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# **A Human Shield**

by  
**Robert L. Kinast**

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# A Human Shield

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## CHARACTERS:

STAN GRANT; *Mid-late 50s, recently retired General in the U.S. Army. Has a military bearing about his appearance and speech pattern. Holds strong views which he states emphatically.*

PRISCILLA GRANT; *Stan's wife of relatively the same age. After years of deferring to Stan as a military wife, begins to assert her own opinions.*

ALBERTA; *28, Stan and Priscilla's daughter currently serving in the U.S. Army. Tends to be "Daddy's girl" but has her own convictions and makes her own decisions.*

ROBERTA; *Alberta's twin sister. Graduate student at a university in Minnesota. Political liberal and social activist, outspoken and intensely committed to her causes.*

SHARON WILLIAMS; *Mid-late 30s. A reporter for a local newspaper. Conscientious, respectful but always alert for a story.*

## SETTING:

*The den/family room of the Grant home in a suburb of Kansas City, on the Kansas side of the state line. The play takes place on New Year's Eve and later in January of 2009 before an imaginary conflict in North Korea.*

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## ACT I; SCENE 1

*AT RISE: The den/family room of the Grant home. In addition to the typical furnishings—sofa, recliner, telephone, computer, desk, bookshelves—there are several indications of Stan’s, and his father’s, military careers: photos of them taken in front of a tank or fighter plane, medals in prominent cases, the American flag or the flag of Stan’s unit, etc.*

*It’s New Year’s Eve, about quarter to twelve. STAN enters SL carrying a tray with a bottle of champagne and glasses which HE sets neatly on the desk or sideboard. HE steps back to insure everything is in order and checks his wrist watch. HE glances around the room and gives a deep, satisfying sigh.*

*ALBERTA enters SL carrying a serving dish and napkins which SHE places on the desk/sideboard.*

**Alberta**

Here are the deviled eggs for New Year’s Eve, Dad. Mom’s preparing the grapes. Is there anything else I can do?

**Stan**

Locating your sister would be helpful.

**Alberta**

I tried calling her on her cell phone, but I haven’t had any luck. It’s either dead, turned off, or lost. But I’m sure she’ll be here before midnight.

**Stan**

Is that wishful thinking or some form of intuition you two share as twins?

**Alberta**

Roberta knows you asked us to be here this New Year’s Eve because you have important news to share with us. She takes requests like that seriously . . . in her own way.

**Stan**

Does “her own way” include being on time?

**Alberta**

Time is relative in her world.

**Stan**

Time is precise in any world, even in graduate school. Don't her classes begin and end at a specific time? And aren't there deadlines for that campus newspaper she edits, what's it called, *The Student Speaks*?

**Alberta**

Yes, but as Roberta likes to say, the important thing isn't what time it is, but what it's time for.

**Stan**

It's time for the New Year which begins at midnight, not when she decides.

**Alberta**

She still has almost fifteen minutes. I'm sure she'll be here . . . before next year.

**Stan**

*(Looks skeptically at ALBERTA)* If that was meant to be a joke, young lady . . . it worked.

*THEY give each other a warm, father-daughter hug as  
PRISCILLA enters carrying a tray with clusters of grapes.  
SHE pauses when SHE observes them, then places the tray on the  
desk/sideboard.*

**Priscilla**

Practicing for midnight, are we?

**Stan**

No, trying to keep my blood pressure down with the help of our daughter.

**Priscilla**

No doubt to offset the **rise** in your blood pressure caused by our other daughter. Well, don't worry; she's on her way.

**Stan**

How can you be sure?

**Priscilla**

Her roommate left a text message on my cell phone. At least, I think that's what it means. *(Opens her cell phone and reads, deciphering the cryptic references which ALBERTA confirms by nodding)* "R" (Roberta) "cmg" (coming?) "hm" (home?) b4 (before) 12."

**Alberta**

You'd have gotten the same message, Dad, if you used a cell phone.

**Stan**

You know my position on cell phones, Alberta. They're intrusive, distracting, and encourage spur-of-the-moment decisions instead of planning and proper execution.

**Alberta**

But they can be a big help in emergencies.

**Stan**

I've taught you girls that emergencies are handled with your wits and resourcefulness, qualities which reliance on a cell phone diminishes.

**Priscilla**

All the same, I'm glad to know Roberta's on her way.

**Stan**

"On her way" is not the same as being here, which is what I expected by now. If Alberta could do it, why couldn't she?

**Priscilla**

Alberta was already here, Stan.

**Stan**

I know that, but she had to rearrange her weekend duty at the Army base so she **could** be here. And I know that was a damn sight harder for her to do than for Roberta to pick up and leave her campus.

**Alberta**

Oh Dad, I wish you wouldn't compare me and Roberta. Every time you do, you wind up criticizing her and praising me.

**Stan**

With good reason.

**Alberta**

But it makes me feel . . . embarrassed. And I'm sure it doesn't make her feel very good either. We may be twins, but we're not identical.

**Stan**

I've heard that often enough.

**Priscilla**

You should listen to Alberta, Stan, especially tonight. You've been waiting for this occasion and preparing for it too long to let yourself get upset just because Roberta is . . . acting like Roberta.

**Stan**

I suppose you're right. I don't know why I'm surprised she's not here.

**Priscilla**

Not here **yet**. It's only ten-to-twelve.

**Alberta**

And I can't wait to hear what you have to tell us. Can you give me a hint?

**Stan**

It's something that I think will make you very proud of me.

**Alberta**

I'm already proud of you, Dad. The military service you've given to the country, your role in the Persian Gulf War, your rank and honors when you retired. You're the reason I joined the Army.

**Stan**

I never forced you to do that.

**Alberta**

No, you didn't.

**Stan**

I never set it up as an expectation or hinted that I wanted either of my daughters to serve in the military.

**Alberta**

Of course not. I chose to join, and I'm proud to follow in your footsteps.

**Priscilla**

Roberta's proud of you, too, Stan.

**Stan**

She has an odd way of showing it, routinely demonstrating against military recruiters when they come to her campus, slapping those anti-military bumper stickers on her car.

**Priscilla**

Her views aren't aimed at you personally.

**Stan**

Maybe not, but they reflect on me professionally. And they could become awkward publicly.

**Alberta**

But you're retired, Dad. You don't have to worry about public impressions.

**Stan**

I'm not worried about impressions, Alberta, as long as they don't distract people from the facts. A person in my position can't be undercut by someone in his own house.

**Alberta**

What "position" are you talking about?

---

*PRISCILLA intervenes, holding up a deviled egg or cluster of grapes, trying to redirect the discussion.*

**Priscilla**

Ah Stan, why don't you eat a deviled egg to ward off last year's evil spirits? Or else eat a lucky grape to get the first month of the New Year off to a good start.

**Stan**

You know I don't believe in those silly superstitions, Pris.

**Priscilla**

No, but they might help you get your mind off Roberta and on to something else, something more important to you.

**Alberta**

You're talking about Dad's news, aren't you? (*To STAN*) Are you finally going to take that teaching position at the military academy?

**Stan**

I never said I wanted to teach.

**Alberta**

Then it must be General Warren's offer to make you the new head of his advisory staff.

**Stan**

Where did you hear that?

**Alberta**

It was all over the base a couple weeks ago.

**Stan**

You shouldn't pay attention to gossip, Alberta.

**Alberta**

I don't, but I couldn't help hearing what everyone was saying.

**Stan**

Everyone except General Warren. He never made such an offer.

**Alberta**

What then?

**Priscilla**

Alberta, your father will share his news when it's time.

**Alberta**

*(Pause)* Well, I have some news to share too.

**Stan**

You're not trying to one-up your old man, are you?

**Alberta**

Of course not. I just thought since we'd all be together tonight, it would be a perfect occasion.

**Stan**

It would be, if we were all together.

**Priscilla**

Stan, eat your good-luck grape.

**Stan**

No, I think I'll pour the champagne and make my announcement.

*HE begins pouring champagne into the glasses.*

**Priscilla**

But Roberta's not here.

**Alberta**

My news can wait till she arrives.

**Stan**

Well, mine can't. I said I wanted to tell you about it on New Year's Eve, and in five minutes it will no longer be New Year's Eve.

**Priscilla**

Oh, Stan, don't be so rigid. It's our daughter we're talking about.

**Stan**

Actually, it's me we're talking about and as you just said, I'll share my news when it's time. It's time.

**Alberta**

Really, Dad, I'm happy to wait for Roberta.

**Priscilla**

I do think we should wait, dear.

**Stan**

Don't either of you understand me? This is my night; it's my news; and I want to share it now.

**Priscilla**

Are you sure you want to do it like this?

**Stan**

It's the way I planned it.

**Priscilla**

Plans can change.

**Stan**

Not mine.

*ROBERTA appears SL, but no one sees her at first.*

**Priscilla**

Then pour your champagne. I'm going to eat my first grape for good luck in the New Year.

**Alberta**

Me too.

*PRISCILLA and ALBERTA each remove a grape.*

**Roberta**

*(Steps forward)* I prefer a deviled egg.

**Alberta, Priscilla**

Roberta! You made it.

*THEY hug and exchange greetings.*

**Stan**

*(Looks at his wrist watch as HE steps back from ROBERTA)* Cut it a little close, didn't you, Roberta?

**Roberta**

I didn't know there was a detour on highway seven or I'd have been here sooner.

**Priscilla**

Well, you're here now, and that's all that matters.

**Alberta**

And in time for Dad's announcement.

**Priscilla**

And yours, Alberta.

**Roberta**

Actually, I have something to share as well.

**Stan**

What have I started here? Can't anyone let me have my moment?

**Priscilla**

Of course, dear. We have the whole weekend to catch up on everyone else's news.

**Roberta**

Not the **whole** weekend, I'm afraid. I have to leave tomorrow night.

**Priscilla**

Why?

**Roberta**

That's what I want to share with you all.

**Alberta**

And I have to be back at thirteen-hundred hours on Sunday.

**Stan**

This is **not** what I had in mind for this weekend. If we could just carry out what I've planned, everything will be fine.

**Roberta**

I can drink to that.

**Alberta**

Me too. (*THEY touch glasses and drink.*) So, tell us, Dad. What's your news?

**Stan**

Last week I was invited to a private, high-level meeting with Ron Nelson.

**Alberta**

Who's he?

**Roberta**

Chairman of the Central Coordinating Committee for the Republican party of Kansas.

**Alberta**

How do you know that?

**Roberta**

This is our home state. I keep informed.

**Alberta**

But you live in Minnesota.

**Roberta**

I go to school in Minnesota. That doesn't mean I'll live there.

**Alberta**

Are you going to move back here after graduation?

**Priscilla**

Girls, I think we're getting away from your father's news.

**Alberta**

Sorry. So why did this Mr. Nelson want to meet with you?

**Stan**

One of the tasks of the Central Coordinating Committee, and of Ron Nelson in particular, is to identify potential candidates for public office.

**Alberta**

*(Gasps with excitement)* What do they want you to run for?

**Stan**

Representative of the Third District.

**Alberta**

Of Kansas?

**Roberta**

Not unless mom and dad move to Pittsburg, Kansas.

**Alberta**

Why would they do that?

**Roberta**

That's where the Third Congressional District of Kansas is.

**Alberta**

Now how do you know **that**?

**Roberta**

I worked on Claire Dunn's campaign from that district last summer, remember? And, by the way, she was elected. No, I think the Third Congressional District dad is talking about is for . . .

**Stan**

The U.S. House of Representatives.

**Alberta**

In Washington? Really? Oh, Dad! I'm so proud of you.

*ALBERTA hugs STAN; almost jumps with excitement.*

**Stan**

I told you you would be.

**Roberta**

*(Extends her hand, gives a polite hug)* Congratulations, Dad.

**Stan**

I must tell you, all this came as quite a surprise to me. As you know, I've never sought or held public office. Of course, I've been a lifelong Republican and always supported the Party, but I didn't think anyone on the Central Committee even knew me.

