.

KELLY
Hey. Not fair.

They exchange looks. The past weighing heavy suddenly.

KELLY (cont'd)
I do love him, you know.

WILL
I know. He's the right guy for you.

She frowns. Eats. Searches for a different subject.

KELLY
I mean, what do you want to do? Are you thinking family? Bachelorhood? College? Job?

WILL
You don't have to worry about me, Kelly. The world's my fucking oyster.

7 EXT. RESTAURANT - NIGHT

7

Will opens the door to let Kelly into a taxi.

She turns and looks him over. He takes her in, smiling. Not sad.

WILL
Thanks for coming.

KELLY
Look, I... I really wanted to see you. But I guess now... I mean--

WILL
I'm really glad you came.

She kisses him goodbye on the lips. Hard to let go.

WILL (cont'd)
Say hi to Alan for me.

She lets go.

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED:

7

KELLY

I don't think so.

She gets inside the taxi.

The taxi pulls out just as another car pulls in.

Will looks at the lights coming and going, an abstracted display of flares on his face.

8 INT. COLONEL DORSETT'S OFFICE. FORT DIX - DAY

8

A pen signing the bottom of an RFO (Request For Orders) form: COLONEL STUART A. DORSETT, the signature neat and precise.

Then another form. Another signature. More RFOs. It's a big pile.

The signer, Lieutenant Colonel DORSETT, 40s, African-American, a look of hard-earned wisdom chiseled into his face. These days he commands a desk.

Sitting in front of him is CAPTAIN ANTHONY 'TONY' STONE, 30s, mustache, shaved head - a wry, world-weary college graduate who joined the Army on a lark and somehow never left. Tony checks his watch.

DORSETT

Someplace you gotta be?

TONY

No, Sir.

DORSETT

How long has he been waiting?

TONY

(no big deal)

Seventeen minutes, Sir.

Dorsett nods, picks up the phone, dials an extension number.

DORSETT

Send him in.

Dorsett keeps reading and signing forms. Will is shown in. Reporting for duty. He salutes at the door.

(CONTINUED)

Dorsett doesn't look up.

Frozen in his salute, Will looks at Tony. Feels the bad vibe in the room already. As if Tony is not exactly disliking him - he doesn't know him - but counting on it.

Dorsett finally looks up.

DORSETT (cont'd)

At ease. How're you getting on, Montgomery?

WILL

It's going well, Sir.

DORSETT

Glad to hear it. I have an assignment for you, Montgomery. It so happens that over the few months left on your enlistment you'll have a chance to render some of your most valuable service to the country.

He crosses looks with Tony. Then sets his attention back on Will.

DORSETT (cont'd)

I'm assigning you to a Casualty Notification team, effective immediately.

WILL

Sir-?

DORSETT

Captain Stone will teach you the ropes. He's the expert.

Tony nods at Will.

DORSETT (cont'd)

Before he does, I just want to be very clear that although most of your time will remain occupied by your other duties, CNO is to be your absolute priority. This mission is not simply important. It is *sacred*.

(CONTINUED)

WILL

Sir, if I may.

DORSETT

Go ahead.

WILL

I- I've never received any grief counseling, let alone given it.

(pause)

I'm not a religious man, Sir.

TONY

We're just there for the notification. Not God. No heaven.

Will looks at Tony. Something about this guy is off. He's sizing Will up, cold, professional.

DORSETT

The job is about *character*. I've had soldiers go out on notification and break into stutters. Men so nervous they read from a script, or get the name wrong. The address. Too many tears.

Tony shakes his head.

DORSETT (cont'd)

I need men of solid stature. Articulate. Compassionate. Men who lead with their hearts. You're a model soldier. You saved your buddies. Hell, you're a goddamn *hero*.

Will starts saying something-- changes his mind.

Will and Tony sit at a booth, sipping coffee. Tony is leafing through a small booklet. Will waits for him to speak. But Tony takes his time. Leafing. Sipping. Finally, he speaks -
FAST:

(CONTINUED)

TONY

Casualty is a soldier who's been...
 (reading:)
 "killed, wounded, missing,
 captured, beleaguered or besieged".
 'Course our job's mainly about
killed.

Will rubs his eyes over and over.

TONY (cont'd)

What you actually need to do is
 pretty simple. Read the guidebook.
 Learn the script, stick to the
 script. Fill in the blanks from the
 casualty report. Can you do that?

Will nods. Tony smiles slightly - *we'll see.*

TONY (cont'd)

Never say stuff like "lost", or
 "expired" or "passed away" - things
 people misunderstand. I know a guy
 once told this old lady that her
 grandson was no longer with us. She
 thought he defected to the enemy
 and started calling him a traitor.

Tony chuckles, shakes his head.

TONY (cont'd)

We need to be clear. Need to say
 "killed", or "died." What we don't
 say is "the body", or "the
 deceased." We call each casualty by
 name. We honor them. You with me?

Will nods.

TONY (cont'd)

Don't speak to anybody other than
 the Next of Kin. No friend, no
 neighbor, no co-worker or mistress.
 Hours of operation are 06:00 to
 22:00 hours.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

TONY (cont'd)

We don't want to wake anybody up in the middle of the night - though if you ask me, hitting them with the news at the crack of dawn is not exactly a great way to start their day, breakfast-wise.

WILL

What if the next of kin is not around?

TONY

We leave. We don't wait. We don't lurk. We come back later. This is a zero defect mission. A pure hit and git operation.

WILL

That it, sir?

TONY

One more thing. You do not touch the N.O.K.

WILL

NOK.

TONY

Avoid physical contact with the next of kin unless it's a medical emergency, like if they have a heart attack. You're representing the Secretary of the Army, not Will Montgomery. So in case you feel like offering a hug or something - don't. It'll only get you in trouble.

WILL

I'm not gonna offer any hugs. So... that's it.

TONY

No. These are the rules. But that's not the job.

Tony drinks from his coffee. Will sighs, *'What did I do to deserve this?'*

(CONTINUED)

TONY (cont'd)

The job is about... something else.
You gotta do it before you can
understand.

Will taps his fingers nervously on the table. Tony stares at them. Will stops tapping.

10 EXT. CAFETERIA - DAY

10

Booklet in hand, Will limps out the cafeteria door, putting his sunglasses on.

UP AHEAD IN THE PARKING LOT, SOLDIERS IN FULL COMBAT GEAR SPILL OUT OF HUMVEES; they're back from a training exercise.

A beat later, Tony follows Will out.

TONY

Hey, Sergeant. One more thing.

Will stops. Turns.

TONY (cont'd)

We make it our business to deliver the news within 24 hours from positive ID. The ideal is within four. We're racing CNN, FOX, Drudge Report, what-have-you. Not to mention any soldier with a cell phone or a webcam. The whole point is we gotta be there first. So, if you're in bed, or church, or the ballet, this baby stays on.

He extracts a pager from his pocket. Hands it to Will. Then produces his own beeper, sets it off. THE RING TONE HAS BEEN CUSTOMIZED TO SOUND LIKE FUNERAL CHURCH BELLS.

WILL

You gotta be kidding me.

TONY

Tried and true. Long battery life too. Can't be beat.

Suddenly, they hear THE SOUND OF "RETREAT" PLAYED BY A BUGLE OVER THE BASE PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEM.

(CONTINUED)

10 CONTINUED:

10

It signals the end of the official day. They freeze. Salute. All activity around them halts. Soldiers salute and/or stand at attention. Cars stand still. It lasts for a few seconds longer.

When it stops, they unfreeze. Base life returns to normal movement. Tony stares at Will. Smiles.

TONY (cont'd)

I know what you're thinking.

Will blinks -- *so Tony's a mind reader...*

TONY (cont'd)

You're thinking: 'shit, I'm a goddamn decorated war hero with three months left to serve and they draft me into the angels of death squadron. I get a beeper, a canned speech, and a lunatic commanding officer to surf a fuckin' ocean of grief. Am I right?

WILL

More or less, sir.

(a beat)

Am I right?

Tony smiles. Doesn't answer. Maybe.

11 OMITTED

11

12 INT. LIVING ROOM. WILL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

12

Will stands in his underwear and laced army boots, aiming a dart at a dart board. Sunglasses on. The house fully lit. The TV is SCREAMING a late night MURDER MOVIE.

The clock behind him reading: 2:58 a.m.

He covers his wounded eye, aims the dart, throws and misses badly. Another dart, another miss. The next dart actually hits the board but bounces off.

He moves to pick the darts up off the floor.

13 INT. BEDROOM. WILL'S APARTMENT - LATER 13

--Will wakes up with a fright. Sits up. Looks at the alarm clock on the messy bed above him: 4:16 a.m. He's been sleeping on the floor. THE TV IS STILL ON IN THE OTHER ROOM. SOUNDS LIKE AN INFOMERCIAL. He drinks from a bottle of water. Places it on the bed.

--LATER: Will checks himself in the mirror.

--LATER: Will, sitting on the bed with his back to us, is playing with the beeper.

--LATER: Will turns a lamp on. Winces as it hits his eye. Turns it off.

--LATER: Will drops into a chair. He takes a small eye-drop plastic bottle and looks up, squeezing the bottle above his eye. A few drops rain in. He rubs his eye. Keeps looking up. Then gets up and walks off.

He comes back with the Casualty Notification manual. Starts reading in the dark.

14 INT. REPAIR STATION. MOTOR POOL. FORT DIX - DAY 14

Will overlooks a nerdy recruit - MILTON - as he fiddles with the engine block of an armored Humvee.

WILL

There's your problem right there.
Attention to detail, Private! Read
the fucking manual!

Milton is sweating, can't seem to be able to fix the problem. He seems a bit in awe of Will, stealing nervous glances at him. To him, Will's the real thing, combat-tested and with the medals to show for it.

WILL (cont'd)

You have 130 degree heat, you have
sand blasting - it's baked the hose
right under the housing. Break the
suction!

Milton gives it his best shot. Failing.

(CONTINUED)

WILL (cont'd)

Every second you're on the side of the road increases your chances of getting shot, your boy's shot - your boys blown up. No haji armor's gonna protect you. Plus you're fucking up a five billion dollar a week operation because you don't have a twenty-five cent cooling hose.

Milton is fidgeting.

WILL (cont'd)

So you think ahead, you have five- no, ten in the back - you think ahead. You prepare, you think ahead. You. Think. Ahead.

Losing his patience, Will moves in, starts illustrating the proper repair operation. Suddenly stops. And now we hear it too - THE BEEPER IS RINGING, SHRILL AND PLAINTIVE.

15 INT./EXT. TONY'S CAR. MOVING - DAY

15

Tony drives his shiny silver car, shades on.

Will, also in sunglasses, looks up from the Casualty Report form and stares straight ahead, trying to hide his nervousness. Both wear formal (class A) uniforms.

They drive into a working class neighborhood, a typical soldier's breeding ground.

TONY

Should be in the next couple of blocks.

WILL

We could ask that guy--

TONY

No.

Off Will's confused look:

(CONTINUED)

TONY (cont'd)

First of all: men don't ask for directions. Much less soldiers. Soldiers on a notification, definitely, positively, do not ask for freakin' directions. No GPS. No Mapquest. We navigate. Second, you never wanna park too close. They hear a car park, go to the window, see two soldiers getting out - it's just a minute of torture.

Beat.

TONY (cont'd)

I should warn you - some of them have guns.

16 EXT. STREET. WORKING CLASS NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

16

They draw some hostile looks. Tony ignores them. Will doesn't.

TONY

Knocking is ominous, but ringing is jarring. Or worse, sometimes they have one of those god-awful chirping doorbells, some sing-song shit - throws you right off your game.

(singing)

"Yankee Doodle went to town, riding on a pony", and sorry, your husband's dead? Doesn't flow. So I knock. I don't really like to say "good morning" or "good afternoon" either - nothing good about it. I used to introduce myself, that's standard, but now I think it's rude. It's not about me.

Will swallows hard. This is getting to him already.

TONY (cont'd)

Lose the shades.

17 EXT. MRS. BURRELL'S HOUSE - DAY

17

A modest bungalow with a drying lawn, tiny American flag planted in a pot. Yellow ribbons. SUPPORT OUR TROOPS sign.

Tony draws a big breath, straightens himself up. He KNOCKS TWICE. SHUFFLING STEPS ARE HEARD FROM INSIDE and the door opens to frame:

MONICA WASHINGTON, 20, seven months pregnant. Instantly anxious.

MONICA

What is it?

TONY

We're looking for Mrs. Tina Burrell. Is she--

MONICA

Is Leroy in trouble again? I'm his girlfriend.

TONY

We need to speak with Mrs. Burrell.

She hesitates, then opens the door more.

MONICA

Come in.

Tony and Will follow her inside.

18 INT. MRS. BURRELL'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

18

She closes the door behind them. There's a mattress on the floor. DAYTIME TV IS ON. Bag of potato chips on the couch.

MONICA

Please sit down. I just made some tea.

She turns the TV off.

TONY

Ma'am, would you please get-

(CONTINUED)

MONICA

She'll be back in a minute. She
just called. She's down the block.

Tony and Will glance at each other. *Trapped.*

Monica looks at Tony, tries to read his expression. Tony
doesn't let on. Will avoids her eyes altogether.

Monica walks into the kitchen.

WILL

I thought you said we don't wait.

TONY

If she's not here in thirty
seconds, we're gone.

THE TINKLING OF A TEASPOON AGAINST CHINA IS THE ONLY SOUND IN
THE HOUSE. YOU CAN ALMOST HEAR THE HEARTBEATS.

Will looks at Tony. Tony has a twitch. He's not in control
here. Regretting. Very human suddenly. Clearly Monica is in
denial.

Monica comes back with her tea. Takes a sip, but she can
hardly swallow - she sets the cup down.

MONICA

I'm Leroy's girlfriend. Did I say
that already?

(pats her stomach)

This here's his baby...

(quickly:)

He don't know it's a boy yet. Don't
tell him. I ain't calling him
Junior.

Silence.

MONICA (cont'd)

What did he do?

TONY

I'm sorry, Ma'am. Our orders are to
talk to Mrs. Burrell.

(CONTINUED)

MONICA

I am-- I was *gonna be* Mrs. Burrell... We were supposed to get married, then my father got laid off and...

Will looks at Tony again. Both of them have started sweating.

MONICA (cont'd)

Leroy's always saying the wrong thing, but he's a good man. Please, just tell me--

TONY

We'll be back.

MONICA

NO! Don't leave.

A standoff. Can't talk to her, can't leave her hanging. Tony slowly turns his face toward her. Looks her in the eye.

And she knows. In a silent, frozen moment something dies inside.

MONICA (cont'd)

No... Oh, God, please... God please... God please...

Will is rooted to the spot, watching her fall apart.

The door opens - MRS. BURRELL steps inside.

MRS. BURRELL

What the..?

She sees the two grim soldiers. Shifts her eyes to Monica holding on to her stomach, sobbing.

TONY

I have bad news, Mrs. Burrell. The secretary of the Army has asked me to express his deep regret that your son, Private First Class Leroy Burrell-

And now a SCREAM comes out of Mrs. Burrell - a sound so raw, so loud, coming from so deep inside her that it literally shakes Tony and Will in their shoes.

(CONTINUED)

MRS. BURRELL

Get out-- Out! I don't want to--

TONY

I'm sorry, Mrs. Burrell. I--

She turns to Will, sensing he's the weaker link.

MRS. BURRELL

No. I'm not *ready* for this... He's just a baby... You understand? I'm not--

Will doesn't know what to do. He looks at Tony for guidance.

MRS. BURRELL (cont'd)

Come back tomorrow... The house is a mess... Please... Come back tomorrow...

They don't move. Mrs. Burrell starts opening her purse, digs through it - she's going to fight reality any way she can.

Will holds back tears.

TONY

Your son was killed yesterday by a roadside bomb outside Tikrit.

Mrs. Burrell slaps him. Then immediately withdraws her hand, shocked at herself. Tony just stands there, his cheek going red.

MRS. BURRELL

Don't say that about my baby.

TONY

A Casualty Assistance Officer will contact you shortly to arrange--

She slaps him again.

MRS. BURRELL

Stop it -- Stop saying that. You don't know what you're saying. Stop it!

Monica grabs Mrs. Burrell to stop her from hitting Tony again.

(CONTINUED)

18 CONTINUED: (4)

18

Will lowers his eyes to the floor.

TONY

We're very sorry for your loss...

19 INT./EXT. TONY'S CAR. PARKED - AFTERNOON

19

Will wears his sunglasses, although it's getting dark. He's on the passenger side, still reeling from the experience. Tony is behind the wheel, chewing gum fast and furious, while finishing a call on his cell.

TONY (TO PHONE)

We left them with a next door neighbor. Hard, very hard. Yup. Yup. Thank you. Good luck.

He hangs up.

TONY (cont'd)

CAO on his way.

An ice cream truck drives by playing HOME ON THE RANGE. It stops close by and a FEW KIDS run to it.

Will looks at Tony with a mix of newfound respect and disgust.

Tony looks at Will for a second.

TONY (cont'd)

No such thing as a satisfied customer.

He starts the car.

20 INT. BEN'S BAR - NIGHT

20

A popular local dive, not as full this evening, a small mixed crowd of local-types and soldiers. A large fish tank behind the counter. Will and Tony at the counter.

WILL

Double whiskey, please.

The bartender, EMILY, 25 going on 40, nods and turns to Tony. There's familiarity there. She knows he'll order-

(CONTINUED)

EMILY

Hot water and lemon?

TONY

And a glass of ice.

EMILY

Split pea soup tonight. You guys eating?

They look at each other. The idea of food is beyond them.

WILL

No.

TONY

No.

She leaves.

TONY (cont'd)

(to Will)

First one's on me.

Will nods *thanks*. THEY CONTINUE TALKING WHILE LOOKING AROUND, HARDLY EVER LOOKING AT EACH OTHER.

TONY (cont'd)

I'm in AA, if you're asking. Been sober three years. Mind you, I never drank anything stronger than pop. 'Course my pop would drink just about anything.

A beat. Will doesn't know what to say. Tony looks around. He's striking out, but he'll keep swinging with his stock jokes. For now the mood has shifted.

TONY (cont'd)

They tell them to get ready when their kids deploy. But they never listen, do they?

Will stares for a quick second. Not sure he wants to get into the conversation. Not even sure why he's here.

TONY (cont'd)

Soldiers go to war and everyone waves flags and applauds.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

TONY (cont'd)

They look at charts and study strategy and have "informed opinions." And then bullets fly and soldiers die and it's such a shock. Fuck that! What did they think it was gonna be like? Fear Factor?

WILL

Where did you see action?

TONY

Desert Storm/Desert Shield. Didn't get a crack at Enduring Freedom or Iraqi Freedom. Much to my chagrin. Wasn't much of a war, but I had my baptism too. You weren't the only one getting shot at.

(long pause)

They say you saved your buddies.

Will gives him another look. Tony locks eyes with Will, is he mocking him? Can he break this guy?

TONY (cont'd)

You know what I think? I think they should show every goddamn funeral on TV. Live. Have the president come around from time to time. Eulogize. The Vice President. Get people used to it. Are we at war or not?

Emily brings them their drinks.

TONY (cont'd)

Thanks.

EMILY

Sure thing. Let me know if you need anything else.

TONY

You know it already, Emily.

She rolls her eyes as she walks away.

TONY (cont'd)

I'd like to strap her on and wear her like a government-issued gas mask.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

TONY (cont'd)

(leaning in)

I got my sights on her, so don't even go there.

WILL

Roger that.

TONY

Figure I could play the sensitivity card. Tell her what my day was like down in death valley. Then again, sympathy backfires - she'll never leave. Trust me, I've been married three times. Twice to the same woman.

Will smiles. Finally. Takes a big gulp from his drink. A beat.

TONY (cont'd)

So now you know what the mission is.

WILL

(heartbroken)

Yeah.

Tony smiles victoriously.

TONY

If you're not cut out for it, you're not cut out for it!

Will glares.

TONY (cont'd)

You got a girl?

A beat. Will thinks it over. Shakes his head.

TONY (cont'd)

Had to think about it?

WILL

Kelly. We were together since we were kids. When I was deployed--

(CONTINUED)

TONY

She wanted you to commit. You balked, and the minute you were gone Jody plunked his ass down in the lazy boy.

Will's look says, *Is there anything you don't know?*

TONY (cont'd)

You probably dodged a bullet. Only good reason to get married like that's the extra pay. But then you're better off marrying a stranger - cut them in, then cut them loose.

(a beat)

'Course she can always get pregnant and bleed you dry. It's too easy.

WILL

I just told her she was free. Didn't want you to come knocking on her door.

Tony makes a dismissive gesture with his hand.

TONY

Anyway. Lots of Shellys out there.

Will opens his mouth to correct him - *Kelly...* Sees the glint in Tony's eye, realizes he's been baited.

TONY (cont'd)

You know, up to Vietnam they'd send a telegram. If it was your wife, what would she want?

Will sighs. *This guy, you gotta take him in small doses.*

21 INT. BATHROOM. WILL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

21

Will rifles through the medicine cabinet, finds a couple of leftover sleeping pills, dry-pops them.

22 INT. 24 HR. SUPERMARKET - NIGHT 22

MUZAK. The store is mostly deserted, a few NIGHT SHOPPERS milling about.

Will, in his civvies, is stuffing his shopping cart with canned goods and non-perishable items. Making a game of it. He's not in a hurry to go back home to a sleepless night.

A SHOPPER eyes his cart. Either he's going camping or stocking his fallout shelter.

23 INT. WILL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT 23

Middle of the night. Will eating on the floor straight out of a can while leafing through a magazine - just looking at the pictures. The BEEPER goes off. Will jolts. Looks at the thing with something approaching terror. Checks the number, grabs the phone off the bed, dials...

INTERCUT WITH:

24 INT. TONY'S APARTMENT - AT THE SAME TIME 24

Tony picks up the phone. He's sweaty, leaning on his chin up bar in his pajama pants, no shirt; we see his ARMY "MEAT TAG" (Tattoo) - red, white and blue American heart with wings.

TONY

Hey. That was quick. Were you awake? I was just making sure you're on your toes.