**Alberta**

This is so exciting. Do you think you can win?

**Priscilla**

Your father has always achieved whatever he went after.

**Stan**

Ah, but this is different. I don't even know at this point who my opponent might be.

**Roberta**

Thanks to term limits, which now applies to national office and prevents Representative Bonds from running again.

**Alberta**

He's a Democrat, right?

**Roberta**

He's a fair and effective Representative of the people in this District. And a good example why term limits is the wrong solution to a real problem.

**Alberta**

Oh, I don't know. I think a regular turnover in leadership is a good thing.

**Roberta**

If the replacement is at least as good as the one turned over.

**Stan**

I trust that isn't your opinion of my qualifications.

**Roberta**

Of course not, Dad. (*Beat*) But I am wondering what made Ron Nelson select **you**?

**Priscilla**

Roberta! What a question to ask.

**Roberta**

I'm just curious, that's all. If dad hasn't been active in politics, why does Ron Nelson think he'd be a viable candidate?

**Stan**

It's a fair question. In fact, that very question occurred to me as soon as I knew what Ron was proposing. So I put it to him.

**Alberta**

What did he say?

**Stan**

Do you remember the commencement speech I gave at the Southside High School graduation last year?

**Alberta**

I sure do. It got a standing ovation.

**Priscilla**

And was reprinted in the *Leawood Gazette* along with a flattering commentary.

**Stan**

Well, Ron read that commentary and my speech. Apparently he was quite taken with what I had to say.

**Roberta**

A high school commencement address was all it took?

**Alberta**

Oh Robbie, you're not on campus now. You don't have to take issue with everything we say.

**Roberta**

I'm just trying to get a sense of what the political qualifications are these days . . . for a Republican from Kansas.

**Stan**

For your information, my commencement address was not **all** it took, but it did get the ball rolling.

**Priscilla**

Mr. Nelson was especially struck by the phrase your father used several times in that speech: “If you give your best, you’ll get the rest.”

**Stan**

He even thought it might work as a campaign slogan.

**Roberta**

It’s vague enough.

**Alberta**

What do you mean vague? I think it’s catchy, and inspiring.

**Roberta**

For a high school commencement address maybe.

**Alberta**

What don’t you like about it?

**Roberta**

It’s a fill-in-the-blank statement. It means whatever you want it to mean.

**Priscilla**

That’s what makes it so appealing, dear. Your father’s not telling anyone what their best should be or what they should expect to get from giving their best.

**Roberta**

Then why is it effective as a political slogan? It doesn’t stand for anything. It just appeals to people’s individualism.

**Stan**

“Self-determination” is how I would put it. The freedom to set your own goals and go after them. Anyway, it was just a suggestion. It may never be used in a campaign.

**Alberta**

I still like it. I think it encourages people to try their best.

**Roberta**

And if they don’t get “the rest” they expect from trying, you can always say it was because they didn’t really give their best. Politically you can’t lose, which is another reason I don’t like it.

**Alberta**

You don’t like it because you can’t lose politically? Do you prefer to lose?

**Roberta**

I prefer not to play it safe, not to let consultants and pollsters tell you what to say and how to appear so it fits what **they** think the voters want.

**Alberta**

What's your alternative?

**Roberta**

Take the risk of telling people straight out what **you** believe and what you intend to do and let them decide if you're the person they want in office.

**Priscilla**

That's what your father would do. Isn't it, Stan?

**Stan**

Absolutely. Oh, of course, there would be input from advisors and campaign officials and Party leaders. But I'd form my own judgments, make my own decisions, and let people know where I stand.

**Priscilla**

In addition, Ron Nelson feels there's one area of your father's background which speaks for itself.

**Stan**

He saw my tour of duty in Korea and my role in the Persian Gulf War as real assets in facing this growing crisis with North Korea.

**Alberta**

*(Solemnly, almost to herself)* It does seem we're headed for some type of military action there.

**Roberta**

Only if we give up on diplomatic efforts, which is what **politicians** should be advocating.

**Stan**

Granted, but if it comes to armed conflict, it will be important to have people with the right kind of experience in positions to make the critical decisions.

**Roberta**

Like Congress did before the Iraq War?

**Priscilla**

Roberta, this is not the time to rehash all those arguments.

**Alberta**

I think it would be fantastic if Dad could influence our policy toward Korea right now. I'd follow his lead . . . all the way.

**Stan**

Which brings us back to the purpose of this little gathering. There are a couple of things I need to discuss with you before I give Ron Nelson my answer about running for Congress.

**Roberta**

You mean you haven't decided to run?

**Stan**

Not definitively, no.

**Alberta**

Why wouldn't you?

**Stan**

Well, for one thing, there are all of you to consider.

**Alberta**

What do you mean?

**Stan**

As you know, and as I'm sure Roberta would remind us, modern politics holds no secrets. Sooner or later everything about everybody becomes public knowledge.

**Alberta**

We have nothing to hide.

**Priscilla**

Of course, not, dear. But we live in a culture where impressions carry more weight than facts. And the wrong impression can make a lot of difference in a political election.

**Alberta**

That's what you were referring to earlier, wasn't it, Dad? What was it you said, "Impressions ...?"

**Stan**

"... can distract from the facts." We have to be realistic about this. If I run for office, we all come under scrutiny. And with the epidemic of bloggers these days, there's no telling what impressions they might serve up as fact.

**Alberta**

But what do we have to worry about?

*There is a brief pause as the question hangs in the air.*

**Roberta**

Me.

**Stan**

I didn't say that.

**Roberta**

You don't have to, Dad. It's obvious I'm the left foot in this family.

**Priscilla**

But you're **in** the family, Roberta; that's the main point.

**Roberta**

I know I am; that's why I feel free to express my opinions, even if the rest of you don't agree with them.

**Alberta**

I think it's a plus that Robbie has different viewpoints from the rest of us. It shows that we're open-minded, accepting.

**Priscilla**

It didn't hurt Ronald Reagan that his son held different political views. Or Dick Cheney that his daughter was a lesbian.

**Roberta**

But they were already established politically. Dad's an unknown.

**Alberta**

So?

**Roberta**

So he doesn't want me to become a distraction in his campaign. Am I right?

**Stan**

It could happen.

**Alberta**

How?

**Priscilla**

Honey, if reporters and commentators decided that Roberta's "differences" were more newsworthy than your dad's positions, they could make them a distraction from his campaign.

**Roberta**

I think you're giving me too much importance. I'm even less known politically than dad is.

**Priscilla**

Don't be so sure, Roberta.

**Roberta**

What, has somebody on the Coordinating Committee been reading my editorials in *The Student Speaks*? (A long, awkward silence) They have, haven't they?

**Stan**

To be perfectly frank, Ron Nelson didn't just check out **my** background. He also made inquiries about the rest of you.

**Roberta**

Without telling us?

**Priscilla**

He wasn't prying into our private lives, dear. He was simply gathering information that's available to anyone who wants it.

**Alberta**

I have nothing to hide.

**Roberta**

That's not the point. It's secretive, and presumptuous.

**Stan**

The **point** for our discussion here . . . is that Ron has some concerns about you, Roberta.

**Roberta**

I don't believe this. I feel like I'm under investigation.

**Alberta**

Oh, Robbie, don't be so dramatic.

**Priscilla**

Roberta, your father is simply sharing Ron's viewpoint so we can discuss it and decide what to do.

**Roberta**

About me?

**Stan**

About whether I run for U.S. Representative.

**Alberta**

I think that should be your decision, Dad. It shouldn't depend on Robbie, or me.

**Priscilla**

It depends on all of us, Alberta. It's a family matter.

**Roberta**

OK, so what's Nelson's concern; that I think too much like a pre-Clinton, liberal Democrat?

**Stan**

It has more to do with your activism.

**Roberta**

Oh, I see. If I confine my convictions to words, I'm safe. But if I **act** on what I believe, I'm a "concern."

**Stan**

His concern isn't just about your activities; it's also about your affiliations.

**Alberta**

You haven't joined the Socialists or some radical political party, have you?

**Roberta**

Not yet, but a lot depends on the next election.

**Stan**

If that was meant to be a joke, Roberta, it wasn't funny.

**Roberta**

I know. I'm too serious to be any good at making jokes. But I would like to know which of my affiliations is a concern to Ron Nelson. Is it the Society of Professional Journalists or the Book-of-the-Month Club?

**Alberta**

You're not very good at sarcasm either, Robbie.

**Stan**

The affiliation Ron wonders about is that group of foreign students you met with in Denmark during spring break last year.

**Roberta**

The meeting was in Sweden, and it was a group of **international** students. Nobody was a foreigner.

**Alberta**

Or everybody was.

**Roberta**

"Everybody" at that meeting was involved in some form of media communication. We all share similar concerns about our world and discussed how we could be more imaginative in raising people's awareness about those concerns.

**Priscilla**

I think part of the problem, for me anyway, is the name of the group that sponsored that meeting.

**Roberta**

Student Solidarity for a Better World? What's wrong with that?

**Priscilla**

It sounds, I don't know, kind of communistic.

**Roberta**

It was inspired by Pope John Paul's support of the Solidarity Party in Poland—which, by the way, helped to **overthrow** Communism. And what happened to the concern you all just voiced about "impressions distorting facts"?

**Stan**

It's more than impressions, Roberta. You wrote several editorials in your student paper advocating the ideas of this group.

**Roberta**

That was the purpose of the meeting, Dad: brainstorm creative ideas, then publicize them.

**Stan**

But the tone of your articles was so impatient, even extremist.

**Roberta**

Is that your impression, or Ron Nelson's?

**Stan**

He showed me sufficient samples of your writing.

**Roberta**

Samples! Why didn't you ask me for the whole text?

**Stan**

I didn't need the whole text. I know your positions, Roberta, and your attitude.

**Roberta**

Do you? Well, for your information, I'm not impatient, but I am frustrated, frustrated that so many people in power **are** so patient. I'm not extremist; I just don't see many courses of action that I can support.

**Stan**

And that gets to the real concern—not what you have done, but what you might do.

**Roberta**

Such as?

**Stan**

You tell us.

**Roberta**

Now this feels like an inquisition.

**Priscilla**

It isn't, Roberta. We just want to have a sense of what to expect from you if your father runs for office.

**Roberta**

I can't tell you that.

**Alberta**

Why not? You know what you stand for.

**Roberta**

But I don't know what might happen in the next few months, or what I feel I might have to do about it, any more than you can know where the Army might send you on your next rotation.

**Stan**

We're not asking you to predict the future, Roberta.

**Roberta**

What are you asking? That I keep a low profile and go into hibernation until you're elected?

**Priscilla**

We would never ask you to put aside your convictions, dear.

**Stan**

What we would ask is that if you feel "obliged" to take some action that might be embarrassing to me politically, you'd discuss it with us first.

**Roberta**

That sounds like censorship!

**Priscilla**

It's communication, Roberta. We wouldn't tell you what to do or not do. We'd just like a heads-up on anything that might be controversial.

**Alberta**

Sounds fair to me.

**Roberta**

What may seem controversial to you may not be controversial to me.

**Stan**

All the more reason to communicate about it.

**Roberta**

So you can decide which it is?

**Priscilla**

So we can come to a mutual decision . . . about what might be controversial, and how to deal with it.

**Alberta**

Still sounds fair to me.

**Stan**

Look, Roberta, I'm not asking you to campaign for me or raise money or even vote for me. All I'm asking is that you be sensitive to the position I'd be in and act accordingly.

**Roberta**

Is that all you're asking of Allie?

**Priscilla**

We're asking both of you to do whatever you can, given your individual circumstances.

**Roberta**

You're pretty much gagged politically, being in the Army, aren't you, Allie?

**Alberta**

I can exercise all my rights as a citizen. And I would . . . if I were going to be here.

**Priscilla**

What do you mean, honey?

**Alberta**

My unit is being deployed next week.

**Priscilla**

Where to?

**Alberta**

Korea.