WILL

Is this a joke, sir--?

TONY

No. I just... Since I stopped drinking, I stay up nights. Especially after notifying someone.

(beat)

So you think you'll stay on? I mean, when your enlistment is up? I mean, hell-- What's your Email anyway? Do you IM?

(CONTINUED)

WILL
I don't have a computer.

TONY
Really? How does that work?

Awkward pause. What does Tony want?

Tony's BEEPER goes off.

TONY (cont'd)
Oh, that's funny.

WILL
What?

TONY
You calling my beeper.

WILL
No, I'm not.

TONY
(checking the number)
Oh, shit.

WILL
What...?

TONY
Meet me on post.

Tony hangs up. Rushes into his room to put on his uniform.
Turns on a lamp.

We see Emily half naked in his bed. She turns in her sleep,
opens a drunken eye.

EMILY
What's going on?

TONY
You gotta get out of here.

She sits up shocked, quickly sobering. Lights a cigarette and
stares at him angry, she was expecting a quiet night.

(CONTINUED)

TONY (cont'd)

Don't look at me like that. I gotta go so you gotta go.

EMILY

I don't get it, you married or something?

TONY

I'm-- I got... work.

EMILY

In the middle of the night all of a sudden? What the fuck do you do, deliver babies?

He doesn't answer, afraid to show weakness.

25 INT./EXT. TONY'S CAR. MOVING - DAWN

25

Tony and Will drive in the silver car on an empty road. TALK RADIO ON.

WILL

(rehearsing quietly)

Specialist Eric Martin. Specialist Martin. Sniper fire while on patrol. Specialist Eric-- While on patrol.

He looks at Tony. Tony smiles.

TONY

I got it covered.

WILL

I'm doing this one.

TONY

It's OK. I'll do it.

WILL

Long as I'm assigned to do something, I'm going to do it, sir.

TONY

It's a man this time.

(CONTINUED)

WILL

So?

TONY

Men try harder to keep it together.
But they're also the ones who can
hurt you.

WILL

I'm doing this.

Tony thinks it over. Realizes Will means business.

TONY

Well, then. Just reach down your
pants, grab a handful of balls and
do it right.

26 EXT. FARMHOUSE - LATER

26

They are parked. Waiting in the car as the sun rises. The
farm glistens. Moments pass.

Then they get out of the car, start walking to the farmhouse.
Their shadows falling far in the early light, leading them
on.

Will knocks. IMMEDIATELY, THREE DOGS BARK MAD INSIDE. They
wait. And wait.

KNOCK AGAIN. Nothing. They exchange looks.

Tony rings the DOORBELL.

The DOGS BARK. ONE MORE RING. No one's home.

TONY

Let's go.

They walk back toward the car.

DALE (O.S.)

Oh, shit!

They turn to see:

DALE MARTIN, 50, work pants and lumberjack shirt buttoned
askew. He's come around the house from a nearby field having
heard the dogs.

(CONTINUED)

WILL

Are you Mr. Martin-- Dale Martin?

Dale nods, bracing himself.

WILL (cont'd)

Sir, the Secretary of the Army... has asked me to express his deep regret that... your son Specialist Eric, Eric Martin... Was killed in action by sniper fire yesterday in Southern Iraq.

Dale reels. His whole world turning upside down, inside out, dark all over.

WILL (cont'd)

You will receive a more complete report as soon as possible, sir. What we can tell you right now is that his platoon came under sniper fire while on patrol. It was an instant death.

(beat)

I'm so sorry, Sir.

Dale, eyes welling, turns his head away and stares at something off screen.

DALE

Look at that tree.

Will turns to look at the off-screen tree, then back to the man.

DALE (cont'd)

I said look at the fucking tree.

Will looks off-screen again.

DALE (cont'd)

Same age as my son.

WILL

Sir, the Secretary extends his deepest sympathy to you and your family in your tragic lo-

(CONTINUED)

DALE

If I don't go, who goes in my place? That's what he said...

WILL

Sir, a Casualty Assistance Officer will contact you--

Dale looks as if he's about to fall. Will reaches out to help him.

Dale pushes Will's hand away.

DALE

Don't touch me.

WILL

I'm sorry, sir.

He spits in Will's face.

DALE

Fucking bastards.

Will stares in shock. Wipes his face with his sleeve.

WILL

Mr. Martin--

DALE

Why aren't you there now? Why aren't you dead?

Will stares at Dale - it's a question he lives with every day. Dale takes a step toward Will.

WILL

Sir-

Tony pulls Will back.

TONY

Let's go. We're done here.

DALE

Fucking cowards!

Will and Tony get in the car. Tony starts the engine. Dale bangs on the hood with his fist.

(CONTINUED)

26 CONTINUED: (3)

26

DALE (cont'd)
Fucking cowards?

27 INT./EXT. TONY'S CAR. MOVING - DAY

27

Will's still stone-faced. Tony drives.

TONY
One way or another we're all God's
children.

WILL
It's all fortune cookies to me,
sir.

Will turns his back to Tony, and looks out the window.

28 INT. DOCTOR GROSSO'S OFFICE - DAY

28

An abstract, cloudy landscape slowly reveals itself as:
WILL'S EYE, seen through a slit lamp.

DOCTOR GROSSO examines it silently, then scribbles down some
numbers.

Grosso slides his chair across to the computer station.

WILL
So?

DOCTOR GROSSO
I'm not quite happy with these
drops. I'm gonna prescribe
something else.

Will waits for more information, to no avail. Grosso is one
of those doctors.

He turns his back to Will and grabs his prescription book.

DOCTOR GROSSO (cont'd)
What's the doctor saying about the
leg?

WILL
Getting there... I'm kinda rooting
for the eye.

(CONTINUED)

DOCTOR GROSSO

It's not a race. Polytrauma takes a lot of patience. The body parts are literally on different schedules.

WILL

'And all the king's horses and all the king's men... How does it go?

Dr. Grosso looks at him sideways.

WILL (cont'd)

Couldn't put Humpty back together again?

Dr. Grosso hands him the prescription.

Will forces a grateful smile.

29 INT. KITCHEN. WILL'S APARTMENT - LATER 29

Will picks up the phone and dials a number. RINGING.

ALAN (ON PHONE)

Kelly's phone.

Will hangs up. A split second later his PHONE RINGS.

Will turns the answering machine off.

ANSWERING MACHINE (V.O.)

Answer off.

THE PHONE KEEPS RINGING OVER AND OVER AGAIN. Will walks down the corridor toward the bathroom. Letting the PHONE RING.

30 INT./EXT. WILL'S CAR. MOVING - DAY 30

Will at the wheel, shades on, checking his rearview mirror as A SIREN wails behind them.

He pulls over, watching in the side mirror:

A COP slowly getting off his bike. He walks up to Will's window.

COP

License and registration.

(CONTINUED)

WILL

What did I do?

COP

You crossed a red light half a mile back.

TONY

It was yellow.

COP

It was red before you passed it.

WILL

Look, it's an emergency.

COP

What kind of emergency?

WILL

A soldier was killed and we're going to notify the widow.

COP

That's not an emergency.

WILL

It's about timing, you know that.

COP

Yeah, well, you get into a wreck on the way to a notification. You kill someone. Or get killed yourself. How's that going to feel? That's a jackass move. There's a reason why we enforce the speed limit, it actually saves lives.

TONY

(to Will)

Can you believe this shit?

Will gets his license and registration out.

WILL

No, he's right. I don't want to do this anyway.

He hands them over to the cop.

(CONTINUED)

WILL (cont'd)

(to cop)

Do you want to do it? Fuck it.

(getting angry)

Let's just pretend it didn't happen. Let her put together a care package for her dead husband. Let her find out he got blown up from some kid on the local newsdesk. Let him put her on hold. Cause you don't give a fuck about her, do you? You don't really give a shit. You're doing your job.

A beat. Tony smiles to himself, impressed with Will's anger. The cop gives Will his license and registration back.

COP

Get the hell out of here.

31 EXT./INT. SUBURBAN STREET/CAR - LATER 31

They cruise down the street in Will's car, slowly now, as if on the prowl, looking at houses.

It's a quiet neighborhood. Yellow ribbons galore, American flags, purple heart bumper stickers.

32 EXT. CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND - DAY 32

Will and Tony pull up and get out of the car across the street from a crowded playground where YOUNG ARMY MOMMIES chat, laugh, push little CHILDREN on swings or CHEER them as they come down slides.

Suddenly, the ARMY MOMMIES FREEZE, one by one, as they see Tony and Will walk gravely toward the row of houses where one of them will learn she's a widow.

TONY

Could be worse.

Will gives him a look. *How could this be worse?*

TONY (cont'd)

Could be Christmas.

(CONTINUED)

Will and Tony keep walking toward the blue house, all eyes on them.

We see the currents of dread and relief on the women's and some of the kids' faces as Tony and Will keep going. It's like slow-motion Russian roulette.

They round the corner and keep walking toward the blue house. We now see:

A WIFE is hanging the wash on a clothesline: OLIVIA PITTERSON, 20s, no make-up.

Olivia sees them as they enter her driveway.

She straightens up. Holding an empty basket now. A man's shirt is draped on the clothesline behind her.

TONY (cont'd)
Mrs. Pitterson?

She stares at them without answering.

TONY (cont'd)
Are you Mrs. Pitterson?

She turns to look inside, make sure Matt is out of earshot. Up the road she sees a gathering of ARMY MOMMIES. Watching.

OLIVIA
How did it happen?

TONY
Did anyone talk to you already,
Ma'am?

OLIVIA
How did he die?

TONY
He was killed in action six hours
ago in the city of Mosul. That's
all the information we have so far,
Ma'am.

A beat. Will's expecting the worst. But she's holding herself together with so much dignity it's almost spooky.

(CONTINUED)

TONY (cont'd)

The secretary of the Army asked us
to extend--

OLIVIA

Thank you. There's no need.

Will and Tony exchange looks. From inside the house we now
notice the SOUNDS OF VIDEO GAMES.

OLIVIA (cont'd)

I would ask you in, but... my
little boy

WILL

Would you like us to notify your
child, Ma'am?

Tony gives him a quick look, *where did that come from?* She
looks at Will as if noticing him for the first time. Shakes
her head, *no*.

OLIVIA

Am I supposed to call Phil's
parents?

TONY

Not unless you want to. Your
husband's DD93 lists you as primary
NOK and them as secondary. They
moved to Florida. Is that still
accurate?

OLIVIA

Yes.

TONY

A local notification team has been
alerted. They're waiting for our go-
ahead. A casualty assistant will
contact you with all the
arrangements for-

OLIVIA

OK, thanks. Goodbye.

TONY

If you have any further questions--

(CONTINUED)

OLIVIA

OK. Thank you. I know this can't be
easy for you.

She turns and walks inside, leaving Will in shock. *Too calm,
too gentle to be true.*

Tony starts walking away.

Will stands there a few seconds too long. He doesn't
understand what just happened. Stares at the shirt on the
clothesline, moving gently in the wind. Forlorn flag.
Restless spirit.

TONY (O.S.)

Sergeant!

Will turns, sees Tony glaring, *what's wrong with this guy?*
We're left staring at the shirt.

33 EXT. BY WILL'S CAR - MINUTES LATER

33

Will and Tony walk toward the car. We hear CHILDREN PLAYING
OFF SCREEN.

TONY

*'I know this can't be easy for you'-
can you believe it? That's a first.*

Will is still processing Olivia.

TONY (cont'd)

She's banging someone. Did you see
the shirt she was hanging? Her
husband dies ten thousand miles
away, she's already got a man on
the clothesline.

Tony's at the passenger door waiting for Will to pop the
doors open. Will's still at the driver's door.

TONY (cont'd)

Are we gonna get in this vehicle
today or what??

Will takes another beat.

(CONTINUED)

33 CONTINUED:

33

WILL

We walk into these people's lives,
we don't know shit.

TONY

Trust me - you don't want to know.

Will thinks it over, unconvinced. Unlocks the doors.

TONY (cont'd)

From now on we take the silver
bullet. Your wheels are crap.

34 EXT. OLIVIA'S HOUSE - EVENING

34

We see Olivia and her son MATT, a mixed race boy of 9,
through the kitchen window. She's at the stove, her back to
us. He's at the table, flipping through a comic book.

Then she turns, pan and spatula in hand. Piles two pancakes
for Matt on his plate, one for her. Puts the pan away. Opens
the fridge looking for maple syrup. Digs it out, starts
pouring it on Matt's short stack.

He looks just a bit surprised - like she poured just a little
too much.

35 INT. WILL'S CAR - EVENING

35

Parked across the street, Will watches Olivia and Matt eating
pancakes. He's been here for awhile. The car is running.

36 INT. BEN'S BAR - NIGHT

36

Will and Tony sitting across from each other in a booth. The
bar is especially crowded tonight. MID-CONVERSATION.

TONY

You're going to pretend you don't
have one?

Will plays dumb.

TONY (cont'd)

I know you have her picture. I'm
willing to bet the next round on
it.

(CONTINUED)

Will smiles. Gets his wallet out, throws it on the table. Basically daring Tony.

Tony takes it - wallet *and* dare. Starts pulling stuff out:

Credit card, driver's license, expired hunting license, forty-something bucks, medical insurance, military ID, a note with a number, and finally, buried deep:

A PICTURE OF KELLY. Tony smiles.

TONY (cont'd)

Nice. Very nice. I could sop her up with a biscuit.

WILL

She's got a serious boyfriend.

Tony studies the picture.

TONY

Nah. I don't buy it. Not this girl. Nothing serious about her. She's having a ball down in nowheresville while you pine for her. You still got her number?

Will puts his things back in the wallet. *Whatever.*

Tony keeps the picture. Pockets it. Will gives him a look. Then gets up.

Tony calls Emily over.

TONY (cont'd)

Hey. Hey.

She stops. Gives him a look. *Does she want to deal with this right now?*

TONY (cont'd)

Can you sit for a moment?

She does. Annoyed. Amused. *Whatever.*

TONY (cont'd)

Listen, I thought we had a great time the other night. You were amazing. As was I.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

TONY (cont'd)

And I was thinking -- tonight's
another night...

EMILY

I'm pregnant.

He almost swallows his tongue. Her look cannot be more
sincere. Then -- she smiles.

EMILY (cont'd)

I'm just fucking with you. Have a
nice life.

She slides out and leaves.

TONY

What nice life? You had me going
there.

Will is back with hot water and a glass of ice for Tony.

WILL

I gotta go home.

TONY

What for? Internet porn? Come on.
You don't even have a computer.

Will smiles.

TONY (cont'd)

I was just bullshitting. Stay!
Forget women. We can talk about
something else, right? What's your
deal anyway - your folks around?

Will takes a moment.

TONY (cont'd)

Come on, sleep when you're dead.

Tony gives Will Kelly's picture back.

Will sits back down - perhaps their time together pulling
them a bit closer. Perhaps just better than being alone.

WILL

My father's gone. My mom's a nut. I
haven't seen her in years.

(CONTINUED)

TONY

Another lost child looking for a family, huh?

Will's heard that one before. Still doesn't like it.

WILL

Why did you join?

TONY

A dare.

WILL

So why are you still here?

TONY

They offered me a commission. And nobody dared me to leave.

Will gives him a smile that says *I dare you to leave.*

TONY (cont'd)

And I dare you to stay.

37 INT. MALL. SECOND LEVEL. FOOD COURT - DAY

37

Olivia and Matt seen in the store window, shopping in the children's section of a clothing store. She asks something of the CLERK. The clerk nods, overly obsequious.

Will gets up to watch Olivia unseen. He's been here for awhile.

He passes: TWO ARMY RECRUITERS, OLSON and BROWN, talking to a gaggle of TEENAGERS in the food court.

OLSON

...Where's the furthest place you've ever been?

TEENAGER 2

Been to Vegas once.

From Will's point of view, little Matt refuses to try on a dark suit jacket for his mother.

(CONTINUED)

BROWN (O.S.)

Vegas, right. Went there once. I stayed at some dump way off the strip, drove downtown, played the slot machines. I lost all my money, gained 5 pounds at the all-you-can-eat buffet, saw some hot chicks who wouldn't give me the time of day. Then I drove back home. Maybe you were luckier.

Matt and Olivia are arguing behind the glass. We can't hear them. Olivia shakes her head at something Matt says. Matt is shaking his head back at Olivia, on the edge of a tantrum.

BROWN (O.S.) (cont'd)

I'm talking 'bout something else here. I'm talking real life experience.

TEENAGER 1 (O.S.)

Like where?

Olivia turns to the CLERK. Says something.

OLSON (O.S.)

We're not gonna lie to you. Iraq. Afghanistan. Wherever we go next. That's possible.

The clerk nods to Olivia, explains something.

OLSON (cont'd)

Most of the time, it's serious work. Fighting terrorists. Rebuilding a country. Saving lives--

TEENAGER 2 (O.S.)

And risking our lives?

Olson looks him in the eye.

OLSON (O.S.)

I don't have to remind you how many Americans died one day in September just working in their offices. Sure, there's risk.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

OLSON (O.S.) (cont'd)
 But there's also a *point*. You're
 changing the world. And that's not
 a feeling you're gonna get serving
 hot dogs at the ball game.

Olivia and Matt exit the store and take the opposite stairs
 down.

OLSON (cont'd)
 See, the Army's your opportunity to
 get something very special. And I'm
 not just talking about skills and
 the best health insurance. What I'm
 talking about is *pride*...

BROWN
 ...Self-respect. Knowing that you
 were part of the defining moment of
 your generation.

TEENAGER 1
 I just wanna fuck some shit up.

BROWN
 Well, that does come with the job
 sometimes.

Will goes to the stairs to follow Olivia down to the first
 floor. The recruiters are on the landing where all the
 staircases meet.

OLIVIA
 Let them go. They're just kids.

The recruiters turn. Will stops.

OLSON
 We're not keeping anybody here
 against their will, Ma'am.

OLIVIA
 (to teenagers)
 Take a look.

She reaches inside the bag, shows off the boy-size black
 suit. Matt wanders off in embarrassment.

OLIVIA (cont'd)
 Wanna guess what it's for?

(CONTINUED)

The two recruiters look at each other.

OLIVIA (cont'd)
You know, there's a sticker on my
husband's coffin. Says "remains
unviewable".

The teenagers are getting jittery.

BROWN
Ma'am, we're very sorry for your
loss, but we-

OLIVIA
Big tall boys like you, and what's
left could fit in a shoebox.

OLSON
Look, you're-- Understandably...
why don't you just take your son
home and--?

OLIVIA
Why doesn't everyone just go home?

OLSON
What?

OLIVIA
(to teenagers)
Come on. Go home! Go--

Will moves down the stairs. The recruiters notice him. He motions for them to get lost.

Olivia looks at him, but says nothing.

Olson turns to the teenagers.

BROWN
You guys know where to find us.

The teenagers leave in the opposite direction. Olivia looks after them, thinking to herself. Matt makes his way back to his mother. Will approaches them.

WILL
(to Olivia)
Are you OK?

(CONTINUED)

OLIVIA

What? Yes.

She looks at Will as if just now realizing the strangeness of the coincidence. Matt stares up at him, unhappy.

WILL

Do you need anything?

OLIVIA

What? No. Thank you.

38 EXT. MALL. PARKING LOT - LATER

38

Sitting in his car, MUSIC BLASTING, Will finishes putting his new eye-drops in his left eye. He then starts the car and backs his way out of his parking space.

He reaches the parking lot exit where he spots Olivia and Matt waiting impatiently at the bus stop. Matt is losing it, hitting his mom. She tries to calm him down.

WILL

(to himself)

Oh, come on.

He stops the car.

39 EXT. WILL'S CAR. MOVING - DAY

39

Will drives. Olivia is sitting next to him. Matt, still angry, is strapped with a seat belt in the back. Not much talking.

They're all looking in different directions.

Matt struggles with the seat belt. It presses against his neck and annoys him. He slips it under his arm. But it's tight.

WILL

I was getting a prescription - At the mall. And that's why I was at the mall. I have this eye thing - I gotta take drops.

(CONTINUED)

39 CONTINUED:

39

OLIVIA

It's okay now? Is it okay now?

WILL

Yeah. Gets dry. It's kinda -
spotty...

40 EXT. OLIVIA'S HOUSE - DAY

40

We see Will's legs stick out from under Olivia's car as he fixes it.

Olivia watches him from the kitchen doorway. A strange image, changing with the angle he's either a man at work or a dead body under a car.

41 EXT. OLIVIA'S HOUSE - DAY

41

Matt is coloring in a magic marker drawing. Flowers of every color, bright, loud, almost grotesque.

Will downs a glass of lemonade and hands it back to Olivia. He's done with the car.

WILL

(nods toward the car)

It's gonna need a new transmission
soon.

He looks at Matt. A normal kid for five minutes. Matt goes inside.

OLIVIA

Can I pay you something?

WILL

No.

OLIVIA

I guess I should get a new car at
some point. Just feels wrong with
the... new money.

THE SOUND OF A PIANO BEING BANGED ON IS HEARD FROM INSIDE THE HOUSE.

(CONTINUED)

WILL
(re: piano)
You play?

OLIVIA
No. I work at Lock & Keep.

He smiles puzzled. Doesn't get the reference.

OLIVIA (cont'd)
It's a storage space on 3rd street
and Battalion. People just leave
things behind sometimes.
(shrugs)
Nice things. If you ever need a
mattress or a coffee table, or...
framed pictures of strangers, you
should give them a call.

They look at each other for a long moment.

WOMAN (O.S.)
Olivia!

They turn to see TWO WOMEN approaching, neighbors carrying
dishes of food prepared for the new widow.

WILL
I should get going...

OLIVIA
Thanks for your help.

WILL
Sure. Get a new transmission, OK?
Seriously. Soon.

42 OMITTED

42

43 INT. GYM - DAY

43

A LOUD GROAN. A PHYSICAL THERAPIST assists A SOLDIER through
basic exercises.

Will is pushing 20 pounds on a leg-press machine.

(CONTINUED)

43 CONTINUED:

43

Around him, MUSCULAR GIs - MEN and WOMEN - pump iron. A basketball game is getting rowdy in the back of the gym.