END ACT I; SCENE 1

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**ACT I; SCENE 2**

*AT RISE: Early the next morning, ROBERTA is sitting on the sofa in the den. SHE sips a cup of coffee and seems to be deep in thought. ALBERTA enters SL and is startled when SHE sees ROBERTA.*

**Alberta**

Robbie! I didn't know you were up.

*ROBERTA greets ALBERTA with a hug and "Happy New Year." THEY sit down together and through the ensuing dialogue show signs of closeness such as simple touching and smiles.*

**Roberta**

To tell you the truth, I didn't sleep much last night.

**Alberta**

I guess no one did after I dropped my bombshell.

**Roberta**

Bad metaphor, Allie.

**Alberta**

I never intended it to come out like that.

**Roberta**

Don't blame yourself. It wouldn't have come out like that if I hadn't asked dad what he expected of you during his campaign.

**Alberta**

It was an honest question.

**Roberta**

But I think it sounded petty, and I was probably coming on too strong.

**Alberta**

You were your usual opinionated self, but I'd say we all gave as well as we got.

**Roberta**

Especially dad.

**Alberta**

I think he actually enjoys the repartee between the two of you.

**Roberta**

Well, I gave him plenty to enjoy. I hope he doesn't think I would actually oppose his running for Congress.

**Alberta**

*(With mock sincerity)* Now why would he think that?

**Roberta**

It's just that his politics aren't my politics.

**Alberta**

You **can** get riveted on your "issues," but that's the Roberta we've come to know and love—and disagree with.

**Roberta**

I don't mind that, but if I had known what **you** were going to tell us, I'd have been a lot more reserved.

**Alberta**

Somehow I find that hard to believe, but the point is, you didn't know. Maybe the way it came out was for the best. I mean, how do you share news about going to Korea with an invasion being talked about? *(Beat)* My concern is that it really blew mom away.

**Roberta**

Another bad metaphor, Allie.

**Alberta**

You know what I mean. She seemed to be in a state of shock; she didn't say anything. After all her years as a military wife, I'd have thought she'd be ready for this kind of news.

**Roberta**

Maybe she's tired of this kind of news—after all her years as a military wife. But I wouldn't worry. She always sees the upside of everything.

**Alberta**

That's true. Like the time I was learning to drive and backed the car into the light post at the corner of the driveway.

**Roberta**

"Never did like that light," she said. "It always made me feel like someone was shining a flashlight in our front room."

**Alberta**

And how about the time you fell out of our tree house and broke your right arm?

**Roberta**

“Now you can learn to be ambidextrous,” she said. And I did.

**Alberta**

Still, she didn’t seem very upbeat when she went to bed.

**Roberta**

Wait till this morning. She’ll have a dozen ways to look on the bright side of your news. Dad, on the other hand, seemed to take it all in stride.

**Alberta**

That’s because of his military training.

**Roberta**

Or a prior briefing.

**Alberta**

You think he knew about my troop deployment?

**Roberta**

As a two-star general in the U.S. Army, only three years retired, I’m sure he’s informed about a lot of things—all of which he keeps to himself.

**Alberta**

That’s military protocol.

**Roberta**

Which reminds me, I was surprised you were told where you’re being sent, or that you’re allowed to tell us. Aren’t you supposed to keep that kind of thing secret nowadays?

**Alberta**

Officially we’ve only been told we’re being deployed to the Pacific. But it doesn’t take a genius to figure out that the one place in the Pacific where additional U.S. troops may be needed is Korea.

**Roberta**

For an invasion?

**Alberta**

Who knows?

**Roberta**

How do you feel about that?

**Alberta**

I'd be lying if I said I wasn't anxious. I mean, we're talking about one of the most volatile places on earth right now, even for people not engaged in direct combat.

**Roberta**

I know. That has to be scary.

**Alberta**

It can be, if you dwell on it. But if you dwell on it, it's like our old soccer coach used to say: "If you start thinking about your next move . . .

**Roberta**

. . . you'll get in your own way." So what do you do?

**Alberta**

Focus on your training; trust your instincts; rely on your comrades.

**Roberta**

That sounds like a drill instruction.

**Alberta**

It can save your life.

**Roberta**

*(Pause)* What if you have to take a life?

**Alberta**

I hope it won't come to that.

**Roberta**

What if it does?

**Alberta**

I'll deal with it then, OK?

**Roberta**

I wish you didn't have to deal with it at all.

**Alberta**

So do I, but I'm afraid that's no longer an option.

**Roberta**

Does it make you regret joining the Army?

**Alberta**

Not for a second.

**Roberta**

Well, I hope you won't regret your decision later, if you have to do something that's . . . hard to deal with.

**Alberta**

I won't. I'm ready.

**Roberta**

Are you sure about that?

**Alberta**

It's what I've trained for; it's what the Army expects.

**Roberta**

I don't know how I'd feel if something dreadful happened to you, Allie.

**Alberta**

I know.

**Roberta**

You could be killed.

**Alberta**

You think I don't know that? I'm aware of it all the time. I knew when I joined the Army, it could come to this, but I wanted to serve my country and this seemed the best way to do it.

**Roberta**

That's hard to explain to someone, isn't it?

**Alberta**

What is?

**Roberta**

When you feel within yourself there's something you have to do, but you know that no one else will understand or accept it.

**Alberta**

I never felt that way with mom and dad, or with you.

**Roberta**

I know.

**Alberta**

But you have?

**Roberta**

Not really. Not till now.

**Alberta**

But you might? In the future?

**Roberta**

In the immediate future.

**Alberta**

What are you planning to do, Robbie?

**Stan**

*(Entering SL)* Good morning, girls.

*ALBERTA and ROBERTA stand, hug their father, and exchange New Year's greetings.*

Did I interrupt anything?

**Roberta**

We were just talking about Allie's deployment to Korea.

**Alberta**

I didn't mean to upstage you with that news, Dad.

**Stan**

In terms of priorities, Alberta, your news was much more urgent, and important. The timing was just a little off.

**Roberta**

How do you feel about Allie going to Korea, Dad?

**Stan**

It's a soldier's duty to go wherever they're sent.

**Roberta**

I know, but how do you **feel** about her going to war?

**Stan**

Well, we don't know if there will be a war, but in any case I feel proud. It's a noble act to put your life on the line for the sake of your country.

**Roberta**

Are you concerned for her safety?

**Stan**

Of course, I am. But I have confidence in Alberta. And confidence in our Army. She'll be all right.

**Alberta**

Is that how mom feels, too?

**Stan**

I'm sure it is, but you can ask her yourself. She's in the kitchen, waiting for a fresh pot of coffee to brew.

**Alberta**

I'll see if she needs help.

*ALBERTA exits SL. STAN sits in the armchair next to the sofa.*

**Roberta**

Allie's really concerned about mom.

**Stan**

Because she's going to Korea? She needn't worry. Your mother's been through this sort of thing before.

**Roberta**

I know, but she seemed caught off guard last night. Didn't she suspect something like this might happen?

**Stan**

Of course, she did. Your mother's not naïve. No, it's more like having your worst fear come true.

**Roberta**

My worst fear is that Allie's not ready to go to Korea.

**Stan**

Nonsense. She's well-trained and has all the material support she needs from the best Army in the world.

**Roberta**

I don't mean that. I mean emotionally, psychologically, how it will affect her if she has to go into combat.

**Stan**

No one ever knows how combat will affect them (*Pause*), especially the first time. But Alberta's not naïve either. She knows what to expect—and how to handle it.

**Roberta**

I know she talks that line, but I'm not so sure she believes it.

**Stan**

You're too skeptical, Roberta.

**Roberta**

Not in this case. I'm her twin, and twins have a sense about each other's real feelings, and I'm telling you she's terrified at the prospect of going into combat.

**Stan**

She's not terrified; but she is realistic, and in any event there's nothing can be done about that now.

**Roberta**

No, but . . .

**Stan**

But what?

**Roberta**

I know you're retired, Dad, but you must have lots of contacts at high levels of the Army. Isn't there some way you could use your influence to . . .

**Stan**

Rescind Alberta's orders? That's unthinkable!

**Roberta**

Not rescind her orders, maybe just see whether her unit could be stationed where there's little chance of combat.

**Stan**

You don't know what you're talking about.

**Roberta**

Yes, I do. My roommate's brother was in the Iraq War. His father used his influence to have his platoon stationed at the perimeter of an insurgent zone. He never fired his rifle at an enemy during his whole tour of duty.

**Stan**

I would never do something like that.

**Roberta**

Not even for your daughter?

**Stan**

Precisely because of my daughter, and your sister, who wouldn't let me use my influence when she enlisted. I could have helped her get a commission, an office specialization, a domestic assignment. She wanted none of it, threatened not to enlist if I pulled any strings on her behalf.

**Roberta**

I wish you had. It might have kept her out of the Army.

**Stan**

She **wanted** to join the Army! And unlike you, she doesn't think the military is an evil institution.

**Roberta**

I don't think it's evil. I just think that if political leaders know they have all those weapons and all that firepower at their disposal, they're less likely to do everything they can to find a peaceful solution to conflicts.

**Stan**

And while they're talking about peaceful solutions, the really evil people in this world won't hesitate to use their weapons to attack us.

**Roberta**

Is that how you justify a pre-emptive war strategy?

**Stan**

If that's what it takes.

**Roberta**

In Korea?

**Stan**

There's no pre-emptive action in Korea.

**Roberta**

Not yet, but you know that's why additional troops, including Allie's regiment, are being sent there.

**Stan**

I don't know that for a fact.

**Roberta**

Even if it's just a possibility, you still wouldn't use your influence to try to keep her safe?

**Stan**

She'd be outraged; she'd never forgive me.

**Roberta**

She wouldn't have to know.

**Stan**

I respect her wishes too much to intervene—even if I could.

**Roberta**

Will you feel the same way if she comes home in a coffin?

**Stan**

That's a cruel thing to say! Do you think I don't care whether Alberta lives or dies?

**Roberta**

I know you care; you've showed your care for us our whole lives—in your own way.

**Stan**

What's that supposed to mean?

**Roberta**

I always had the impression you were caring because of some abstract principle like duty or honor.

**Stan**

Those are not abstract principles if you live your life by them, and base your decisions on them, as you well know because you do the same thing.

**Roberta**

But I don't turn my principles into a shield to hide behind.

**Stan**

They can also be a shield to protect what you care most about.

**Roberta**

As long as you don't forget what it is you're protecting.

*ALBERTA and PRISCILLA enter SL, carrying trays with coffee cake, plates, silver ware, coffee, and cups.*

**Priscilla**

Time for coffee cake everyone, before we leave for church.

**Roberta**

Church?

**Stan**

It's New Year's Day, Roberta. We always have a church service on New Year's Day, or have you missed so many holidays at home you don't remember?

**Roberta**

It's just that today's Friday. I wasn't expecting to go to church.

**Stan**

Whatever day New Year's falls on, that's the day we have a church service.

**Priscilla**

*(Cuts the coffee cake and hands a piece to ROBERTA)* You will be coming with us, won't you, Roberta?

**Roberta**

Ah, yeah. Sure.

**Stan**

Don't be too enthusiastic about it. It's only a five minute walk and the service never lasts more than half an hour.

**Priscilla**

And the theme this year is especially fitting in view of Alberta's news: A Year of Peace, One Prayer at a Time.

**Roberta**

I wish it were that easy.

**Alberta**

Easy or not, I'll take all the prayers I can get.

**Priscilla**

It's one way we can all support our troops.

**Roberta**

Only if you support the war they fight.

**Stan**

Are you saying you won't pray for your sister if you oppose a war she might be in?

**Roberta**

Of course, I'd pray for her. I'd pray for her safety and the safety of everybody involved. It's just that if you oppose a war, what does it mean to support the troops who fight it?

**Stan**

It means letting them know you stand by them, you appreciate the sacrifice they're making.

**Roberta**

But I don't. To me, it's like opposing capital punishment, but supporting the executioners.

**Stan**

Your sister isn't executing anyone; she's defending your freedom. She deserves your support, even if you don't agree with a war she may have to fight in.

**Roberta**

I just can't make that distinction, Dad. Don't any of you understand what I'm saying?

*Pause.*

**Priscilla**

I do.

*There's a moment of stunned silence at PRISCILLA's unexpected declaration.*

**Priscilla, Continued**

I've wrestled with the same dilemma, for a long time.

**Stan**

What are you talking about, Pris?

**Priscilla**

War, Stan. Training for war, planning for war, fighting a war. I've never been comfortable with any of it. I was okay at first. But frankly, I didn't know what I was getting into. You were the first person I'd ever met who was in the military. I was impressed.

**Stan**

But you had to know what was involved: the risks, the separations, the sacrifices.

**Priscilla**

No, I didn't know, not really, not personally, and by the time I realized what it meant, I felt like I was re-living my experience of the Vietnam War.

**Stan**

We hadn't even met at the time of that war.

**Priscilla**

I know, but I felt like the country did when we began to realize we were involved in something that didn't make sense, didn't justify the risks, the separations, the sacrifices, but we didn't know how to change it, how to make it work out the way we wanted.

**Stan**

So you just went along with my military career, pretending to be supportive?

**Priscilla**

People do things for love, Stan. Yes, I pretended; I rationalized; I said what you wanted to hear; I accommodated to the expectations of a military wife. And I did all that, and would do it again, because I love you. But I was always ambivalent about the military and what it represents.

**Alberta**

If you've been ambivalent about dad's service, then you must be ambivalent about mine too.

**Priscilla**

I suppose I am, dear.

**Alberta**

Well, where does that leave me?

**Priscilla**

Frankly, at this moment, I'm more conscious of where it leaves me.

**Roberta**

Where is that, Mom?

**Priscilla**

Caught again, pulled in opposite directions. I love you, Alberta, but that's only half the equation. I want to support what you're doing, but I don't know what that means anymore.

**Stan**

If you could do it for me, why can't you do it for Alberta?

**Priscilla**

It's different with Alberta. When I met you, Stan, you were already an adult, formed by all the experiences that made you who you were. And I fell in love with who you were; I accepted all of it; I took it in with my feelings for you.

**Stan**

So what's different with Alberta?

**Priscilla**

She didn't come already-formed into my life. She came **from** my life, our life, Stan. She's been part of me from the beginning, and I'm part of her. If she goes to war, she takes that part of me with her—and I don't want to go.

**Alberta**

Then you really don't support me being in the Army.

**Priscilla**

I want to support you as much as I can, Alberta.

**Stan**

All of a sudden that doesn't sound like very much.

**Priscilla**

It's the most I can give, Stan, with integrity.

**Stan**

I don't believe this conversation! Here I thought we'd have a good, spirited discussion about my candidacy—in case you've all forgotten that—and start off the New Year together as a family.

**Roberta**

But we have, Dad.

**Stan**

Not the way I expected. Oh, I expected some verbal sparring from you, Roberta, but I didn't expect this . . . revelation from you, Pris. I've never heard you talk like this before, not even in private.

**Priscilla**

I've never felt like this before.

**Alberta**

It's because of me, isn't it?

**Priscilla**

No, it's because of Roberta. Just now she put into words what I've been keeping to myself for a long time. She made it easier for me to say it.

**Roberta**

And now that you've said it, Mom, where do you want to go with it?

**Priscilla**

I don't know.

*There is a long, uneasy pause.*

**Stan**

*(Stands to leave)* Well, I know where I'm going—to our New Year's Day church service, as planned.

**Roberta**

And leave this conversation hanging?

**Stan**

It'll be here when we get back.

**Roberta**

But now's the time to talk things out.

**Stan**

Oh, that's right, you don't pay attention to what time it is, but "what it's time for." Well, it's time for church.

**Roberta**

Maybe facing up to the issues we've raised is our "church" for today.

**Stan**

I don't think so, Roberta. I haven't heard any hymns sung or Scriptures read, much less God's name invoked. That's what makes a church service.

**Roberta**

Are you sure going off to church isn't just a way to avoid continuing this discussion?

**Stan**

Not for me it isn't! Going to church is a way to re-group, get centered. (*Glances at PRISCILLA*) It's where I know what to expect and won't be disappointed.

**Priscilla**

How do **you** feel, Alberta?

**Alberta**

About what? Going to church, going to Korea, going anywhere without the support I thought I had?

**Priscilla**

I guess all of it.

**Alberta**

To be honest, at this moment I feel kind of abandoned.

*STAN puts his hands on her shoulders or his arm around her waist.*

**Roberta**

Allie, that's not what I meant when I said I couldn't support the troops in a war I oppose.

**Priscilla**

And I hope you don't think I'd ever abandon you, Alberta.

**Alberta**

It doesn't matter; this is how I feel right now. So I'm all for going to church—with dad.

**Roberta**

OK, I'll go too, as long as we don't come home and act like none of this ever came up.

**Alberta**

I'm not sure I want to hear any more of what's come up.

**Roberta**

On the other hand, maybe we all need to hear each other more—and tell each other less.

**Stan**

Now that's advice I can accept even from you, Roberta. So are we all agreed that we can go to church now?

**Priscilla**

I'd rather not.

**Stan**

What!

**Priscilla**

I'd prefer to stay here, and have some quiet time to think—and pray.

**Stan**

That's what church is for.

**Priscilla**

Right now, I feel I can do it better at home.

**Stan**

But we've always gone to church together on New Year's Day.

**Priscilla**

That doesn't mean we always have to, Stan.

**Stan**

I swear I don't know what's gotten in to you, Pris.

**Priscilla**

Nothing that hasn't been in there a long time. And it's what's going on inside of me that I need to think about.

**Roberta**

Would you like me to stay with you, Mom?

**Priscilla**

No! I'd like some time alone. Is that too much to ask?

**Alberta**

*(Puts her arm around PRISCILLA)* It's not too much, Mom; it's just . . . unexpected. It's not like you.

**Priscilla**

Well, it's how I am at the moment. *(Beat)* Now you all go along. You're going to be late for church.

**Alberta**

**That** sounds more like you.

*ALBERTA and ROBERTA smile at the last comment and give their mother a hug. STAN looks at PRISCILLA quizzically, confused.*

**Stan**

Come on, girls. Let's go.

*THEY exit. PRISCILLA sighs deeply as the LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.*

## END ACT I; SCENE 2

## ACT I; SCENE 3

*AT RISE: A door slams OS. ROBERTA bursts into the den, paces back and forth, punches the back of the sofa, obviously agitated and trying to control her anger. After a moment, PRISCILLA enters, hesitantly, and takes a step toward ROBERTA.*

**Priscilla**

I **thought** I heard someone come in. Is the church service over already?

**Roberta**

It is for me.

**Priscilla**

Where's your father and Alberta?

**Roberta**

No doubt still listening to that guest preacher justify pre-emptive war.

**Priscilla**

(Comes to ROBERTA, touches her arm) Oh, Roberta! You didn't leave church during the sermon, did you?

**Roberta**

It was either that or storm the pulpit single-handedly.

**Priscilla**

What did he say that upset you?

**Roberta**

In effect, we can no longer rely on self-defense to justify war. We must be cunning as serpents and wise as doves, which he took to mean "anticipate the designs of enemies and take action before they do." (Beat) So much for "peace one prayer at a time."

*ROBERTA plops onto the sofa still upset.*

**Priscilla**

Maybe you misunderstood what he was trying to say.

**Roberta**

He didn't leave much room for misunderstanding.

**Priscilla**

Did he actually say we should take **military** action before an enemy does?

**Roberta**

Only when he got to his practical application. "If our leaders decide we have to invade North Korea to disarm their nuclear capability, let us trust their judgment and pray for success." He practically said, "My country right or wrong, my country." That's when I walked out.

**Priscilla**

(Sits next to ROBERTA) Don't you think you were overreacting?

**Roberta**

Of course, I was overreacting! What I can't believe is that nobody else even reacted.

**Priscilla**

Not everyone feels as strongly about these issues as you do, Roberta.

**Roberta**

We're talking about unprovoked war! How can you not feel strongly about that?

**Priscilla**

I just mean the bigger and more complicated an issue is, the harder it is to know what to do about it. (Beat) It's hard enough dealing with tensions on a personal level.

**Roberta**

You mean, like, you and Alberta earlier?

**Priscilla**

And you and your father, always debating, never just talking. I used to be able to hold it all together—accept each of you as you were, respond to your needs, make things okay for you.

**Roberta**

Be our mother, in other words.

**Priscilla**

That's who I am.

**Roberta**

But we don't need a mother anymore.

**Priscilla**

Is that supposed to make me feel better?

**Roberta**

You know what I mean. We don't need you to "mother" us.

**Priscilla**

Well, what do you need from me?

**Roberta**

To be your own person. Say what you really think or feel without worrying that it might offend us.

**Priscilla**

I know **you** can do that, Roberta, but I'm not very good at it.

**Roberta**

I thought you were pretty good when I went off on my "can't support the troops" spiel.

**Priscilla**

But I made Alberta feel like I abandoned her.

**Roberta**

Nah, she just felt you were siding with me; she's not used to that matchup. She's fine, trust me. In fact, she said on the way to church she appreciated knowing how you felt.

**Priscilla**

*(Pause)* Did your father say anything?

**Roberta**

No, he just sort of marched with us to church in silence.

**Priscilla**

I was afraid of that.

**Roberta**

Of what?

**Priscilla**

Maybe you've been away from home too long or maybe you just never noticed but when things don't go the way your father thinks they should, he barricades himself behind this façade of authority and waits for you to come around to his point of view.

**Roberta**

Don't do it, Mom. Don't let him feel he was right and you were wrong.

**Priscilla**

But I know I upset him when I said I didn't want to go to church.

**Roberta**

He's fought in a war and spent his whole adult life prepared for combat. How much can a little upsetness hurt him? Besides, you have a right to think and do what you want.

**Priscilla**

It's a right I'm not used to exercising. But I did feel I'd just be going through the motions today, and I didn't want to do that.

**Roberta**

And you shouldn't have to. That's what I'm talking about. Hey, I'm proud of you for saying what you wanted to do—and for doing it. (*Beat*) By the way, how was your time here at home—before I interrupted it?

**Priscilla**

You didn't interrupt it, exactly. In fact, coming home when you did was actually timely.

**Roberta**

How so?

**Priscilla**

After you all left, I sat down in the living room and tried to be very still. You know, get in a comfortable position, concentrate on my breathing, not think in words. I used to do that when you father was away, especially when he was on a dangerous mission, or one he couldn't tell me about.

**Roberta**

I know that happened a lot.

**Priscilla**

Often enough. Anyway, during those quiet times, I'd try to let my feelings surface and suggest some kind of an image that would help me connect with what was going on at the time.

**Roberta**

That's neat. I never knew you did that.

**Priscilla**

I guess it was one way I tried to "hold it all together."

**Roberta**

So did you get an image this morning?

**Priscilla**

I did. I pictured myself birthing you.

**Roberta**

You mean my actual birth?

**Priscilla**

Yep. I remembered that it wasn't as hard or as painful as I thought it was going to be—or as other mothers said it would be. Of course, I didn't really know what to expect. This was my first pregnancy . . .

**Roberta**

. . . with twins, no less.

**Priscilla**

And your father in Latin America training nationalist soldiers to defeat the rebels.

**Roberta**

I can only imagine how difficult that must have been.

**Priscilla**

For him or for me?

**Roberta**

Both, but we're talking about you right now.

**Priscilla**

It was, but as I said, birthing you wasn't as painful physically as I expected. It took a long time though. It seemed like I was in labor for a week. And when I made my last push and you were

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**Priscilla, Continued**

finally born, I had this tremendous feeling of relief. It was over; I was finished; I had done what I had to do. And just when I began to relax and enjoy that feeling . . .

**Roberta**

. . . there was Alberta.