Will winces in pain, works through it. HIS BEEPER GOES OFF.

Blood rushing to his head, Will hits the beeper with his fist, fighting the inevitable.

PEOPLE stare. THE BEEPER KEEPS GOING.

44 EXT. TONY'S CAR. MOVING - DAY

44

Tony drives, Will shotgun. COUNTRY MUSIC on the radio, some Nashville ballad about cheaters and forgivers. Mid-conversation:

WILL

That's not what I said.

TONY

But you are trying to fuck her, right?

WILL

I'm not trying anything. I just fixed her car. You saw the shirt, didn't you? She's got someone.

TONY

Who?

WILL

I don't know.

TONY

Jesus, why is it always the quiet ones? Where are your morals, hero? It's too easy. You bring her her husband's death, then you try to fuck her?

Exasperated, Will turns the radio up. Tony lowers it.

TONY (cont'd)

And by the way, if she's into you, she's into some pretty weird twists. She's a head case - you've been warned.

(CONTINUED)

44 CONTINUED:

44

WILL
I'll make a note of it.

TONY
I bet you her husband couldn't wait
to get away from her and back in
theater.

45 EXT. COHEN HOUSE - LATER

45

Tony and Will get out of Tony's car. They open a gate and
take a few steps up the porch.

Tony KNOCKS on the door, then looks around: they're in a semi-
affluent suburban neighborhood. Houses plain but spacious.
SUVs in driveways.

MR. COHEN, 50s, opens the door.

MR. COHEN
Can I help you?

TONY
We're here to speak with Mrs.
Galindo.

Mr. Cohen cannot disguise his instant anger.

MR. COHEN
What is this, a joke?

Tony and Will are caught by surprise.

TONY
No, Sir.

MR. COHEN
There's no Mrs. Galindo here.

TONY
Marla Galindo? Are you saying she
moved, or--

Mr. Cohen huffs and puffs, as he walks back inside the house.

MR. COHEN
Marla!

No reply.

(CONTINUED)

MR. COHEN (cont'd)

Marla!

Nothing. He moves toward the stairs and calls up.

MR. COHEN (cont'd)

Marla!

He marches up the stairs. Knocks on a door and opens it.

Inside MARLA COHEN, all of 18 years old, is listening to her iPod while typing on her computer.

MARLA

What?

MR. COHEN

I'm so sick of your crap, missy.

MARLA

What? What did I do?

MR. COHEN

Some soldiers at the door says they're looking for Mrs. Galindo.

Marla goes red in the face.

MARLA

We were going to tell you, dad, I-- but... I knew how you felt and there was just no time before he was deployed and--

She runs past him down the stairs. He follows.

MR. COHEN

What *the hell* are you trying to say to me? You *married* that little greaseball!?

MARLA

Don't call him that!

Down the stairs, she sees Tony and Will. She stops cold. Takes a step back.

TONY (O.S.)

Mrs. Galindo--

(CONTINUED)

Mr. Cohen steps up.

MR. COHEN

We have some family matters to address here, as you can see, so please-

Tony steps forward. He speaks toward Marla, ignoring Cohen.

TONY

I have some bad news, Mrs. Galindo. Your husband, Corporal Mario Galindo was killed last night in Iraq by an improvised explosive device. The Secretary of the Army has asked me to extend his deepest sympathy.

Mr. Cohen looks to his daughter. He doesn't know what to say. Marla is in a daze.

MARLA

I-- I was going to tell you, dad...

Her father hugs her, shushes her. His face is dark with anguish.

Tony and Will stand in their spots, watching an angry man turn into a good father.

TONY

A Casualty Assistance Officer will contact you in the next few hours...

Banner on the wall read: WELCOME HOME.

The place is in full swing with a party celebrating a RETURNING SOLDIER, already drunk. A few DOZEN MEN and WOMEN are happy, intoxicated, and in the mood for love.

Will sits close by at the bar, drinking while listening to the returning soldier tell a story.

(CONTINUED)

RETURNING SOLDIER

--Tribal Chief's an old-looking guy, weird, I figured in his 50s, maybe older. Face all sagging and gray, bunch of teeth missing... He tells me he's not used to making deals like this with a kid. I tell him, hey, man, I'm 28.

SOLDIER'S WIFE

29 next month!

RETURNING SOLDIER

That's right. I'm no kid, gramps. So, the Chief says, 28? You can't be 28. You're a beautiful man... You must be 18, 19. I'm thinking, what is he talking about? What is this - he *likes* me? But the guy's getting all depressed. Starts saying, this country's bad... I try to tell him, it ain't that bad since we liberated you, old man. And then he goes: Not that bad? Look at me. I'm 27!

SOLDIER'S WIFE

It's the goat-fucking, man!

They all LAUGH, except the returning soldier, merely smiling.

Will watches the returning soldier.

RETURNING SOLDIER

(casually)

The poor asshole, he got one here-
(points to temple)

A couple here-
(throat)

And one went through his chest, you could almost hear the lungs deflate... like *swoosh*... One of his own men did it...

The LAUGHING STOPS altogether. Everyone just stares at him in shock. They didn't see this part of the story coming.

(CONTINUED)

RETURNING SOLDIER (cont'd)

Anyway. He was a funny guy. I liked him.

The returning soldier takes a sip from his beer, then looks around, recognizes the awkward silence.

RETURNING SOLDIER (cont'd)

What is this, a funeral all of a sudden?

A few CHUCKLES.

RETURNING SOLDIER (cont'd)

I'll be right back.

He leaves. Everybody's uncomfortable now, a contrast with the LOUD UPBEAT MUSIC.

Will gets up and follows the soldier out.

47 EXT. BEN'S BAR - NIGHT

47

SMOKERS shoot the breeze outside the bar. Will steps out. Sees the returning soldier standing there, trying to catch his breath.

WILL

Can I bum a cigarette?

The Returning Soldier fishes out his pack, gives a cigarette to Will. Lights it for him with shaking hands.

WILL (cont'd)

Thanks. You OK?

RETURNING SOLDIER

Yeah... Sure.

Clearly, he's not.

WILL

It's like coming back from another planet.

RETURNING SOLDIER

What are you talking about? I'm fine. I'm home, baby!

(CONTINUED)

He lights a cigarette for himself, and walks away further down the street.

A beat later, his wife comes out and hurries to him. Will watches the returning soldier light a cigarette for his wife. They stand there, huddled, smoking together. Quietly. Tenderly.

TONY (O.S.)

...Every American generation has to have a war, you know. We just need it. 'Cause we gotta use up our weapons, so we can make more. Easy.

Will shifts his gaze to see Tony arriving with two young women - CLAIRE and LARA. Both are somewhat tipsy, listening to Tony rant.

TONY (cont'd)

And we gotta take warriors through wars so they can command the next batch. Nothing wrong with that.

They reach the entrance and Will standing there. Claire's cell phone RINGS. She answers.

TONY (cont'd)

Hey, Will. Girls, this is the guy I told you all about. Will, meet Laura and Claire.

LARA
Lara.

CLAIRE
(while on phone)
Hi.

TONY (cont'd)

Lara.

LARA

Nice to meet you, Will.

Will smiles at both. Tony is glowing.

TONY

Coming in? I'm buying.

WILL

In a minute.

(CONTINUED)

47 CONTINUED: (2)

47

They spill into the bar, Tony talking their heads off, Claire on the phone.

Will stands in the street for a moment, hesitating.

He takes a last look at the returning soldier and his wife. They're arguing now in HUSHED VOICES. He makes a snap decision and walks away toward his car.

48 EXT. FIELDS - DAY

48

Olivia and little Matt walk on a meadow, talking, picking flowers. They are moving toward:

49 EXT. ARMY CEMETERY - DAY

49

CAPTAIN RICK MOORE goes through roll call. We see the soldiers as they answer.

CAPTAIN MOORE
Sergeant Gonzales.

GONZALES
Sir!

CAPTAIN MOORE
Sergeant Evert.

EVERT
Sir!

CAPTAIN MOORE
Corporal Anderson.

ANDERSON
Sir!

CAPTAIN MOORE
Private Pitterson.

There is no answer. We get a view of the entire group - forty or fifty soldiers, half that many civilians.

CAPTAIN MOORE (cont'd)
(louder:)
Private First Class, Pitterson!
(a beat, then louder:)
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

49 CONTINUED:

49

CAPTAIN MOORE (cont'd)
 PRIVATE FIRST CLASS: PHILIP.
 ROBERT. PITTEKSON.

The louder the call, the more chilling the silence, until:

The familiar notes of "Taps" start playing.

Olivia stands by the coffin, holding little Matt's hand. He puts his freshly picked wildflowers on it.

Eyes downcast, Philip's Mother takes Matt's other hand.

Soldiers watch, some welling up, some stone-faced.

A RETIRED GENERAL in his late seventies, fruit salad of medals and ribbons on his chest, stares semi-vacantly. A funeral habitue.

Olivia and Matt step away from the coffin.

Olivia lifts her eyes to the sparse crowd.

Meets some nervous glances. Mostly compassionate. The awkwardness of loss.

And apart from crowd, keeping his distance from the grave site, she spots:

Will. Standing with a GROUP OF VETERANS attending in support of the funeral.

He holds her gaze. A complex tangle of emotions passing between them from afar. Respect/regret/longing. *What does he want? What does she want?*

50 INT/EXT. TONY'S CAR/APARTMENT BUILDING - LATER

50

Through the front windshield: we are moving toward an apartment building and an officer waiting outside - CAPTAIN GARCIA.

TONY (O.S.)
 There he is.

51 INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY

51

We follow Will, Tony and Garcia up the stairs from behind. Climbing one floor after another. The SOUND OF THEIR FOOTSTEPS ECHOING IN THE HALLS.

52 INT. APARTMENT BUILDING - LATER

52

Tony and Will stand at the doorway with Captain Garcia, facing a sweet old man in shirt sleeves, MR. VASQUEZ.

WILL

Mr. Vasquez, do you understand English?

MR. VASQUEZ

(in Spanish)

My daughter is in the Army. Her husband too.

TWO LITTLE KIDS run down the hallway, chasing.

TONY

(in English)

Mr. Vasquez, the Secretary of the Army has asked me to express his deepest regrets...

CAPTAIN GARCIA

(in Spanish)

Mr. Vasquez, the Secretary of the Army has asked me to express his deepest regrets...

Will stares at Captain Garcia, fascinated by the sound of the familiar words in a different language. Almost makes them bearable. Vasquez, deeply shocked, talks back to them.

TONY

(in English)

...That your daughter Patricia was killed in a helicopter crash at 7Am our time in the Anbar Province of Iraq. You will be further advised as more information becomes available. The Secretary of the Army extends his deepest sympathy to you and your family in your tragic loss."

CAPTAIN GARCIA

(in Spanish)

...That your daughter Patricia was killed in a helicopter crash at 7Am our time in the Anbar Province of Iraq. You will be further advised as more information becomes available. The Secretary of the Army extends his deepest sympathy to you and your family in your tragic loss."

IT TURNS INTO AN ARGUMENT, MR. VASQUEZ REFUSING TO ACCEPT THE NEWS, UNTIL IT HITS HIM AND HE BREAKS DOWN.