**Priscilla**

Exactly. I had to start all over again. I don't think the physical part of her birth was any more difficult than yours, but psychologically, emotionally, it was a much harder delivery for me. In fact, I remember thinking to myself, "I don't ever want to do this again." Of course, at the time I had no way of knowing that we wouldn't have any more children.

**Roberta**

*(Assumes a lighter, almost humorous tone)* At least you got two daughters, and dad got to name us as if we were sons.

**Priscilla**

You were named for your godmothers, as you well know.

**Roberta**

Who were picked by dad—for reasons never fully disclosed.

**Priscilla**

That's not true. They were both childless, and he thought this was as close as they would get to being mothers.

**Roberta**

Fortunately for us, they didn't get any closer than our names. Then again, Allie and I aren't married or mothers either. Maybe they've had more influence than we think.

**Priscilla**

Stop it.

**Roberta**

So tell me, how did this image of birthing us help you connect things?

**Priscilla**

When your father retired, I thought I was finished with all the worry and fear that he might be sent into combat again. I lived our whole married life with that concern, but I tried not to let you girls know how worried I was.

**Roberta**

We knew. And as we got older, we knew why. I'm sure that's one reason I'm so opposed to everything about warfare. But you must have felt this sense of "here we go again" when Alberta enlisted.

**Priscilla**

I did, but I was also relieved she joined the Army because at that time women weren't used in combat. If she had joined the Navy or the Air Force, I'd have been much more worried about her safety.

**Roberta**

Until the Secretary of Defense decided last year that women could fight with men in the infantry, and you had to deal with it after all.

**Priscilla**

Yes, but not as much as you might think. Your dad assured me very emphatically that this ruling would not affect Alberta. I assumed he meant he could use his influence to keep her out of harm's way, but after her announcement last night, apparently he couldn't.

**Roberta**

Or wouldn't. (*Beat*) So now you're back where you'd been and never wanted to be.

**Priscilla**

And do you know what's ironic? When your dad told me he had been approached to run for Congress, I thought it would put some real distance between our military past and the future. I pictured him reading congressional bills rather than intelligence reports, meeting with legislators rather than commanding officers, counting votes rather than casualties.

**Roberta**

What's ironic about that?

**Priscilla**

Since I started paying more attention to the political scene, I keep hearing military language, like he'll have to "mount a campaign," build up his "war chest," defeat his opponents, be "sent off" to Congress, achieve "rank" on committees. I can't seem to escape his military world.

**Roberta**

You keep giving birth after you've given birth.

**Priscilla**

And I'm tired of it. That's probably why I went off on the military the way I did this morning.

**Roberta**

How do I fit into your image?

**Priscilla**

I was asking myself the same question . . .

**Roberta**

. . . when I came home?

**Priscilla**

No, when you got a phone call, just before you came home.

**Roberta**

Who would be calling me here?

**Priscilla**

That's what I'd like to know.

*PRISCILLA goes to the answering machine and clicks it on.*

**Male Voice on the Answering Machine**

*Hey, Berta, it's me, Johann. I hate to leave a message like this but you left your cell phone here and I don't know how else to reach you. We've had a change in plans. I'll explain when I see you, but I have to pick you up at noon instead of tonight. I hope you get this message in time. Have you talked to your parents yet? See you soon.*

*PRISCILLA clicks off the answering machine.*

**Priscilla**

"Have you talked to your parents" about what, Roberta?

**Roberta**

I planned to tell you and dad together. (*Pause*) I'd **rather** tell you and dad together.

**Priscilla**

All right, but who is Johann?

**Roberta**

He's the president of Student Journalists International, a chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists.

**Priscilla**

And why is he picking you up at noon?

**Roberta**

We have a commitment.

**Priscilla**

Roberta, what aren't you telling me?

**Roberta**

(*Pause*) I'm going to Korea too.

**Priscilla**

As a student journalist?

**Roberta**

No.

**Priscilla**

What then?

*STAN and ALBERTA enter SL.*

**Stan**

*(To ROBERTA)* Well, I hope you're proud of yourself, young lady. You not only disrupted the church service, you embarrassed your family and insulted our guest preacher. I wish **you** had stayed home instead of your mother.

**Alberta**

You have no idea how awkward it was, Robbie, when people asked us afterwards why you left so abruptly.

**Roberta**

What did you tell them?

**Alberta**

We didn't know why you left, so we couldn't tell them anything.

**Roberta**

You could have made an educated guess, based on the point in the sermon where I left. That preacher was no messenger of peace.

**Stan**

On the contrary, peace was the thrust of his **whole** sermon, not just the part you heard.

**Roberta**

I'd love to know how he got from invading Korea to advocating peace.

**Stan**

The former leads to the latter.

**Roberta**

The latter rationalizes the former, you mean.

**Stan**

“Justifies” is the correct term. **If** military force is the only way to defend ourselves and **if** the probability of success requires pre-emptive action and **if** the end result is proportional to what will happen if we do nothing, invasion is justified. And that’s based on principles of just war theory which you didn’t stay long enough to hear him explain.

**Roberta**

“Exploit” sounds more like it.

**Alberta**

His rationale made perfectly good sense to me.

**Stan**

And to the rest of the congregation, from what I could tell.

**Roberta**

I’m sure it did—to anyone whose mind is already made up.

**Priscilla**

Will you all please be quiet! I’ve had enough of this arguing and bickering and disagreeing. You act more like a debating team than a family. And on New Year’s Day!

**Stan**

I don’t mind a good debate, on New Year’s Day or any other time. But walking out of church the way Roberta did is just plain wrong. I hope you never do anything that rash and foolish again.

**Priscilla**

Stan, you’d better sit down. You too, Alberta. Roberta has something to tell us.

*As THEY sit, LIGHTS FADE OUT.*

END ACT I

## ACT II; SCENE 1

*AT RISE: Moments later; ALBERTA and ROBERTA sitting on the sofa. STAN is sitting in the armchair/recliner next to the sofa; PRISCILLA standing next to the sofa.*

**Stan**

*(Stands up abruptly and almost shouts)* You’re what?

**Roberta**

I’m going to Korea as part of a human shield.

**Stan**

You've got to be kidding.

**Roberta**

Why would I kid about something like that?

**Stan**

It's the most preposterous thing I've ever heard of. Did you know about this, Pris?

**Priscilla**

Roberta was just starting to tell me when you and Alberta came in from church. I think we should all hear what she has to say. Roberta?

**Roberta**

Do you remember the group who sponsored that meeting of international students last year, Student Solidarity for a Better World?

**Stan**

The one your mother thought was communistic. Now we know they're just crazy.

**Priscilla**

Let her talk, Stan!

**Roberta**

Student Solidarity has recruited a large block of students from all over the world to go to Korea and form a human shield between the North and South.

**Alberta**

Recruited? You mean you all volunteered to be part of this human shield?

**Roberta**

Of course.

**Alberta**

But I thought human shields are people the enemy forces into positions they can hide behind.

**Roberta**

That's the military definition, Allie. Human shields can also be people who **choose** to take positions between opposing soldiers to prevent fighting. Remember the human shields who went to Iraq in 2003 when the U.S. was planning its invasion?

**Alberta**

No.

**Stan**

That's because they only stayed until it became obvious, even to them, that their grandstanding wasn't going to make any difference. Then they high-tailed it home.

**Roberta**

They left when the Iraqi government wanted them to take positions near military targets.

**Stan**

That's the face-saving explanation. In fact, the shields couldn't agree among themselves on which sites to protect. Finally, the Iraqi government told them to start shielding or get out of the country.

**Roberta**

They still made their point just by being there.

**Alberta**

What **was** their point?

**Roberta**

To dramatize what would happen to innocent civilians if we invaded.

**Alberta**

Everybody knows there's likely to be collateral damage in warfare.

**Roberta**

Spare me the euphemisms, Allie. And anyway it's not just about civilians getting killed. Attacks on non-military targets destroy resources and systems people depend on.

**Stan**

Civilian infrastructure is already protected from attack by Article fifty-four of the Geneva Conventions.

**Roberta**

Which we violated during the Persian Gulf War.

**Stan**

You don't know anything about that war.

**Priscilla**

I do.

*The OTHERS pause, surprised by her intervention.*

**Priscilla, Continued**

While you were still over there, Stan, I started going to the VA hospital to visit the soldiers who were returning.

**Stan**

You never told me you did that.

**Alberta**

I didn't know either.

*ROBERTA nods in agreement.*

**Priscilla**

I went when you girls were in school. And I went because I felt somehow it would bring me closer to you, Stan.

**Stan**

Did it?

**Priscilla**

It brought me closer to the reality of the war you were fighting, especially when I visited the soldiers who were suffering from post-traumatic shock distress. As I listened to them, I became convinced their distress was from the shock of seeing what their computer-guided missiles and laser weapons had done to non-combatants. I saw the face of war in **their** faces, and it's a sight I don't want to see again.

**Alberta**

No one does, Mom, but sometimes that's the price we have to pay to maintain peace.

**Roberta**

Or to maintain our power, the power to tell the rest of the world how we expect them to behave.

**Stan**

Even if we had that kind of power, Roberta, the rest of the world would still act in its own self-interest. Or have you forgotten the response of France and Germany, among others, when we took on Saddam Hussein?

**Roberta**

They were right.

**Stan**

They were selfish, and they cost us a chance to deal a crippling blow to terrorism.

**Alberta**

Robbie, I still don't see what your human shield can hope to accomplish. There must be other, less drastic ways to make your point.

**Roberta**

Of course there are. And the less drastic, the less effective they are. Do you remember the student who stood in front of the tanks in Tiananmen Square? The tanks stopped; they turned back.

**Stan**

And they returned the next day to quash the rebellion.

**Roberta**

But if one student could stop the fighting for one day, maybe a thousand students can stop it indefinitely.

**Stan**

You're hopelessly naïve, Roberta. There isn't a military force in the world that will be deterred because you're standing in their way. They'll go around you, or over you, or through you if need be.

**Roberta**

But at least they'll know we were in their way, and so will the rest of the world. They'll have to pause if only to decide how to deal with us.

**Stan**

They've already decided.

**Roberta**

Do you know that from one of your confidential briefings?

**Stan**

I don't need a briefing. Military strategists and tacticians anticipate contingencies like this all the time. You won't surprise them.

**Priscilla**

But you've certainly surprised us, Roberta. Why didn't you say anything about this last night when we asked you about your political activities?

**Stan**

Which will definitely have a bearing on **my** political activities.

**Roberta**

I planned to tell you, all of you, but I didn't expect to hear that dad might be running for Congress, or Allie's going to Korea. When I heard that news, I didn't want to say anything until I'd had a chance to think about it.

**Stan**

Thinking is apparently something you haven't done much of. In all your idealistic fervor, have you considered for a moment how utterly impractical this human shield idea is?

**Roberta**

Practicality is not our primary objective.

**Stan**

Obviously not, but let me point out a few “practical” things I learned in the two years I was stationed there. Korea isn’t divided by a “border.” It’s divided by a demilitarized zone which happens to be one hundred and fifty-five miles long. How do you intend to cover all that distance?

**Roberta**

We’ll take positions at strategic points where an invasion is most likely to occur.

**Alberta**

By the coalition forces?

**Roberta**

Or by the North Koreans, if **they** decide that a pre-emptive strike is **their** best strategy. That’s why we want to stand in the middle, to show we’re not siding with either army.

**Stan**

That may be your intention but if you stand to the north of the DMZ, you’re with the North Koreans; to the south, you’re with the coalition forces; and you sure as hell won’t be allowed to stand in the middle of the DMZ.

**Roberta**

Our intention will be clear no matter where we stand.

**Stan**

Assuming, of course, you can even enter Korea, which is another practical matter. I’ll bet you don’t have a visa, much less a guarantee of immunity if you should break any laws, which I’m sure you will.

**Roberta**

I don’t need a visa under the principle of reciprocity between the U.S. and Korea.

**Stan**

**South** Korea. What happens if you step foot in North Korea?

**Roberta**

The necessary arrangements will have been made.