53 INT. KITCHEN. WILL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

53

Will walks in. Hits the PLAY MESSAGES button on his answering machine.

KELLY (ON ANSWERING MACHINE)
Hey, it's Kelly. I'm sorry I sent that invitation? It was really dumb. You know I wanted us to be able- I dunno, I hope you're not mad, okay. I didn't... You didn't RSVP so-

Will goes through the unopened pile of mail on his kitchen table. Finds a fancy white envelope amid the unopened junk mail and bills. Gets up absentmindedly to read it.

KELLY (ON ANSWERING MACHINE) (cont'd)
I guess I was just- You know, I was scared to tell you. I don't know, there's like all this stress... And I don't even want this stupid party anyway, and his parents... It's not even your problem. I'm crazy, I know. Alan and I got in a big fight about it and... Don't come, okay? Just forget the invitation. Forget me, just- I'm sorry..

He listens to the HANG UP. Lets go of the invite. Takes a beat.

Starts punching the wall. Over and over again. Until he's done. He's in pain.

He walks away, hand bleeding.

54 INT. WILL'S BEDROOM - LATER

54

Will's lying on the floor, he's wide-eyed, alert.

In his window, the moon is fading and so is any hope of sleep.

He buries himself in blanket. A moving corpse.

55 INT. OLIVIA'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

55

Matt comes down the stairs. He is wearing his father's medals, he's got a large band-aid over his eyebrow and his face is bruised. He stops in the middle of the landing.

WILL
(trying to joke)
Hey pal. I bet the other kid got it
real good.

Matt says nothing. Will hands him the folded flag.

WILL (cont'd)
It's my old unit flag...

MATT
I already have two.

Will is stumped. Matt walks back upstairs.

OLIVIA
Can't seem to get enough of them.
Flags and casseroles.

A beat.

WILL
If there's anything I can do...

OLIVIA
I know where to find you.

He's at a loss for words. Swallows hard. He wants to say the "right" thing.

OLIVIA (cont'd)
Anyway, we're leaving town.

WILL
Oh. Where to?

OLIVIA
Haven't decided. Funny. We always
had to move wherever the Army sent
us, and now...

She shrugs.

(CONTINUED)

WILL

Well. If you need any help. Packing boxes. Or... Unpacking. Anything.

OLIVIA

I can pack up this house in a day and unpack it in two. Plenty of practice.

A TOILET IS FLUSHED UPSTAIRS. Breaking their eye contact. Making it even more awkward.

OLIVIA (cont'd)

(to Will)

Anyway. Thanks for the flag.

A beat. Will's still standing there. He nods. He should go.

OLIVIA (cont'd)

We were thinking about getting some...pizza.

56 INT. DINING ROOM. OLIVIA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

56

Olivia, Matt and Will sit around the table eating pizza.

It's an awkward gathering, no one knowing quite what to say. So they eat quietly. Until:

MATT

Can I watch TV?

OLIVIA

After you finish your broccoli.

Matt and Will look at the table. Then each other. Only thing green on it is the tablecloth.

MATT

Mom, there's no broccoli.

OLIVIA

Oh.

She gets up, slightly embarrassed, revealing her nervousness.

OLIVIA (cont'd)

I guess I left it in the microwave.

(CONTINUED)

56 CONTINUED:

56

Will stands.

WILL
I should go. Probably... I need to--

OLIVIA
OK.

WILL
I-- Thanks for the pizza... Matt.
It was nice hanging...

MATT
How come he doesn't have to eat his
broccoli?

Will freezes.

WILL
I could eat broccoli.

He sits back down. Olivia walks into the kitchen. Matt stares at Will.

MATT
I'm not eating mine.

WILL
Roger that.

57 OMITTED

57

58 INT. KITCHEN. WILL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

58

Will reads a newspaper at his kitchen table. Another sleepless night. A pile of unopened mail on the table. THE TV PLAYING OFF SCREEN. His second beer open. He drinks. A plate of cookies.

Zoom in on newspaper - a story at the bottom of page 9: SOLDIER LAID TO REST. There's a picture of a YOUNG MAN, caption reading MARIO GALINDO, in uniform smiling at the camera, next to a picture of Marla Galindo holding a flower bouquet. Will just stares.

59 EXT. LOCK & KEEP STORAGE - DAY

59

A SIGN: LOCK & KEEP.

Will parks by the loading dock where TWO SOLDIERS in their ACUs, A YOUNG MAN AND A YOUNG WOMAN, glowing in a recently-married kind of way, are loading boxes into a U-Haul truck. An EMPLOYEE IN A PURPLE POLO SHIRT is helping them.

60 EXT. HAPPY HOME STORAGE - DAY

60

A long row of gated storage cubicles, like a morgue.

Will is following Olivia, who's wearing a Lock & Keep purple polo shirt. They are talking while she leads him forward.

OLIVIA

Friday is my last day and I just thought... There's stuff here you could take. It's such a waste.

She slides open a gate. He looks inside, but quickly his eyes drift to meet hers. Tension.

They are searching, just by looking, searching for a connection.

OLIVIA (cont'd)

Anybody looking at us right now would say you're a lowlife trying to take advantage of my grief. And that I'm a slut who's not even grieving.

Beat. She moves closer.

OLIVIA (cont'd)

You ever lose somebody?

WILL

A few friends...over there. My father, in peace-time. Drunk driver.

OLIVIA

Did they catch him?

(CONTINUED)

WILL

What..? Oh. No. My dad... he was
the drunk driver.

Olivia nods. Almost smiles at the unintentional humor.

WILL (cont'd)

My mom woke me up in the middle of
the night. Said his brakes failed.
I never saw her cry. Made me want
to be a mechanic by age 10.

OLIVIA

So your mom notified you.

He smiles at her directness. Not funny anymore.

They look at each other in silence. She gets him.

61 INT. OLIVIA'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON

61

The door opens. Will and Olivia enter. They stop, looking at
each other. They made it this far. What now? They're not
quite sure.

OLIVIA

Want to dance?

He laughs. She moves closer to him.

WILL

There's no music.

They're a step from being in each others arms. They take it.
Almost dance. Then she disengages.

OLIVIA

I'm going to jump in the shower.

WILL

Why?

OLIVIA

Cause...

A nervous pause.

She moves away. He grabs her hand. Holds her.

(CONTINUED)

WILL

Don't.

She moves in, he's not letting go. They breathe each other in. Leaning into each other. It's the moment of truth. She pulls back.

OLIVIA

I'm going to make myself a cup of coffee. Do you want some?

He smiles. Lets go of her hand.

WILL

Thanks, I'm good.

She presses a button to heat up this morning's coffee. Doesn't even wait for it to get warm, she's so nervous. She wants to say something. But can't. They move closer. She drinks. And then:

OLIVIA

When Phil reenlisted for a third tour, he *needed* to go. Staying home was no longer an option in his mind. Or in mine. I was relieved to see him go.

He takes her in.

OLIVIA (cont'd)

I missed him, but... I didn't miss the guy who just left. I missed the man he was a long time ago.

She braces herself.

OLIVIA (cont'd)

One morning I opened the closet and one of his shirts fell off the hanger. I picked it up.

She drinks from the cold coffee.

OLIVIA (cont'd)

It smelled of... something awful. It wasn't another woman, or cigarettes, or booze - I could have handled that. I smelled... Rage.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

OLIVIA (cont'd)

Fear. This-- The man he turned into over there. The man I started hating. And he didn't treat me or his little boy very good when he was at home. So in a way, in my mind, it was like he was dead already.

She takes a long breath.

OLIVIA (cont'd)

Anyway, I washed it. The shirt. And then you came.

They look at each other, time now has no meaning.

OLIVIA (cont'd)

Funny. I loved him once. And now that he's gone, I love him again. But more for my little boy.

(pause)

I'm sorry I brought you here.

WILL

Don't be.

He smiles. Puts his head on her shoulder.

WILL (cont'd)

It's not that I don't want to--

OLIVIA

I know. Me too.

She wants to kiss him. He wants to kiss her. They don't.

OLIVIA (cont'd)

I'm gonna go get Matt now. He loves it when I pick him up early. The other kids go green with envy.

WILL

OK.

She walks away to get her keys.

WILL (cont'd)

Do you mind if I just stay here for awhile?

(CONTINUED)

She hesitates. But finally:

OLIVIA

Just slam the door hard. The lock's
kinda funky.

She leaves. He stands there for a moment.

Finally, he sits.

We stay with him there for a while.

62 INT./EXT. TONY'S CAR. MOVING - DAY

62

CLASSIC ROCK ON THE RADIO MIXED WITH NEWS - the dial in-between stations. Tony drives. Will sips 7/11 coffee from a huge Styrofoam cup.

TONY

--A soldier dies in a black-op mission someplace we never admitted going. The army calls his death an *accident*. Why? To protect the next one. Another soldier dies slipping into a ditch, and we call it a combat death, just to give it a meaning.

WILL

What's your point?

TONY

My point? My point is that sometimes the Army must be concerned with something bigger than truth. Doesn't mean it doesn't care about you-- just the opposite. Ain't a family on God's green earth take better care of you than the U.S. Army.

WILL

Oh, really?

TONY

Really. Civilian life's for people who haven't seen shit. It's too late for you.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

62 CONTINUED:

62

TONY (cont'd)
You've seen the shit-- can't unsee
it anymore. Can't go sell insurance
now, brother-- Too fucking late.

63 INT. GROCERY STORE - AFTERNOON

63

Will checks out the magazine rack next to the register.
Gossip magazines, car magazines, skin magazines, gun
magazines. Modern-day Americana, glossy and raw.

The CASHIER rings up the only other customers here MR. and
MRS. FLANIGAN.

CASHIER
I'll see you, Ralph. Good-bye Mrs.
Flanigan.

Will reacts to the names. Turns to look at the man.

WILL
Mr. Flanigan?

Mr. Flanigan sees him staring. Narrows his eyes, straining
for recognition.

MR. FLANIGAN
Do I know you?

Tony comes out of the bathroom, WHISTLING, drying his hands.
He picks up a candy bar. Then sees Mr. Flanigan eyeballing
Will.

WILL
No. You don't know me.

Will steals a glance at Tony. Tony stops whistling - but
still holds the candy bar.

WILL (cont'd)
You're the father of Walton
Flanigan...

MR. FLANIGAN
Yes?

Tony realizes he's holding the damn candy bar, clumsily slips
it into his pocket.

(CONTINUED)

Silence. Everybody staring at everybody. Saying without saying. Knowing without knowing.

Suddenly, Mr. Flanigan falls to his knees. Puking his guts out in the middle of the store.

MRS. FLANIGAN

Oh, my God. Ralph, what's wrong?

Mr. Flanigan lifts his head up to his wife. His mouth hangs open but the words don't come.

She sees his face crumble, realizes it's not something he ate.

MRS. FLANIGAN (cont'd)

Talk to me!

She turns to Will, still fighting the sinking realization.

WILL

(too fast)

The Secretary of the Army has asked me to express his deep regret that your son, Walton Flanigan, was killed yesterday in Iraq. The Secretary extends his deepest sympathy to you and your family in your tragic loss.

Will gives Tony a look. Then, to Tony's shock, Will gets down on his knees, bad leg and all, and puts his hand around Flanigan's shoulder.

WILL (cont'd)

(whispering to Flanagan)

You cry now. Let it all out. Don't hold on to a single drop.

He helps Flanigan up. Flanigan can hardly stand straight.

MRS. FLANIGAN

He's dead?

Will puts his hand on her shoulder.

WILL

I'm sorry, Ma'am.

(CONTINUED)

Tony watches. Will is touching the NOK. It's not clear who needs the contact more.

Mrs. Flanigan puts her shaking hands on her face, as if she's trying to shut the world out.

MR. FLANIGAN

How... how did he...?

WILL

I don't have that information currently, sir.

(voice breaking)

The Army will let you know as soon as it's available. The Secretary extends his deepest sympathy to you and your family during this trying period. A Casualty Assistance Officer will contact you within a few hours.

Mrs. Flanigan clutches her husband's arm now, not to support him but herself. Both of them instantly aged twenty years.

WILL (cont'd)

Is there a friend or neighbor we could call? Do you need a ride?

They slowly back off, almost circumspect, unable to turn from him. Shaking their heads.

The cashier watches them in stunned silence as they leave the store, two bags of groceries in their hands and their lives ruined.

Will exhales. It's as if he had been holding his breath for the last two minutes. He notices his leg is shaking.

His eyes meet Tony's. New respect for Will or a growing anger for breaking the rules?

64 EXT. GROCERY STORE - DAY - MINUTES LATER

64

Will walks out of the store. Tony is waiting there.

WILL

Where did they go?

(CONTINUED)

TONY

They took off.

Will walks away. Tony behind him. Pats him on the back. Then again. Again, more aggressive. He's pushing him. Will turns.

WILL

What?

TONY

What did I tell you from day one?
You do not touch the NOK.

Will says nothing.

TONY (cont'd)

You gotta wake the fuck up - you're not in high school. You're not in a rock band. You're in the Army!

WILL

I know I'm in the Army-- I gave blood to the Army. I got blown up in a firefight that lasted longer than your entire war. I didn't sunbathe in Kuwait with the rest of the POGs. I fought.

Tony pushes him against the wall.

TONY

It's not your job. You didn't follow procedure.

WILL

Fuck procedure! It's not about the job. They're human beings. They're people. They're not like you.

Tony seethes. It takes all he's got not to hit Will.

He walks away. Will follows, trying to stay calm.

Tony gets in the car and drives off, leaving Will behind.

65 EXT. ROAD - AFTERNOON 65

Will is walking by the side of the road. Up ahead he sees Tony in his car approaching fast. Tony U-turns, stops and opens the passenger door for Will.

TONY

Get in.

No reply. Stubbornness. Will keeps walking.

TONY (cont'd)

It'll take you a week at this rate.
Get in.

Will keeps limping along.

TONY (cont'd)

I'm letting it go. Get in!

No way.

TONY (cont'd)

Hey stubborn, get in the fucking car!

66 EXT. ANOTHER ROAD - EVENING 66

Will hitchhikes by the side of the road. A car brandishing an American flag from its antenna stops for him. He hobbles in and the car takes off.

67 EXT. WILL'S APARTMENT BUILDING - DUSK 67

Will walks toward his apartment building, looking beat. *What a day. And it's not over yet.*

68 OMITTED 68

69 INT. BEDROOM. WILL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT 69

Will on the bed. Drunk. Half-naked. Half-awake. His clothes and shoes all over the place. The room a mess. The PHONE RINGS. He rolls off the bed. Walks off screen.

(CONTINUED)

WILL (O.S.)

Hello.

Comes back into frame and collapses back into bed, phone in hand.

INTERCUT WITH:

70 INT. OFFICE. TONY'S APT.

70

Tony at his desk, by the computer.

TONY

Dorsett thinks you need some time away. Clear your head. He told me to keep an eye on you.

WILL

Me? I don't need anything-

TONY

You walked home, you need it. We're off 'til Tuesday. I got it all planned out. Bring a bathing suit and your ACUs. The girls are totally into it.

WILL

What girls? *Into what?*

TONY

Come on. They won't go if it's just me. And I haven't had some in weeks, OK? I need to get laid, and so do you. Right?

WILL

Can we take my car?

A beat.

TONY

I'll let you choose the girl.

71 EXT. BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD - DAY

71

Tony and Will are fixing a flat tire on the silver car. Lara drinks beer and watches. Claire is texting fast and furious on her cell phone.

TONY
(to Claire)
Sure your stepfather won't show up?

CLAIRE
(while texting)
He's fishing in Alaska for the rest of the season.

TONY
Fishing.

WILL
In Alaska.

TONY
(to Claire)
And he doesn't mind you using the place?

LARA
Oh, he minds. You don't know her dad.

Tony arches an eyebrow.

72 EXT. CABIN - DAY

72

Tony's car pulls into the driveway and stops outside a cabin near a lake.

WILL
Nice.

LOUD RAP MUSIC CUTS IN.

73 INT. CABIN - EVENING

73

Tony and Claire are dancing/making out. She's already drunk, he's high on lust.

(CONTINUED)

73 CONTINUED: 73

Will and Lara are playing pool. Where is this going?

74 INT. CABIN - NIGHT 74

Tony and Claire, fucking hard. Or is it soft?

75 EXT. OUTSIDE CABIN - NIGHT 75

Will and Lara sit on the porch. SEX AND MUSIC CONTINUING INSIDE. He leans in to kiss her. Almost forcing it. Awkward. She laughs.

She leans back and puts her head on his lap. As if to sleep. He sits there touching his hair, letting her rest tenderly in his lap.

76 INT. CABIN - A FEW MINUTES LATER 76

Tony and Claire climax. He drops off her, sweaty and out of breath. Turns his back to her and stares at the wall.

CLAIRE
You OK, sailor?

TONY
Yeah. God, I need a drink.

77 EXT./INT. CABIN - LATER 77

Will walks back inside.

Claire is smoking.

A couple of empty beer bottles sit on the table.

Tony clutches another one. Three years of sobriety over.

WILL
(to Tony)
What the hell are you doing?

TONY
Do you know if there's more beer
left in the car?

(CONTINUED)

WILL

Tony.

TONY

It's OK. It's alright. Just taking the edge off. I mean, extraordinary times, right? You can give me a break, can't you? Aren't you my buddy?

Will starts cleaning up.

TONY (cont'd)

Come on. We've been to hell and back together.

WILL

Three years? Just like that.

CLAIRE

He knows what he's doing. It's all good. Let's just go to sleep.

WILL

Yeah. Go to sleep.

She walks away.

CLAIRE

Asshole.

Tony and Will lock eyes.

TONY

Sergeant.

Will exits.

TONY (cont'd)

I'm more fun when I drink.

He's all alone now.

TONY (cont'd)

Sergeant!

78 EXT. LAKE - DAY

78

Will and Tony sit in the boat in the middle of the lake, engine idling, two six packs between them. Will's in a T-shirt and his ACU pants. Tony in shorts and a red windbreaker.

TONY

You missed out. That's the problem. That's the whole problem with this time around in Iraq. Vietnam, those guys got laid six ways from Sunday. Bosnia, best brothels in the world. Desert Storm, we had R & R ships with Philipino hookers on call. I'm telling you, nothing like sex in a war zone-- whether you're sleeping with the enemy or the grateful natives, or some reporter who gets her nipples hard at the sight of blood on the uniform. Or the dykey chick who wears the uniform. Whichever you pick, the mask falls off... No bullshit, no pretending. You're fucking for your life. But this war, I don't know... All this religious bullshit, Crusades, jihad... and nobody gets laid. Shit, that's half the reason why those guys are so angry, right?

WILL

Let's get back.

JET SKIS CAN BE HEARD APPROACHING. They turn to watch (off screen)

TONY

(yelling)
Charlie don't surf!

Will laughs. The JET SKI NOISE IS GETTING NEARER.

TONY (cont'd)

Maybe I should have a kid.

WILL

I shouldn't have let you drink.

(CONTINUED)

TONY

See, that's your other problem right there, hero. You think everything's your fault, your responsibility. Someone's gonna fall to pieces - here's Will with a glue stick. Some soldier gets drunk... Well, let me tell you something: I had a beer last month, OK? Last week -- I had a few more. The other day--

WILL

You serious?

TONY

That's right. Today's not the day I got off the wagon -- just the day I'm not gonna bother pretending.

THREE GUYS ON THREE JET SKIS zoom by. Dressed the part. Assholes by definition. Making waves and causing Tony to spill some beer.

TONY (cont'd)

Hey, Charlie! Stay the fuck away, assholes.

He throws the beer bottle in their general direction. But they're gone.

WILL

Come on, man...

Will remains seated in the boat, drinking, while Tony ties the boat to the dock rings. Tony's got his windbreaker tied around his waist.

WILL

Where did you learn about knots?

TONY

Boy scouts. They sure love a good knot... Easy to tie, easy to untie-- but hard to pull loose.

(CONTINUED)

BRAD (O.S.)

So, dude--

THREE GUYS, BRAD, STEVE and JOE, the jet skis trio, are coming their way.

Tony tenses.

BRAD (O.S.) (cont'd)

What's your fucking problem anyway?
You own this lake?

Tony gives Will a look, you up for a fight? Will shrugs, why not. Will quickly gets out of the boat and they charge the three...

TONY

Hey ladies, what sorority do you belong to?

Will is quick to throw the first punch.

80 INT. TONY'S CAR - DAY - LATER

80

Will drives, Tony shotgun. Both bruised with blood stains on their clothes, mud on their faces.

TONY

Man, those girls sure overreacted.
It was just a little fight is all.
I thought they were cool. Sorry,
buddy. How far did you get with
Laura?

Pause.

WILL

Lara.

TONY

Lara. What a name!

They drive.

TONY (cont'd)

So?

81 INT. TONY'S CAR. MOVING - DAY 81

Will drives. Tony's sleeping in the back seat.

Will sips beer. Only half-listening to A NEWS BULLETIN on the radio: we hear fragments of the report as well...

Will switches to the first burst of MUSIC. A languid R&B ballad. Feels a million miles away - suits him fine.

Tony wakes up. Starts singing HOME ON THE RANGE...

82 INT. TONY'S CAR. MOVING - LATER 82

They sing HOME ON THE RANGE at the top of their lungs. Funniest song they ever heard. They're too drunk to remember they first heard it after notifying Mrs. Burrell.

83 INT. ENTRANCE. COUNTRY CLUB - EVENING 83

Will and Tony step into the country club.

Eyes turn to watch them. They both stick out like sore thumbs, both bruised and dirty; Tony in his red windbreaker, shorts and Army boots, Will in a blood-stained T-shirt and ACU pants.

Everyone around them is dressed to the nines. This is a monied engagement party pretending to be informal by playing ALMOST CURRENT MUSIC.

Tony and Will look as though they've just returned from war. They look round.

And there she is: KELLY.

She hasn't seen them yet. Then, suddenly, she does.

KELLY

Oh, my God.

She rushes to them, as if to prevent a disaster.

Will attempts to kiss her on the cheek. Fails.

(CONTINUED)

KELLY (cont'd)

You should have RSVP-ed. Alan's going to freak-

ALAN (O.S.)