**Stan**

I’ll bet. And another matter—do you have any idea how cold it is in Korea at this time of year? Why on earth would your organizers pick the coldest month of the year to go there?

**Roberta**

They don't have a choice about that. Once the invasion begins, it'll be too late for a human shield—as you well know, Dad

*A tense pause, as STAN refrains from saying any more.*

**Priscilla**

How many of you are taking part in this human shield, Roberta?

**Roberta**

I don't know for sure, but the response has been greater than the planners anticipated.

**Stan**

And how long do you think these eager volunteer shields will stay, especially after the novelty wears off and the media loses interest?

**Roberta**

It doesn't matter how long we stay; it matters **that** we stay to make our point.

**Priscilla**

But is it worth the risk, Roberta? You could be injured, or captured, or . . . killed.

**Roberta**

So could Allie.

**Priscilla**

But she **has** to go and face that threat. You don't.

**Roberta**

Yes, I do. But for a different reason. I desperately want to prevent this war, and I'm willing to stand in the way of the combat troops to do it.

**Alberta**

That means standing in my way too.

**Roberta**

If need be.

**Priscilla**

Dear God, I just realized. If you go through with this, Roberta, you two really could come face to face.

**Roberta**

I know, but I made my decision about going to Korea before I knew Allie was being deployed there.

**Priscilla**

But now that you do know, doesn't that change anything?

**Roberta**

Not for me.

**Priscilla**

What would you do, Alberta?

**Alberta**

I'd carry out my orders—whatever they are.

**Priscilla**

I can't believe it would come to that.

**Stan**

It won't. Roberta isn't going to Korea.

**Roberta**

I'm twenty-eight years old, Dad. It's my decision, and you can't stop me.

**Stan**

Don't be so sure about that. One phone call to the right people and you won't even get out of town, much less out of the country.

**Roberta**

You wouldn't do that.

**Stan**

To protect you against yourself? You bet I would.

*STAN starts to leave.*

**Priscilla**

Stan, this isn't your decision.

**Stan**

Don't tell me you support this idiotic plan.

**Priscilla**

I don't know if I support it or not, but it's Roberta's decision. Just as it was Alberta's to join the Army. I'm only trying to understand it.

**Roberta**

It's not hard to understand, Mom. For me, it's a question of what's right and what's wrong. It's a moral decision, and sometimes you have to take a position you know is right even if it doesn't change the course of events.

**Alberta**

Are you sure about that, Robbie?

**Roberta**

What do you mean?

**Alberta**

You make it all sound very idealistic and principled, but you always need to be on the edge, pushing, challenging, taking exception to things. Being part of this human shield sounds to me like it fits your need.

**Roberta**

You think I'm doing this to satisfy some personal need?

**Alberta**

I think that's why it appeals to you. It's extreme enough, and controversial enough to be irresistible to you.

**Roberta**

I'm sorry you don't see more value in it than that.

**Alberta**

I'm sorry you don't see more value in my decision to defend our freedom as a soldier. The military is a human shield too, you know.

**Roberta**

The difference is that your shield relies on destructive power; my shield relies on constructive persuasion.

**Stan**

And in a confrontation, power wins every time.

**Priscilla**

Unless persuasion is a power that prevents confrontation. Isn't that what you told me, Stan, when I asked you why a political role appealed to you?

**Stan**

In so many words, but we're not talking about politics, Pris. We're talking about the threat of war and how to protect ourselves from it.

**Priscilla**

I know what we're talking about, Stan, and if you don't have more confidence in the persuasiveness of politics than that, don't run for office.

**Stan**

What I'm saying is that persuasiveness is more effective politically if it's backed up by real power, not a flimsy human shield of students.

**Priscilla**

I don't know if Roberta's human shield is flimsy or if it will have any effect on what's going to happen, but she's putting herself on the line for what she believes.

**Alberta**

So am I, Mom.

**Priscilla**

I know you are, Alberta. But you've got the whole U.S. military with you. I think we should give Roberta whatever she needs to see this through.

**Stan**

She needs to re-think the whole idea.

**Alberta**

I wish you would, Robbie.

**Roberta**

There's nothing to re-think, Allie. (*Beat, then to STAN and PRISCILLA*) But there is one thing you could do for me before my ride comes.

**Priscilla**

What?

**Roberta**

Even though all the participants in the human shield are of age and don't need anyone's permission, we've been asked to obtain a signed acknowledgment from our parents or next of kin.

**Stan**

Acknowledging what?

**Roberta**

That you know we've chosen to be part of the human shield. (*Produces a sheet of paper and holds it out for one of her parents to take*) It's a simple statement. Only two sentences.

*PRISCILLA takes the paper, reads it, offers it to STAN.*

**Stan**

I won't put my name to anything so . . . irrational.

**Alberta**

If no one signs, does that mean you can't go?

**Roberta**

No, this is just a formality, an assurance—if anything happens to any of us—that someone close to us knew what we were doing.

**Stan**

Anyone who's close to you and really knows what you're doing wouldn't want to acknowledge it.

**Roberta**

It would mean a lot to me if you signed it, Dad.

**Stan**

It would mean even more to me if you didn't do this, Roberta.

**Roberta**

I have to. I'm sorry.

**Stan**

Me too.

*There's a long, tense pause, then the DOORBELL RINGS OS.*

**Priscilla**

Give me your pen, Stan.

*STAN reluctantly hands PRISCILLA his pen. SHE signs her name as the LIGHTS FADE OUT.*

END ACT II; SCENE 1

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**ACT II; SCENE 2**

*AT RISE: A few weeks later. STAN is sitting in the den, reading the morning newspaper. The PHONE RINGS and HE answers it.*

**Stan**

Hello. *(Pause)* Good morning, Ron. *(Pause)* As a matter of fact, I was just reading it. *(Pause)* I agree; we should talk. *(Pause)* Tomorrow morning will be fine. Ten o'clock in your office. I'll see you then.

*STAN hangs up the receiver and stares at it for a moment.  
PRISCILLA enters SL.*

**Priscilla**

Who was that?

**Stan**

Ron Nelson.

**Priscilla**

What did he want?

**Stan**

To schedule a meeting with me tomorrow.

**Priscilla**

What for?

**Stan**

*(Hands her the paper, points to an article)* This.

*PRISCILLA scans the article STAN has handed her.*

**Priscilla**

Oh dear. *(Pause as SHE reads, then sits next to STAN)* This is just what you were afraid might happen.

**Stan**

I suppose it was only a matter of time.

**Priscilla**

*(Reads from the article)* "Retired Lieutenant General Stan Grant, rumored to be running for the U.S. Congress later this year, faces an unusual dilemma already." *(Looks up)* What do they mean "rumored?"

**Stan**

That probably comes from a few well-placed, off-the-record comments by Party spokesmen, testing the waters to see what reaction they'd get.

**Priscilla**

In that case, they should have told you. (*Resumes reading*) "While his one daughter is serving with the Army in South Korea, his other daughter is part of a human shield protesting the military build-up in that volatile region. And the daughters are twins." (*Stops reading and looks at STAN*) What does being twins have to do with anything? Who wrote this piece anyway?

**Stan**

It doesn't matter. The basic elements of a controversial story are all there.

**Priscilla**

Is this . . . Sharon Williams . . . the reporter who's been calling the last couple of days?

**Stan**

It is.

**Priscilla**

Did you ever talk with her?

**Stan**

I did. She wanted to know if the rumor about my candidacy is true.

**Priscilla**

What did you tell her?

**Stan**

"No comment."

**Priscilla**

That must have calmed her curiosity.

**Stan**

I knew she'd stay on that tack, but I didn't expect her to pursue the angle of our daughters.

**Priscilla**

How did she find out about it so fast? Alberta's only been in Korea for two weeks and Roberta didn't get there till a few days ago.

**Stan**

I don't know how she found out about Alberta, but the names of the students in the human shield were posted on that group's web site.

**Priscilla**

Have you been looking at their web site?

**Stan**

No, but it was mentioned in their press announcement. A high school student could have connected the dots.

**Priscilla**

So, what do you think Ron Nelson will say about all this?

**Stan**

I wouldn't be surprised if he asks me to step aside in favor of a candidate who doesn't "face a dilemma already."

**Priscilla**

Would you do that?

**Stan**

I can hardly run a successful campaign without the Party's support.

**Priscilla**

Oh Stan, I'm so sorry.

**Stan**

Well, rumors notwithstanding, I never formally announced my candidacy, so I don't have to say anything publicly. And to tell you the truth, I'd actually feel a bit relieved.

**Priscilla**

But I thought you wanted to run for office.

**Stan**

I wanted to be **elected** to office; I wasn't so sure about running. A lot goes into it that I don't know anything about. Oh, I was flattered when Ron approached me and it appealed to me as an honorable way to continue serving my country, but I was concerned that I was out of my league. I mean, what do I know about big-time politics?

**Priscilla**

What does anybody know before they get into it?

**Stan**

I know enough that I don't want to be managed by a group of political "operatives," telling me what to say, where to show up, when to smile.

**Priscilla**

You sound like Roberta. I mean, her views about political campaigns today.

**Stan**

I wouldn't go that far, but after giving orders most of my life, I don't think I'd be very good at taking them.

**Priscilla**

What if Ron Nelson doesn't ask you step aside? What if he just wants to strategize about the best way to respond to this article?

**Stan**

Not likely.

**Priscilla**

But what if?

**Stan**

Just now, I'm inclined not to run anyway.

*PRISCILLA studies STAN for a moment.*

**Priscilla**

This doesn't sound like you, Stan. You've never backed away from a challenge.

**Stan**

I don't know if I want to go through the whole process—and drag you along with me.

**Priscilla**

You wouldn't drag me along. I'd go willingly.

**Stan**

Like you did all during my military career?

**Priscilla**

We talked about that on New Year's Day. I did everything I was asked during your career, and more.

*STAN assumes a lighter, almost playful tone as the conversation continues.*

**Stan**

But not willingly.

**Priscilla**

I had my reservations, yes, but this is different. This is a public service I can identify with.

**Stan**

How so?

**Priscilla**

We'd be in it together; it would be something we could share fully, from start to finish.

**Stan**

That's enough reason?

**Priscilla**

It is for me.

**Stan**

How can I be sure?

**Priscilla**

Because I'm telling you.

**Stan**

You told me you were willing to be a military wife, too. How do I know you aren't just telling me you're "willing" to be a Congressman's wife?

**Priscilla**

I know what I'm getting into this time.

**Stan**

Are you sure? There would be committee meetings, private caucuses, staff reports, long days on the Hill, a lot of things I'd have to do alone.

**Priscilla**

But not on the other side of the world, or so top secret you couldn't discuss them with me. In fact, you may want to discuss certain issues with me—to get a woman's perspective, for example.

**Stan**

Or to learn what you pick up from other Congressmen's wives about what their husbands are planning and plotting.

**Priscilla**

You really have an itch for this, don't you?

**Stan**

It's a lot more appealing than spending my retirement playing golf and reminiscing with other "two stars" about our active duty days.

**Priscilla**

Do you miss those days?

**Stan**

No, but I've begun to see it all differently since Ron Nelson approached me about running for Congress.

**Priscilla**

In what way?

**Stan**

All the time I was in the Army, I saw my role as protecting America, keeping people safe from attack, preserving our national heritage and freedom. It all seemed real and concrete when I was in the midst of military life.

**Priscilla**

What's changed?

**Stan**

As I've thought about myself representing a specific group of citizens with their practical, everyday concerns, the military seems kind of nebulous and detached from reality.

**Priscilla**

Maybe it's just a different level of reality.

**Stan**

Maybe, but you know how I see it now? The military is protective, but politics is pro-active. It doesn't just defend; it moves our way of life forward. At least, it should and I'd like to help make that happen.

**Priscilla**

It sounds like you're talking yourself back into running.

**Stan**

That may not be my decision to make.

**Priscilla**

Well, if not for the Third Congressional district, maybe some other public position. There are lots of ways to contribute to the "practical, everyday concerns" of people. And a lower profile wouldn't attract as much attention to our daughters.

*A SIGNAL BEEPS from the computer.*

**Stan**

Is that Alberta checking in?

*ALBERTA appears SR, sits on a wooden chair facing the audience.*

**Priscilla**

Stan, let's not tell her about the newspaper story. She has enough to deal with right now.

*STAN nods in agreement as HE and PRISCILLA sit at the computer. HE turns on the small camera mounted on the computer and taps the mouse a few times until ALBERTA's picture comes into focus on the monitor. Throughout the following conversation, there may be a two second delay in the responses from one side to the other.*

**Priscilla**

Hi, honey. Your father and I are both here.

**Alberta**

I know, Mom; I can see you, remember?

**Priscilla**

Of course, dear. I'm just not used to this high-tech communication.

**Stan**

How are you, Alberta? You look good.

**Alberta**

I'm doing fine. All things considered.

**Priscilla**

Are you eating all right?

**Alberta**

G.I. gourmet, what can I say?

**Stan**

Has there been any change in your assignment?

**Alberta**

No. Our platoon is still practicing re-supply procedures and testing intell. communications. Pretty safe stuff. Other platoons are more engaged in combat maneuvers.

**Priscilla**

Do you feel safe, honey?

**Alberta**

As safe as I can be in a war zone, or at least a potential war zone.

**Priscilla**

Is there talk of an invasion?

**Alberta**

Oh, there's plenty of talk, but none of it from anyone in command. We're all just trying to stay ready. That's the hardest part—knowing we might go into combat but not knowing when or where.

**Stan**

Have the two additional battalions arrived yet?

**Alberta**

*(Gives a puzzled, surprised look at this question)* I heard they came in at oh-nine-hundred this morning. *(Beat)* Ah, maybe you should tell **me** what's going to happen over here, Dad.

**Stan**

Whatever it is, just follow your orders and stay ready, sweetie. You'll be okay.

*PRISCILLA gives STAN a quizzical, suspicious look, sensing HE knows more than HE's saying.*

**Priscilla**

Are you sleeping all right?

**Alberta**

Except at night. *(Pause)* That was a joke, you two. We've been doing a lot of night training, so I catch my sleep whenever I can. It's okay. I feel rested, as rested as I can be with my adrenaline pumping all the time.

**Priscilla**

*(After a brief, awkward silence)* Have you been able to contact Roberta at all?

**Alberta**

No luck so far, and not much help from our armed forces here. Some of our guys are beating their lips about "teaching them a lesson," but most of the soldiers don't even want to talk about the human shield.

**Stan**

You can't expect them to, can you?

**Alberta**

Not officially, but I thought a couple of my friends might have been helpful. All I have to do is mention it and they look at me like I'm a traitor. I take it you haven't heard from Robbie either.

**Priscilla**

Only an e-mail from the sponsoring group saying that everyone arrived safely.

**Alberta**

Safely. That's a strange word to use in this situation. (*Beat*) Has there been much publicity about the human shield at home?

**Stan**

The usual flurry of reports at first, mostly about their arrival and organizational meetings, but not much since then. You know how the media are; if nothing happens, there's no story.

**Alberta**

That might actually work to our advantage. I met a reporter from the BBC yesterday and told him Robbie was part of the human shield, and I was trying to contact her.

**Stan**

The BBC? Now it'll be an international story!

**Alberta**

What will?

**Stan**

(*Looks at PRISCILLA apologetically*) That my twin daughters are on opposite sides of this Korean situation.

**Alberta**

Oh Dad, I never thought about that. I was only trying to find someone who might be able to locate Robbie. I didn't ask him to keep it quiet.

**Priscilla**

Has this reporter had any luck so far?

**Alberta**

I don't know; I haven't seen him today. (*Beat*) I hope I haven't created a problem for you, Dad.

**Stan**

That particular cat is already out of the bag, locally at any rate. There was a story in this morning's newspaper, which has the Party leaders a bit uncertain about my potential candidacy.

**Alberta**

I'm sorry.

**Stan**

Not to worry. You've got enough on your mind.

**Priscilla**

Do **you** know what's been happening with the shield, Alberta? As your dad said, we haven't heard much since it started.

**Alberta**

All I know is that they have about five hundred students, but so far they've kept a pretty low profile. I think it's so they don't get too much harassment.

**Priscilla**

Do you think they're in danger?

**Alberta**

Mom, everybody here is in danger. But our guys understand they're non-combatants, taking a stand that doesn't really affect our operations one way or the other.

**Priscilla**

What about the other side?

**Alberta**

I can't speak for them, I'm afraid. And I can't speak with you much longer either. My five minutes are almost up and there's a line of people waiting to get on this satellite hookup.

**Stan**

It's been great talking with you, Alberta.

**Priscilla**

And seeing you. *(Beat)* Alberta, please . . . please be careful.

**Alberta**

I will. Love you. Bye for now.

*STAN turns off the camera, stands and goes to the sideboard for a drink.  
PRISCILLA comes around to the sofa and sits.*

**Priscilla**

I'll have whatever you're having.

**Stan**

Scotch in the morning?

**Priscilla**

I'm still a military wife.

*STAN pours the drinks, hands one to PRISCILLA and sits down in the recliner next to the sofa. PRISCILLA takes a long swallow and sips throughout the following conversation.*

**Priscilla, Continued**

I don't know whether I'm more afraid for Alberta or Roberta.

**Stan**

Alberta's equipped and trained and knows what she's doing. Roberta is . . . none of those things.

**Priscilla**

But isn't Alberta more of a target just **because** she's part of the military?

**Stan**

Not if her platoon keeps its present assignment. She's pretty much out of harm's way.

**Priscilla**

Are you responsible for that, Stan?

**Stan**

*(Pause)* Yes and no. Actually, it was Roberta's idea.

**Priscilla**

What was?

**Stan**

To use my influence to keep Alberta's unit on the fringe of things.

**Priscilla**

Didn't you think of doing that yourself?

**Stan**

Of course, I did. But I know how strongly Alberta feels about making her own way in the Army and not benefiting from my position.

**Priscilla**

What did Roberta say that changed your mind?

**Stan**

It wasn't so much what she said about that; it was something she said a little later, about forgetting what it is I think I'm protecting.

**Priscilla**

Meaning what?

**Stan**

I thought I was protecting Alberta's wishes by doing what she asked—or not doing what she didn't want me to do. But Roberta made me question whether I was really protecting something else, some military protocol, some unwavering principle of going by the book—maybe at the expense of our daughter.

**Priscilla**

You mean . . .

**Stan**

Roberta asked me how I'd feel if Alberta came home in a coffin.

**Priscilla**

Dear God, what a cruel thing to say!

**Stan**

Those were exactly my words, but the image stuck in my mind. I kept seeing a coffin and asking myself, "What if I could have prevented this?" I had no good answer to that question, so I called General Warren.

**Priscilla**

I'm glad you did, Stan, though I'd have been happier if you had told me before now.

**Stan**

Old habits change slowly. That's also when I decided I really did want to run for Congress. I kept hearing that question, "What if I could have prevented this?" And I kept seeing myself making a phone call, introducing a bill, framing public discussion, I don't know, doing the things a Congressman is elected to do to make people's lives better.

**Priscilla**

The sort of things Roberta keeps harping on.

**Stan**

I suppose so.

**Priscilla**

Did you tell her?

**Stan**

I didn't have a chance. She left before I came to this realization.

**Priscilla**

I wish you could do for Roberta what you did for Alberta.

**Stan**

Nothing's guaranteed about Alberta's safety. It's only a precaution.

*The DOORBELL RINGS OS.*

**Priscilla**

Let me see who that is—if I can still walk straight.

*PRISCILLA exits; STAN goes to the sideboard and pours another drink. A few moments later PRISCILLA enters.*

**Priscilla, Continued**

It's Sharon Williams, the reporter from *The Gazette*. I told her I wasn't sure you were available.

**Stan**

Tell her, I am. In fact, I'm more than available.

*PRISCILLA exits. SHE and SHARON return a few moments later. PRISCILLA makes the introductions, then exits to leave them alone. STAN shows her a seat on the sofa; HE sits in the chair.*

**Sharon**

General Grant, I appreciate your willingness to see me. Have you read my article in this morning's *Gazette*?

**Stan**

I have.

**Sharon**

I want to explain how that happened.

**Stan**

What's to explain? You're a reporter; you write stories. There was nothing inaccurate in it, although how you got from my "no comment" on the phone to eight hundred words in print took a bit of doing.

**Sharon**

As you know, it was mostly background about human shields and filler material on your military career. The point is, it was a draft piece. I showed it to my editor for his comments, but I didn't intend for it to be published—yet.

**Stan**

Then why was it?

**Sharon**

My editor liked it. Well, the truth be told, he really liked the fact that we might scoop the *K.C. Star* on this one. For a small circulation paper like ours, that's a big deal.

**Stan**

That story is a big deal for me too, no matter what size the newspaper that prints it.

**Sharon**

I know, and I hope it hasn't caused you any problems.

**Stan**

Oh, possibly ending a political career before it begins.

**Sharon**

What do you mean?

**Stan**

No comment. You still haven't told me why the article was published.

**Sharon**

My editor didn't want to sit on the story and he had space available. He said he tried to reach me to confirm some details and get my okay, but I was unavailable.

**Stan**

Were you?

**Sharon**

Yes. My cell phone was dead.

**Stan**

Cell phones!

**Sharon**

They're great when they work, but when they don't . . .

**Stan**

This is what happens.

**Sharon**

Maybe I can make it up to you.

**Stan**

I doubt that very much.

**Sharon**

Well, I was thinking, since the story is already out, maybe you'd like to tell your side of it.

**Stan**

Which story: my "rumored" candidacy or my dueling daughters?

**Sharon**

Both. They're pretty much entwined, aren't they?

**Stan**

Only since this morning's edition of *The Gazette*.

**Sharon**

But if you run for Congress, some reporter is going to pick up this angle. I just beat them to it.

**Stan**

Congratulations! But I'm not interested in furthering **your** career.

**Sharon**

I know you don't want to comment about your candidacy, but what about your daughters?

**Stan**

What about them?

**Sharon**

I imagine you're most proud of your daughter in the Army, which one is that, Alberta?

**Stan**

I'm proud of both of my daughters.

**Sharon**

But Alberta's following in your footsteps.

**Stan**

She's walking her own path. The fact that she's in the Army is her choice, and I wouldn't have it any other way.

**Sharon**

Well, what about your other daughter, Roberta? She's taking an opposing position, isn't she?

**Stan**

If you mean opposing Alberta or me or the U.S. Army, no. In fact, she'd say she's not opposing anything but rather promoting—peace without war.

**Sharon**

How does that make you feel, as a career military man?

**Stan**

How should it make me feel? There's not a military man, or woman, I know who wants war. We all want peace, but if you have to fight a war to get it, then you fight.

**Sharon**

Do you think a human shield is a viable alternative?

**Stan**

I don't know what a human shield can accomplish.

**Sharon**

Surely it can't stop an army from attacking.

**Stan**

That isn't its purpose.

**Sharon**

What is its purpose?

**Stan**

To dramatize the cost of war—in human terms.

**Sharon**

Do you think your daughter's human shield will be successful?

**Stan**

That depends on what you mean by success. Sometimes taking the right stand is all the success you can hope to achieve.

**Sharon**

You seem to be pretty familiar with the human shield idea.

**Stan**

I've had a well-informed tutor.

**Sharon**

It sounds like you also support what those students are doing.

**Stan**

I understand what they're doing, and I hope it contributes to peace.

**Sharon**

But you must be torn, with daughters on both sides.

**Stan**

They're twins; they've always been on both sides, of everything.

**Sharon**

But what if they come face to face?

*PRISCILLA enters SL, holding a sheet or two of paper.*

*ROBERTA enters SR and sits in the wooden chair.*

**Priscilla**

I'm sorry to interrupt, Stan, but I was checking our e-mails and here's one from Roberta. I printed it without reading it.