Oh. Hey.

Meet ALAN, Kelly's fiancée, a chubby guy with enough heart to pretend he's happy to see Will. His beard makes no sense.

Alan attempts to shake Will's hand. Failing. Then Will grabs his hand.

WILL

Long time, Alan.

ALAN

Man, you look terrible.

WILL

I feel terrible.

(laughing)

This is my buddy Tony. Tony, this is Alan, groom to be.

Alan eyes Tony's battered face.

ALAN

What happened?

TONY

Ah, don't worry about it. We do all our own stunts, you know.

Tony and Alan shake hands, then Tony and Kelly. Tony looks her up and down.

WILL

Kelly - Tony. Bride.

TONY

Nice meeting you.

Awkward moment is an understatement.

ALAN

OK. Let's get these guys some drinks.

(CONTINUED)

TONY

Good idea, I was just about to
sober up. Come on, Alan. Let's go.

Alan hesitates.

TONY (cont'd)

Alan! Let's go.

They leave Will and Kelly together. Just staring.

WILL

You look beautiful...

KELLY

Don't...

WILL

You do.

KELLY

What is this?

WILL

This is -- nothing.

84 INT. PARTY ROOM. COUNTRY CLUB - NIGHT

84

Kelly's father is wrapping up a long toast.

KELLY'S FATHER

...Kelly, Alan, here's to a
lifetime together.

A few camera flashes go off. People applaud and tap their
glasses with forks for the young couple to kiss. They do. The
guests cheer.

Waiters and staff flood in. Dinner begins.

Guests attack their food at their table.

Will suddenly stands. He's drunk.

WILL

I'd like to say something.

A HUSH falls over the room. Tony suppresses a laugh, even
though he has no idea what Will's about to say.

(CONTINUED)

Alan tenses up. Kelly more.

ALAN
Jesus Christ.

Will just stands there, swaying drunkenly. He came here for this moment of revenge.

ALAN (cont'd)
Before you do.

Alan stands for a pre-emptive strike.

ALAN (cont'd)
I'd like everyone to toast-- OUR
TROOPS. Love the war or hate it, we
support you guys all the way.

Lots of *HEAR, HEARS* as glasses are raised.

Will looks at Tony.

WILL
They support us.

Tony smiles.

TONY
All the way.

Will looks at Alan. Sizing him up. He's suddenly very serious, almost sober.

WILL
I just wanted to say: Alan. Kelly.
Family and friends...

He looks at Kelly. She's holding hands with Alan. She looks at Will with trepidation - truly not knowing what may happen next. A camera flashes.

WILL (cont'd)
The secretary of the Army...

Will raises his glass.

WILL (cont'd)
Is pleased to congratulate you on
your engagement.

(CONTINUED)

84 CONTINUED: (2)

84

Tony bursts out laughing. Nearly falls off his chair.

85 EXT. PARKING LOT. COUNTRY CLUB - NIGHT

85

Will and Tony, one drunk, the other out of his mind (and also drunk) play shoot-out in the parking lot. Laughing like kids. Aiming their fingers like guns at each other, making BANG, BANG SOUNDS and taking cover behind, inside, and under parked cars.

Disconcerted guests try to pull out of the lot, engagement party over. CAR HORNS BLOWING.

86 INT. TONY'S CAR BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD - DAWN

86

Slumped over the steering wheel, Will wakes up with the crack of dawn. Major splitting headache. Looks around.

Will gets out of the car. Finds Tony asleep under a tree. Shakes him.

WILL

Hey, get up.

Tony opens his eyes. Sees the tree above him.

TONY

Jesus! Am I dead?

WILL

No. No.

Tony sits up.

TONY

I gotta call my sponsor.

Will steps aside, unzips and urinates on the tree. He looks over his shoulder. Their eyes lock.

WILL

We should get out together. You can retire. We'll go fishing in Alaska.

TONY

Nah. Dorsett'll never let me go.

(CONTINUED)

WILL
He doesn't own you.

TONY
Man saved my life. Got me sober.
Til yesterday.

Will helps him up.

TONY (cont'd)
The Army owns me. And that's fine
with me.

WILL
Well, that's not fine with me.

They walk to the car.

TONY
All I ever wanted was to get shot
at. That too much to ask for on the
battlefield? A battle?

WILL
You said you had your baptism.

TONY
Yeah. Well. I lied. Wasn't much of
a war.

We now see that they never made it out of the country club
parking lot.

87 EXT. WILL'S APARTMENT BUILDING - CONTINUOUS

87

Will and Tony park outside Will's apartment building. Get out
of the car.

They see a familiar-looking man waiting by Will's building.

It's Dale Martin. He's lost some weight. He's lost sleep.
There's a haunted look in his eyes.

Dale notices Will and Tony, and starts walking toward them.

Tony and Will exchange looks. This man is here to finish
something they started.

(CONTINUED)

Dale stops a step away from Will. Tony hangs back, ready for anything.

DALE

Dale Martin's my name. Do you remember me?

Will nods, slowly.

WILL

Look, sir--

DALE

You know what's the last thing my son said to me?

Will shakes his head. *Of course not.*

DALE (cont'd)

He said see you next week. On the phone. That's what he said. From over there. And all I said was, *yeah.*

Will nods.

DALE (cont'd)

I'm... not a very good talker. I just wanted to say, what happened that day...

(a beat)

Would you please... forgive me.

Will allows himself to breathe.

WILL

There's nothing to forgive, Sir.

Dale stares into Will's eyes, looking for something.

Will and Tony exchange looks.

Dale extends his right hand. Will shakes it.

Dale nods to Tony and turns around. He gets back into his pick-up truck. Takes off.

Tony makes a face, sighs deeply.

(CONTINUED)

TONY

Mama said there'll be days like
this.

88 INT. WILL'S APARTMENT - NIGHT - LATER

88

ON TV: Weather Channel. A storm is raging. MUTED.

The room is still a war zone. Everything broken.

Will and Tony watch TV, eating burgers and fries, drinking.

Will talks as if he can't stop himself. Tony listens.

WILL

Our LT was taking fire two blocks
down. So I made a decision to move
up an alleyway so we could get into
this haji market that I knew had
roof access. Sniper fire came down
on us from everywhere: pop, pop,
pop, pop. We're all scrambling
around to get some cover when an
IED goes off...

A long beat.

WILL (cont'd)

It knocks us back. But I see that-
Timmerman is still standing, and
there's this... this flap...
hanging off his head. When he turns
my way, I can see it's the side of
his face. Two of my guys behind us
are hit and I'm yelling at them,
yelling to get out of the street
but they're screaming so loud they
can't hear me. So I take off and
pick one of them up, he was just a
kid, 18 or 19, his third month. I
throw him over my shoulder and I
pull the other one with my free
hand and drop them behind some
truck tires. We're all catching our
breath, trying to radio the bird,
and I see Derek bleeding out in the
middle of the street. Now sniper
fire had slowed.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

WILL (cont'd)

He's on his back and he's got his hands up like this--

Will gestures with his hands

WILL (cont'd)

Looks like he's praying. Nothing but noise on the radio- I make a mad dash to him. Pop, pop, pop, grab his wrist, and drag him to the other side of the street behind this burned out old car. He was still looking down at his damn hands. Opening and closing them, he kept saying "I can't feel my hands" "I can't feel my hands"--staring at his hands. His hands were fine, not a spot on 'em, when his left leg... is half a block down. So I start pushing him underneath the car. "Your hands are fine Derek, just sit tight" and he looked at me... like I was lying to him. And then the IED went off under him.

TONY

Jesus.

Will takes a long breath.

WILL

I actually got pieces of him blasted right into me. Flesh shrapnel...

The ghost of a bitter smile passes on Will's face.

WILL(cont'd)

When I came to, I had already been to the FOB and was on my way to Ramstein. In the hospital, I'm laid out and some guy comes in, I can't see very well, my leg's on fire, and he drops this little ribbon on my bare chest. I'm all hooked up to IV's, heart rate monitors, all that shit, shit I don't need. And he tells me... that I'm a hero.

(CONTINUED)

TONY

Damn right you are.

WILL

No. I put him there. That was me. I didn't mean to, I didn't plan that, there's no planning, you can't plan, you can only rely on the moment. But that's what I did. I loaded him - into the bomb. That's not a hero in my book.

They stare ahead. OFF SCREEN TV.

WILL (cont'd)

A few weeks later, I'm on crutches. Major surgery. Fox eye shield. Itches like hell. Everything looks gray - flowers, nurses, blood. My ears are ringing. At 4:52 AM, I'm wandering the halls of the hospital. I took the elevator up and climbed the stairs onto the roof. You're not supposed to be up there but it's where the doctors take their smoke breaks, so the door was open. It just didn't... just didn't make sense anymore. The whole living thing... I was standing out there, on the edge for a while, it was cold and it was dark and I felt calm.

TONY

Why didn't you jump?

Will shakes his head as if he doesn't know.

WILL

The sun came up.

TONY

The sun came up?

WILL

The sun came up. And it didn't make sense to die anymore.

Beat.

(CONTINUED)

WILL (cont'd)

Want another one?

TONY

Get me a Pepsi, will you?- This fake beer tastes like laundry.

Will goes to the kitchen.

Gets a real beer. Downs it.

Then gets two Pepsis out of the fridge. Walks back to see:

Tony, watching TV, chewing, tears streaming down his face.

Will steps back into the kitchen as Tony falls apart, crying his eyes out.

89 EXT. OLIVIA'S HOUSE - DAY

89

Matt unties a yellow ribbon off a tree. No one's coming back from war to this house.

90 EXT. OLIVIA'S HOUSE - EVENING

90

Olivia is organizing boxes around a small U-Haul truck parked in the driveway.

Matt is playing in the backyard with the friend we saw before. A goodbye playdate.

Will pulls up into the driveway in his car. He gets out as she approaches.

WILL

Where are you heading?

OLIVIA

Louisiana.

WILL

Are you... taking the piano?

OLIVIA

What? Yeah. Why? Do you play?

(CONTINUED)

WILL

No. Well. A little bit. My mom forced me when I was a kid. I hated it.

A long beat.

OLIVIA

It was good. To know you.

WILL

Same here.

They step toward each other for a hug, but stop awkwardly. He puts up his hands in surrender. They shake hands.

OLIVIA

Good-bye, Will. Good luck.

WILL

Good luck to you too.

Pause.

WILL (cont'd)

Maybe...

She looks at him, the desire is still there, both ways.

WILL (cont'd)

My timing's always been bad.

OLIVIA

I wouldn't say that.

WILL

Maybe you could let me know where you are. Your address. I don't mind driving.

OLIVIA

I think I can handle that.

Pause.

OLIVIA (cont'd)

OK?

(CONTINUED)

WILL

OK.

OLIVIA

Email?

WILL

Yeah. I just need to get a computer or something. I could always check at Tony's.

OLIVIA

You're staying on?

WILL

I'm thinking about it.

She smiles.

OLIVIA

You better come in. Give me your address. I'll write you a letter.

WILL

Sounds good.

He follows her into the house, walking with their backs to us until they disappear inside.

A beat. It's quiet. Just two kids playing - Matt and his friend. Peaceful.

THE END