**Sharon**

*(Starts to get up)* I should be going.

**Stan**

No, stay. You wanted my side of this story? Maybe you should hear Roberta's side.

**Sharon**

But she may have personal things in her e-mail.

**Stan**

Knowing Roberta, I imagine she'd want as many people as possible to know what she has to say. (*Looks at PRISCILLA who has been scanning the e-mail*) Is this all right with you, Pris?

**Priscilla**

I can skip over the personal parts, if there are any.

*PRISCILLA begins to read but ROBERTA takes over almost immediately.*

**Priscilla, Continued**

Dear Mom and Dad—

**Roberta**

Well, I finally got hold of a computer with Internet access. We don't have much equipment here, as you can imagine, so I had to grab the chance when I got it.

**Stan**

Ever the opportunist.

**Roberta**

I'm sure you want to know how I'm doing. The short answer is OK. The long answer is a little more involved. Because we're taking shifts at the locations we've chosen, eating is pretty much hit or miss.

**Priscilla**

She never eats much anyway.

**Roberta**

Most of us are staying in a couple of old school buildings. They give us some protection from the cold, but hot water is pretty scarce so we take "blitz" showers, as Johann calls them. But hey, I knew I wasn't coming to a resort hotel for this venture.

Speaking of which, it took a while to get the shield in place, as you may know. At first, there was a lot of disagreement among the leaders about where to position us.

**Sharon**

The leaders of the human shield at the beginning of the Iraq war had the same disagreement.

*STAN gives her a look that suggests HE's impressed.*

**Sharon, Continued**

I did some research on them for my story. They had a whole list of civilian sites but couldn't agree on which ones to shield.

**Roberta**

Some thought we should be at the old markers along the DMZ, but they don't have any strategic significance. Others thought we should cluster around the Joint Security Area or at different locations along the Military Demarcation Line which runs through the middle of the DMZ, but access to the JSA from either side is impossible.

**Priscilla**

I don't know what she's talking about.

**Stan**

The DMZ runs east and west approximately at the thirty-eighth parallel. The Joint Security Area, JSA, is near the west coast. It's the only place where north and south connect, and it's where various meetings and negotiations have been held over the years.

**Priscilla**

That sounds like a good location for what the human shield wants to symbolize: talks, negotiation, that sort of thing.

**Sharon**

Only if they can get access to it.

**Roberta**

My contribution to the debate was that shielding the JSA would draw too much attention to the military; we want to focus on the danger to innocent civilians.

**Stan**

They should consider the tunnels.

**Sharon**

What tunnels?

**Stan**

I take it you didn't do any research on Korea for your story. In the 1970s and again in 1990 the North Koreans dug tunnels under the DMZ, almost surely for the purpose of invading the South.

**Priscilla**

Stan, listen to this.

**Roberta**

Another suggestion was to position ourselves at the four incursion tunnels the North Koreans have dug under the DMZ, but that could be construed as siding with the coalition in the South against the North and we want to remain neutral.

**Stan**

Then don't go to the DMZ at all.

**Sharon**

But that's where the Korean hostilities came to a halt, wasn't it?

**Stan**

Yes, and it's a strip of land maintained by nearly a million troops, eyeing each other nervously every day. It's hardly the place to draw attention to innocent civilians.

**Priscilla**

Wait, Stan.

**Roberta**

The stalemate over the location of the human shield forced us to clarify our purpose. I think my comment about focusing on civilians helped, but it was Johann who came up with the idea that everyone accepted.

**Stan**

Hold a press conference and go home.

**Roberta**

He proposed that we form a human shield at the villages on the north and south sides of the MDL.

**Priscilla**

What's the MDL stand for again?

**Stan**

The Military Demarcation Line, which . . .

**Priscilla**

. . . goes through the middle of the DMZ. I remember that part.

**Sharon**

How many of these villages are there?

**Stan**

Only two. The South Koreans already had one when the DMZ was established, so the North Koreans insisted on one of their own. They're both small and mostly symbolic, especially the one on the north. We used to refer to it as the Propaganda Village because that's about all the North Koreans use it for.

**Sharon**

Would these villages be a good location for the human shield?

**Stan**

It's the best of the options I've heard so far—if they want to focus on the civilians and not the armies.

**Priscilla**

Would it be safe?

**Stan**

Probably safer than protecting civilian infrastructures, especially if they're close to military targets.

**Sharon**

But how would they get access to these villages?

**Roberta**

Fortunately both the North and South Korean governments want to get favorable publicity out of our being here, so they're allowing us to go to the villages. Once we had their approval, we could form our shield. Unfortunately the media seems to have lost interest in our cause. I think they got turned off by all the initial disagreements, but hopefully they'll be back when they learn what we've decided.

**Stan**

I wouldn't count on it.

**Priscilla**

What do you think, Sharon?

**Sharon**

If I were there, I'd love to report what the human shield is doing, especially if the other reporters aren't. But I'm just a city reporter for a small newspaper. I don't know what's driving the media there.

**Roberta**

With or without coverage, we're going ahead. In fact, I'm leaving in about half an hour for my first shift at the South Korean village. I'm going to the North Korean village tomorrow morning. Hopefully I can reclaim this computer soon and let you know how everything is going.

I haven't been able to contact Allie. If you're talking with her or writing her, please share this e-mail with her. I hope she's all right. It's hard being so close and not be able to talk. I miss her. Well, that's about it for now. Try not to worry. I'm doing okay, really. Love you.

*THEY sit quietly for a moment.*

**Sharon**

Thank you both for letting me hear that. I can see why you're proud of her. She's really committed to her cause.

**Stan**

That she is.

**Priscilla**

What do you think, Stan? Will their human shield have a positive effect?

**Stan**

If so, it'll have to be in the next twenty-four hours.

**Sharon**

Why is that?

**Stan**

No comment.

*SHARON senses that STAN isn't going to say more.*

**Sharon**

I really need to be going. I'm already behind schedule. I appreciate the time you've given me, Stan, and for sharing Roberta's e-mail, Priscilla.

**Priscilla**

You're welcome. Let me show you out.

*PRISCILLA and SHARON exit SL. STAN picks up the e-mail and re-reads it. Slowly places it on the table. PRISCILLA enters SL and looks at STAN for a moment before speaking.*

**Priscilla, Continued**

What do you know that you didn't tell Sharon, Stan? (*STAN hesitates*) Come on.

**Stan**

(*Straightens up; exhales deeply*) Operation Disarm is scheduled to start tomorrow.

**Priscilla**

What's that?

**Stan**

The first phase of the invasion of North Korea.

*PRISCILLA slumps onto the sofa. BLACK OUT.*

END ACT II; SCENE 2

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**ACT II; SCENE 3**

*AT RISE: Ten days later; SHARON WILLIAMS is in the den, studying the photos and memorabilia of STAN's career. After a few moments, STAN enters SL, wearing black trousers, white shirt, black tie and carrying a black suit coat over his arm.*

**Stan**

I hope you didn't think Priscilla and I forgot about you.

**Sharon**

Not at all. I just hope I'm not in the way.

**Stan**

I wouldn't have asked you to come by if I thought you'd be in the way.

**Sharon**

Thank you. I can only imagine what you've been going through—since getting the news about Alberta.

**Stan**

It's been difficult, but for me, it's better to stay busy on a day like today.

**Sharon**

I understand. *(Points to one of the photos)* Is this your father?

**Stan**

*(As HE slips on his suit coat)* Yes it is. Lieutenant Colonel Stanley Grant, Senior.

**Sharon**

You outrank him.

**Stan**

Only in military terms. In every other respect, I consider him my superior. He's a great man.

**Sharon**

That must make today even more difficult, given the military honors you and your father have received.

**Stan**

I consider today a military honor for our family as well, though obviously of a different sort.

*Motions her to take a seat on the sofa as HE sits in the recliner next to it.*

**Sharon**

Of course. I didn't mean to imply . . . I guess I don't know how to talk about what's happened.

**Stan**

Neither do we. We're just trying to deal with the facts.

**Sharon**

Some facts are harder to deal with than others.

**Stan**

True, and some facts change the way you look at things. They can give you a different perspective, alter the way you've been thinking.

**Sharon**

Is that why you asked me to come today?

**Stan**

That, and the fact that Priscilla and I will be gone for a few weeks, so you and I wouldn't have a chance to talk.

**Sharon**

I see. Well, I want to thank you for asking me to be the press secretary for your campaign. It would have been quite an experience.

**Stan**

What do you mean "would have been"? Are you declining?

**Sharon**

Well no, but I thought you just said, or implied, that Alberta's . . . death changed your mind about running for Congress.

**Stan**

Not about running, about **why** I want to run. Her death has given me a whole new motive and sense of purpose about it now. (*Beat*) What about you?

**Sharon**

As I said when you asked me about it, I have a lot to consider—leaving my position at *The Gazette* with no guarantee of getting it back, being a single mom with two teenagers to support, taking on something I've never done before.

**Stan**

Well?

**Sharon**

Well, I've decided to do it. It's one of those challenges that doesn't really make sense but seems the right thing to do.

**Stan**

That sounds like someone else I know.

**Sharon**

Roberta.

**Stan**

Yes.

**Sharon**

Does she know about Alberta?

**Stan**

We haven't been able to reach her. We're using all the contacts we have, but at this point I don't know what she knows.

**Sharon**

This must all be very distracting for you. I don't know how you can focus on a campaign right now.

**Stan**

Fortunately, I don't have to focus on it for a while. The election is ten months away; I won't make an announcement till next month. By then, I'll be ready. Will you?

**Sharon**

I hope so.

*STAN gives her a disapproving look.*

**Sharon, Continued**

Yes, I will. I do have one question though. *(Beat)* Why do you want me for your press secretary?

**Stan**

For one reason, you helped launch my political career, such as it is.

**Sharon**

How did I do that?

**Stan**

By writing that article last year about my commencement address at Southside High School.

**Sharon**

I just summarized the highlights of your speech.

**Stan**

Well, the Chairman of the Central Coordinating Committee of the Republican Party . . .

**Sharon**

Ron Nelson.

**Stan**

Right. He read your “summary,” liked what he read, and approached me about running for Congress.

**Sharon**

I didn’t know that.

**Stan**

I didn’t remember that it was you who wrote the article until Ron reminded me of it when he read your piece about my daughters.

**Sharon**

That all seems moot now.

**Stan**

Not necessarily. He thought the spin you gave that situation could actually be—or would have been—beneficial to my candidacy, and in any event that I should consider you for my press secretary.

**Sharon**

But I’m not a Republican.

**Stan**

I know, but if I didn’t have someone around me who held a different point of view politically, I think I’d miss it.

**Sharon**

Sort of like Lincoln’s cabinet?

**Stan**

Actually, I was thinking of that “someone else” again, but I’ll take the comparison.

*PRISCILLA enters, adjusting her earrings. Throughout this scene SHE struggles to maintain her composure and not break down in tears.*

**Priscilla**

Sharon, I’m glad you’re still here. I want to thank you for your card. That was so thoughtful of you. *(Beat)* It helps.

**Sharon**

It was the least I could do, for the moment. But I’d better be going and leave you two alone. *(Stands and starts to leave, then notices PRISCILLA’s earrings)* Those are such lovely earrings, Priscilla.

**Priscilla**

They were a gift from our twins when they turned twenty-one, a “thank you” for getting them to adulthood.

**Stan**

You may notice that they don’t match.

**Sharon**

Is that on purpose?

**Stan**

“We’re twins, but we’re not identical” was their explanation, which they used quite often growing up.

**Priscilla**

The only time I’ve ever worn these was on their birthday. Until now.

**Sharon**

It must mean a lot to have something tangible like that to remind you of them.

**Priscilla**

It does, but I don’t need **things** to remind me of my twins. I have all the memories of them, stored in my heart, where I can protect them and no one can harm them or take them away.

**Sharon**

I wish I could have met them—both of them.

*PRISCILLA chokes back a tear which SHARON observes.*

**This is Not the End of the Play**  
**Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes**