

PLEASE BE AWARE THAT
THIS PLAY IS FULLY POTECTED BY COPYRIGHT

All plays, books, music and other materials published by Heartland Plays, Inc. are fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and all countries which the United States has reciprocal relations including, but not limited to all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, The Universal Copyright Convention and the Berne Convention. All rights to the plays and materials on our website are strictly reserved including, and without limitation, professional and amateur performance rights; motion pictures; public reading; radio and television broadcasting; audio and video recording and reproduction of any type known or yet to be invented; information storage and retrieval systems of any type known or yet to be invented; and the rights of translation into any and all languages. No individual or organization whether amateur or stock may perform this or any play published by Heartland Plays, Inc. without first obtaining advance permission from Heartland Plays, Inc. and paying the appropriate fees including Royalties and Single-Use Copyright fees. Heartland Plays, Inc. collects royalties on behalf of the Playwrights whose plays it publishes. Unauthorized copying, transcribing or reproduction of this or any play or excerpt, or storage or transmittal in any form and by any means whether known or yet to be invented, is strictly forbidden except as provided by Agreement with Heartland Plays, Inc. Any unauthorized use is a violation of copyright laws and will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

FIVE SIMPLE RULES TO REMEMBER

1. DO take advantage of the free online perusal of our plays to help you make the best choice for your particular needs or production.
2. DO enjoy the convenience of our online purchase application for performance rights and single-use copyright.
3. DO understand that this play and all plays and materials on our website are controlled by Heartland Plays, Inc. and fully protected by copyright.
4. DO NOT attempt in any way to copy, transcribe or reproduce this play by any means or perform this play or use any play or material from our website without first receiving permission from Heartland Plays, Inc. Any attempt to use this or any other work without first obtaining permission is a violation of copyright and punishable by law.
5. DO NOT rob this Author or any of the Authors we represent of their right to be paid for the use of their property. It is a crime and it is wrong!

Product Code A0440-FC

JUST CAUSE

A Serious Comedy

by

Greg Younger

**ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
REPRODUCTION WITHOUT SPECIFIC WRITTEN PERMISSION PROHIBITED**

**Performance Rights Available Exclusively through
Heartland Plays, Inc. at heartlandplays.com
playsnow@heartlandplays.com
customer service: 406-431-7680**

Copyright © 2011 by Greg Younger

Just Cause

by Greg Younger

CAST OF CHARACTERS

6W / 5M

SUZY: *Private in US Army*

PAUL: *Suzy's Husband; former P.O.W.*

MANAGER BOB: *Manager EarthFoods; calm and chill*

SHIRLY: *Manager Bob's wife; high maintenance*

RICHARD: *General Manager, EarthFoods*

TOODIE: *A regular at EarthFoods; Desert Storm veteran*

YOGI DEV: *Another regular at EarthFoods; white-gowned yogi*

PATROLPERSON BETSY: *No nonsense policewoman*

PATROLPERSON JEN: *Betsy's lover and patrol partner*

CINDY: *Gum snapping mall rat; wise beyond her years*

BETH: *Cindy's BFF; sharp and energetic*

SETTING

TIME: *Present Day*

PLACE: *EarthFoods, a natural foods co-op*

SCENES

ACT I; Scene 1: *In an aisle in EarthFoods; morning.*

ACT I; Scene 2: *In an aisle in EarthFoods; closing time at 6 pm.*

ACT II; Scene 1: *In an aisle in EarthFoods; late at night when closed.*

ACT II; Scene 2: *In the Manager's office at EarthFoods later that night.*

ACT II; Scene 3: *In an aisle in EarthFoods early the next morning.*

Just Cause
by Greg Younger

ACT I; Scene 1

(AT RISE: An aisle in a medium-sized organic supermarket. A large sign is suspended above with the heading "AISLE 5" and below a list of items found in the aisle; Aspirin, Diuretics, Vitamins, Creams, Supplements, Remedies, Tinctures and Powders. SOFT MUSIC plays in the background amidst SOUNDS OF GUNFIRE AND DISTANT EXPLOSIONS. SUZY, wearing fatigues, enters, searches for PAUL, and exits. MANAGER BOB, an extremely cuddly man, enters with PAUL, who opens a box and begins counting its contents.)

MANAGER BOB

So?

PAUL

Hey.

MANAGER BOB

Find the purpose of the pricing gun? Helping customers?

PAUL

Consumers. *(Muttering)* Consumers.

MANAGER BOB

(Opening box) Consumers. Okay. Well? Want the job?

PAUL

(Pause) Pain is weakness leaving the body.

(PAUL tries to price a box of goods. The gun jams up with tape.)

Dammit!

MANAGER BOB

It's not that bad. What's wrong?

PAUL

The thing is down. Everything is wrong. Headaches. This.

MANAGER BOB

It's not like you haven't handled a gun before.

PAUL

Ha ha.

MANAGER BOB

Now there's a smile.

(RICHARD, the general manager, enters.)

RICHARD

SIR!!!

PAUL

What?

RICHARD

Sir! That...is not...a toy. Surrender it immediately to your superior.

PAUL

The pricing gun?

MANAGER BOB

Paul, give it up. That's right. Put it down. Now kick it over.

PAUL

He can't be serious.

MANAGER BOB

Gently, gently. Here you are, Dick.

RICHARD

Thank you sir. Train the new hire properly. You allowed him access to... *(Mumbling)* this is unacceptable, look at this...look! Sir, do you... Has the new hire been trained on the pricing equipment?

PAUL

I just started yesterday!

RICHARD

Was I talking to you? Was I? Bob, we all know the training procedures. Do not deviate from them. And you, sir, watch the attitude. We have eyes, and we are watching.

(RICHARD exits.)

PAUL

Watch my...!

MANAGER BOB

Slow down, Paul. Take a breath. One more. Good.

(MANAGER BOB fiddles with the pricing gun, fixes it and prices a few items.)

PAUL

Guns don't price people, people price people.
Bob, can we talk? Are we fenced in?

(RICHARD is heard over loudspeakers.)

RICHARD, O.S.

Management to office.

MANAGER BOB

Fenced in? Those go over there. And they're already priced. Just relax for a second. I got duty call. Listen, Pauly, can I leave you alone for a second? Are you good? No Post Traumatic Stress? No headache? I know that's tough.

PAUL

Negative. And there's the electronic babysitter in the corner. Just in case. I don't know. I'm a basket case.

MANAGER BOB

You're fine. It's good to have you back. Really. I'll be right in the office if you need me. Breathe. It's not a battle zone. You're not a prisoner.

PAUL

Tell that to Dick.

MANAGER BOB

He's a pussycat, once you get to know him.

PAUL

If you say so.

RICHARD, O.S.

Senior staff to office.

PAUL

How many senior staffers are there?

MANAGER BOB

Just me. Be right back.

(MANAGER BOB exits. PAUL begins pricing again. The gun jams.)

PAUL

For the love a...

(SUZY enters, wearing fatigues. PAUL is preoccupied.)

How may I help you? Hold up. The tape just goes, there, no, there...

SUZY

Hi.

PAUL

Howdy do. Damn!

SUZY

Paul?

PAUL

Um...yeah. Just gotta stock this here, okay? One minute. Alright?! Sorry.

SUZY

Just takes spit.

(SOUND: EXPLOSION; PAUL stops struggling with the gun.)

PAUL

Ahhh crap!

SUZY

Are you okay?

PAUL

Headache. I gotta go.

SUZY

Paul?

PAUL

How do you know me? Look, ah, I just gotta get...you want something? *(Wincing)* Damn! I'll call someone, miss, okay? Okay?

SUZY

Darling, it's me! I've missed you so. So much. I've been looking everywhere!

(SUZY runs towards him for an embrace. SOUND: GREATER EXPLOSION AND GUNFIRE; PAUL backs away.)

PAUL
Son of a...! I'll find someone. I can't...Sorry miss.

SUZY
Paul!?

PAUL
Sorry!

(PAUL exits. SUZY is alone, dumbfounded. BETH and CINDY enter, chattering.)

BETH
And did you see the look on his face?

CINDY
GOD!

BETH
Right? Right?

CINDY
So queer.

(BETH and CINDY notice SUZY.)

BETH
You okay?

SUZY
(To herself) Paul, you, you don't recognize me? How is that possible? How can that be? *(To BETH and CINDY)* He doesn't know me.

BETH
Why don't you sit for a minute, honey?

(SUZY sits on some boxes.)

CINDY
Don't get her in trouble.

BETH
Stop it lighten up. *(To SUZY)* So, he who?

CINDY
Yeah who's he?

SUZY
Paul! My Paul! Do you two work here?

CINDY
No. We just shop here. A lot.

BETH
A lot. It's a freak show.

CINDY
(Giggling) Yeah right? So yeah we're in school, kinda Montessori but more like homeschool.

BETH
You really look sad.

CINDY
She looks freaked out.

BETH
That too.

CINDY
You okay?

SUZY
No. No. Thanks for asking. Not okay. Not at all. I'm so far from okay...

CINDY
Maybe we should leave her alone.

BETH
Who's Paul?

CINDY
Leave her alone, Beth.

SUZY
No. No, it's okay.

BETH
Don't tell me to leave her alone, I can leave her alone if I want. You're not the boss of me.

SUZY
He doesn't recognize me. He...he just looked past me. Like I was a stranger.

(SUZY nearly falls; BETH catches her.)

BETH

I think it might be a good idea to keep sitting.

CINDY

Poor thing.

BETH

Can we, you know, like help or something?

SUZY

I left my post. I had to! They wouldn't tell me anything.

BETH

Is that good? Do you get court martialed and stuff when you do that?

CINDY

Beth be cool!

BETH

You be cool.

CINDY

Cooler than you. *(Pause)* Go on honey, you can talk to us we are totally cool, more than everybody.

BETH

Everybody. We're not judgey.

SUZY

I get here, all the way from Iraq, greasing every palm in sight, go AWOL for the rest of my life to just...what? I love him. The way he smiles, the way he holds a glass. The way we—

BETH

(Cutting her off) True love?

SUZY

The truest! You have no idea. We were stationed in different countries. It was only going to be for a few months. A few months! What does that mean? Two? Eight? A few? A few turned into a year, and when I asked after him, the brass said it was classified. Classified! For a year, longer, no letters. No calls. Nothing. I thought...

CINDY

Go.

BETH
Yeah go.

SUZY
I thought. I thought he was dead.

CINDY
But he isn't, right? And it's true love?

BETH
That's what she said, Cindy. True, as in blue. As. In.

CINDY
If it's true love, you can't give up. You gotta get him back. No matter what.

BETH
You gotta get him back. He'll remember.

(SUZY nearly passes out; BETH holds her up.)

BETH
Oh my god. You need a doctor. Like my dad! Right?

CINDY
He's a lab rat, B. Wait. What does he do again?

BETH
It's like penicillin, that's what he always tells me.

CINDY
How is it like penicillin?

BETH
Like, Daddy takes a little of the cause, the bug he says, and turns it to medicine or something like that.

CINDY
“Hair of the dog.”

SUZY
The cure in the cause...the cure is in the cause.

BETH
Yeah, like that.

SUZY

The cause. So what is the cause? *(Pause)* I can stand, thanks. Okay, I know. I know now.

BETH

Know what?

CINDY

He's not dead, dummy.

BETH

Don't say dummy, Cin-Cin. You're the dummy.

CINDY

No you are.

BETH

What you are, but what am I? Be easy.

SUZY

He's not dead. My love, he's alive. And he's worth fighting for.

BETH

True blue love O'rama!

SUZY

The cause is the cure. Right.

CINDY

Medicine.

SUZY

I won't abandon him, and therapy is not my first option. Girls, I have a mission.

BETH

Thought you said you went AWOL.

CINDY

I get it, B. She means a different kinda mission. A love mission. Change O plan-o.

SUZY

For the better, but I need your help. I'm Suzy. And you're willing to help? Really?

CINDY

Sign me up.

BETH

Me too.

CINDY

I'm Cindy, this is B. Beth. She's my bestie. And we're all about love...love is all there is. So, we're here for ya. Reporting for duty. This is da bomb.

BETH

Boo-yea! Ten hut and all that. What are our orders?

SUZY

Thank you. Thank you both. Welcome to my army. Okay, here's what I'm thinking...

(BLACKOUT.)

ACT I; Scene 2

(AT RISE: PAUL and MANAGER BOB stocking shelves. TOODIE enters.)

TOODIE

Yo.

PAUL and MANAGER BOB

Toodie.

TOODIE

Whoa! I'm a needin' it bad dudes. Yo. Paul. Paul m'man, can ya flip me that vita-6 with Garlic over there while I scope out the new powders. Yeah, that one.

PAUL

Affirmative.

(PAUL tosses bottle into TOODIE's basket.)

TOODIE

Man, this, this country is pushin' and pushin' me hard...Is this new? This stuff, this Spirolina booster stuff over yonderola? Yeah, this. Yeah, this stuff...just to stay alive in this dime and five, man. So is it good? I'm tellin' ya, not to beat it dead with a big whiney stick n all, but in no uncertain terms if this weren't here, if these medicininis you know, this, and this...I'd be AWOL. Haha! Woo! Ya like that? A waste of life. *(Shopping while speaking)* So why do I stay? If it's so bad here, why don't I do up a do and skiddoo. Just go. And I'll tell ya, I'll tell ya, oh I tell ya alright, cause I'm tied. Tied in, tied up, and tied together secure. Obligations. I jack you not. Brothers, sisters, nephews nieces my gimpy Ma...family. *(To PAUL; pointing at bottle)* Hand me that willya? *(Paul throws a bottle to him.)* I'm tied! And it's good to be

TOODIE, *Continued*

needed, you know, to have love, and you know you gotta be there for the clan, Stan...So I keep er together cuz I gotta keep her afloat. And that, boys, is the business end a that stick.

MANAGER BOB and PAUL and TOODIE

I jack you not.

TOODIE

Hubba hubba dang dang doodle. And this here, if any fickin' body's got even a jigger of a clue-in, is how to fortify the defenses. Sandbag the parameter. I jack you not. Say soldier, and could ya hand me the usual? Yeah, that there Retin-A with the organically modified doohicky, K?

PAUL

Yeah. (To MANAGER BOB) *War.*

MANAGER BOB

*War...*I'll get it. Anything for our customers.

PAUL

Consumers.

MANAGER BOB

Consumers?

PAUL

Oil, sugar...

TOODIE

Hell yeah and howdy marine, and there's a platoon of bad units out there best be gettin' here. I absolutely jack, you, not. Feel me on this? You guys feel me, do you feel me? This is the shit, this is the moment, where we all, all of us, every damn one gotta step up... But maybe that's why this USofA is the way it is, no bodys...why don't you let me swear in the store? Yeah yeah yeah I know...crud, crap. Crap is alright right? So anyway, lotta people lotta lotta, they just they can't...they won't...they, they almost what from whatever, you know? Better know I know I know it. Didn't I do what I did? I did it. I did my time. Am I way off base here?

PAUL

You did your duty.

TOODIE

Yuppers. I did indeediola. (*TOODIES' pager rings. He checks it.*) Hold up. I gotta get this. (*On phone*) Uh huh. Wait a sec. (*To PAUL and MANAGER BOB*) Stand down, people! (*On phone*) Yup. Uh huh.

MANAGER BOB

(To PAUL) Paul, do you still have the pricing gun?

PAUL

Yeah. Um. It's...

TOODIE

1600 gotta boog. Semper Fi, man. *(Slaps PAUL on back)* Gotta answer the call of duty. Hooah!

PAUL

Back atcha, Tood.

TOODIE

Lock and load.

(TOODIE exits.)

MANAGER BOB

Paul...

(SHIRLY enters.)

SHIRLY

Hella hella. Robert, my love, I just wanted to drop the Datsun and trade keys. I need the Volvo.

MANAGER BOB

Uh-hmm.

SHIRLY

How are you sweetie? The keys?

MANAGER BOB

Sure. *(Fishes in pocket)* Here.

(MANAGER BOB and SHIRLY exchange keys.)

SHIRLY

(Noticing PAUL) And who might you be?

MANAGER BOB

Shirly, Paul. Paul, this is my wife, Shirly.

SHIRLY

How are you?

(SHIRLY takes PAUL's hand.)

PAUL

Fine.

MANAGER BOB

New hire. Old friend. He's just come back...well, sorta. He was in the war, taken prisoner.

PAUL

That part is a little fuzzy.

SHIRLY

(Still holding PAUL's hand) Ahh, poor baby. I'm so sorry. Don't you remember anything?

MANAGER BOB

You can let go of him now. Honey, we have work to do.

SHIRLY

Of course. Nice meeting you. If you need to process-

MANAGER BOB

Shirly. Please.

SHIRLY

I'm just trying to help, Robert. *(To PAUL)* You'll be okay. *(To MANAGER BOB)* I'll leave the Datsun out by the loading bay.

(YOGI DEV enters as SHIRLY exits.)

PAUL

She's a friendly. Definitely a consumer.

MANAGER BOB

Too friendly. Can you make sure the tinctures are alphabetized? I'll be back.

(MANAGER BOB exits.)

YOGI DEV

Smiling.

PAUL

Back at 'cha. You're Yogi Dev?

YOGI DEV

Yes.

PAUL

Something happened this morning, put me out of whack. There a full moon or what?

YOGI DEV

Why?

PAUL

Anything on the radar I should know about?

YOGI DEV

You?

PAUL

I'm afraid for no reason. I'm really scared, and you're into that mystical stuff right? Do you understand?

YOGI DEV

If there is fear, watch it dance, do not identify with it.

PAUL

But the cause, what would the cause be? Are aliens landing? Is the world ending tomorrow? You can tell me.

YOGI DEV

There is no cause. No effect. Perfection.

PAUL

Who said anything about perfection?

YOGI DEV

You as 'you' will never know. Give up being somebody.

PAUL

Yogi Dev, is it? So this is your advice? Give up?

YOGI DEV

Give up and allow.

PAUL

Oh I give up alright.

YOGI DEV

Good! Excellent!

PAUL

Up. Not the same thing. Not what I said.

It is what you said.
YOGI DEV

I was exasperated.
PAUL

You as a wind were, but 'I' was never.
YOGI DEV

Uh huh. Is it possible to have an actual conversation with you?
PAUL

Of course, but who would be having it?
YOGI DEV

Good point. Forget I asked.
PAUL

Forgotten. Mugwort?
YOGI DEV

Bottom left.
PAUL

I thank you.
YOGI DEV

(YOGI DEV exits.)

Deep breath. Take a deep breath. Man, I miss the woods.
PAUL

(PAUL exits; Pause; TOODIE enters.)

If my brain weren't attached to my head...hey! Hey?
TOODIE

Ssssst!
SUZY, O.S.

Eh?
TOODIE

Soldier...
SUZY, O.S.

TOODIE

Come out! I'm armed!

(TOODIE sneaks through the aisle like it's enemy territory. SUZY enters, creeps up behind him and grabs him.)

SUZY

At ease.

TOODIE

Nice moves for a girl. Frickin awesome. I'm not going anywhere. I'm fine right where I amski. Could you pinch me right in the arm, near my elbow? I dig that shit.

SUZY

I'm a soldier, soldier.

TOODIE

Suit yourself, cupcake. OW!

SUZY

I ain't nobody's cupcake, jarhead.

TOODIE

Easy...easy. That I'm not so into.

(SUZY releases him.)

SUZY

Do we have an understanding? I need to know if you can chill and listen. Otherwise we go back to the fun stuff. Well?

TOODIE

Can I tell you you're cute when you're angry?

(SUZY grabs him again.)

SUZY

Not the direction I want this to go.

TOODIE

Kidding! Way kidding like three d kidding!

SUZY

Had enough, loverboy?

TOODIE

(Squeaking) Yeah I'm done.

(SUZY releases him. TOODIE falls to the ground, gasping. SUZY paces.)

SUZY

See, I have a problem. And you are going to help me. How long have you known Paul?

TOODIE

We went to grade school him and me. Then he went off the map for a way long time, and then he just showed up last week. I think you whacked out my alkaline ratio.

SUZY

Can it, soldier. What was he doing off the grid?

TOODIE

Grid?

SUZY

Where was he before he came back?

TOODIE

Redwood Curtain for a year, man. Hardcore. His reflexors are off. Don't tell him I told you.

SUZY

And before that?

TOODIE

Military. Prisoner of war n' stuff. Least that's what my pal Gurney said he said, but he never said that to me direct. We're not all that tight.

SUZY

Prisoner? How? How did he...was he sent home?

(MANAGER BOB is heard approaching. SUZY runs off.)

TOODIE

Where ya goin'?

(MANAGER BOB enters.)

MANAGER BOB

You're on the floor.

TOODIE

Protein deficiency. Toss me a bottle of fish oil caps.

(YOGI DEV enters, wearing a caftan. He mills around the aisle for a moment.)

YOGI DEV

On the floor? Might stop eating that.

MANAGER BOB

He was worse before. Can I help you?

YOGI DEV

Cumin?

MANAGER BOB

Cumin isn't a supplement. It's designated as a spice here.

YOGI DEV

Where would this designate be?

MANAGER BOB

What?

YOGI DEV

Cumin?

MANAGER BOB

The spice?

YOGI DEV

It's designate?

MANAGER BOB

Yes, as a spice.

TOODIE

God! Look in the cooking section, aisle whatzitz.

MANAGER BOB

Seven.

YOGI DEV

That would be where it's found?

MANAGER BOB

What?

TOODIE

Yes. Thanks for calling! You get the prize! Are we clear? Is the mission, like—

MANAGER BOB

Toodie, take a breather.

TOODIE

Yeah. Breathe. Hey dude, sorry.

YOGI DEV

Thank you.

(YOGI DEV exits. TOODIE tries to put the cap on the fish oil bottle, but is shaking too much. MANAGER BOB takes the bottle from TOODIE.)

MANAGER BOB

It's cool. Just go home and take whatever it is you take. A nap might help.

TOODIE

Okay, but first I gotta know, just a question and it goes like what was Pauley's deal in the war? After the prisoner stuff?

MANAGER BOB

(Pause) I need to get an interpreter.

(RICHARD is heard over loudspeakers.)

RICHARD, O.S.

Management to Checkstand 3. Checkstand 3, management.

MANAGER BOB

I'm going to have to leave, okay?

TOODIE

Affirmative. Yeah buddy. Tell ya, er, ask you later about that thing I was going to say or ask.

(MANAGER BOB exits. TOODIE whistles for SUZY, looking through the shelves. PAUL enters. TOODIE is trying to find SUZY, oblivious of PAUL.)

TOODIE

Hey. Hey sisterlady? You there? Hey Marine! Or were you infantry, cause that's cool as cool can be too.

PAUL

I hate to interrupt, but I gotta do something.

TOODIE

(Surprised) Holy crap! Hey! Hey hey hey, Paulo! Someone, and I don't know if this is classified, cause I don't get the dossiers, you feel me? Hahaha! *(Takes deep breath)* Lookin'.

PAUL

Looking?

TOODIE

More like asking.

PAUL

Asking.

TOODIE

Yeah.

PAUL

Someone.

TOODIE

Yeah.

PAUL

About?

(TOODIEs pager goes off, distracting him.)

TOODIE

About? I gotta get this. *(Exiting)* Back atcha later, dude!

PAUL

But... *(To himself)* Move on. Who cares. Boom. Never happened. Okay then.

(PAUL begins unpacking box. SUZY enters. PAUL ignores her.)

SUZY

Hi.

PAUL

Hey. *(Grabs his head)* Damn!

SUZY

You look like a deer in the headlights.

PAUL
You talkin' to me?

SUZY
Taxi Driver.

(PAUL freezes.)

PAUL
Miss...

(Long Pause; PAUL and SUZY stare at each other.)

SUZY
Paul?

PAUL
Do I love you, er, know...you?

(SHIRLY enters, breezes past SUZY and towers over PAUL.)

SHIRLY
New man. Where is my husband?

PAUL
I don't know. You're standing a little close.

SHIRLY
My husband didn't let you use the car, did he?

PAUL
Yes Maam.

SHIRLY
You used the Volvo?

PAUL
Date last night.

SUZY
(Screaming) Paul!

(SUZY exits.)

PAUL
Postal. The lady's gone postal. Hey, about the car—

SHIRLY

The car? The car? Did she just scream?

(RICHARD enters, fuming.)

RICHARD

What was that? I'm asking you a direct question, sir. I heard something! I will not tolerate screaming in my store! *(To SHIRLY)* Was it you?

SHIRLY

No, little man. It was most certainly not me, and frankly I don't appreciate you taking that tone with me. I am an owner!

RICHARD

(Humbled) Sorry Miss. It won't happen again.

SHIRLY

I think you should call the police.

RICHARD

Yes ma'am. You may have to be questioned however. You too, sir.

(RICHARD exits.)

SHIRLY

Do you know her?

PAUL

It was a date.

SHIRLY

No. Not the woman you were with last night who helped spill popcorn all over the Volvos' upholstery. Not her. I'm not talking about *her*. I'm referring to the woman in fatigues who screamed your name. I'm talking about her. The woman who just screamed. That one.

(MANAGER BOB enters. SHIRLY runs to him and holds onto him for dear life.)

MANAGER BOB

Paul? It's okay, baby. Yes, that's a good girl. I'm here.

SHIRLY

(In tears) Who's my butterball?

MANAGER BOB

Pooky wook is right here, boo boo.

SHIRLY

Ba ba need candy.

MANAGER BOB

Kissie to my missy.

PAUL

I'm gonna lose my lunch if you two don't stop.

MANAGER BOB

Break rooms calling ya.

PAUL

Funny, I thought I heard your name.

MANAGER BOB

(To SHIRLY) Okay honey, let's get sometin' for da boo boo.

(MANAGER BOB helps SHIRLY towards the exit, then stops as PATROLPERSON JEN and PATROLPERSON BETSY enter.)

PATROLPERSON JEN

Hello Bob. New guy. I heard ah that you've been having ah some altercations on the premises. Truth to that?

MANAGER BOB

Nothin' we can't handle...just the usual Martians.

(PATROLPERSON JEN grunts in acknowledgement.)

PAUL

Well? Can I... *(Looks at her gun)* help?

PATROLPERSON JEN

What are you gettin' at?

PAUL

Just want to help.

PATROLPERSON JEN

Do I look like I need help?

PAUL

No.

PATROLPERSON JEN

Then why did you ask? Or am I interrupting your thoughts? Is that it, big shot?

PAUL

I'm fine.

PATROLPERSON JEN

I don't think you are. Just keep it in line. Just keep it in line. Do we understand each other?

PAUL

(Turning away, bristling) Yes.

PATROLPERSON JEN

I didn't hear you.

MANAGER BOB

Jen, cut him some slack.

PATROLPERSON JEN

Have you done a background check on him?

(PATROLPERSON BETSY enters.)

PATROLPERSON BETSY

Got it?

PATROLPERSON JEN

No, Mr. Man over here decided to give me a little beef.

PATROLPERSON BETSY

Yeah?

(PATROLPERSON BETSY picks a bottle off the shelf.)

PATROLPERSON JEN

Not that one.

(PATROLPERSON BETSY puts bottle back.)

Watch the attitude, Buster Brown. Bob, tell him to watch his attitude. Clean up your act and fly right buddy boy, or you're in for a world of hurt. You fit parameters we watch. And we ARE watching. *(To BETSY)* Statements?

(BETSY grunts.)

PATROLPERSON BETSY

Bob?

MANAGER BOB

Overreaction. You know how Dick gets.

(SHIRLY steps away from MANAGER BOB.)

SHIRLY

She was hysterical!

MANAGER BOB

Shhh...

PATROLPERSON BETSY

It upset her.

(MANAGER BOB and PATROLPERSON BETSY exchange glances.)

PATROLPERSON BETSY

Okay. Okay. I get it.

(PATROLPERSON JEN puts arm around SHIRLY.)

PATROLPERSON JEN

You come down to the station if you want.

SHIRLY

I can't. I've got a hair appointment.

PATROLPERSON BETSY

Do you a world a good. Jen, let's go.

PATROLPERSON JEN

What about him?

PATROLPERSON BETSY

You sure he's clean?

MANAGER BOB

He's just new.

PATROLPERSON BETSY

Your call.

PATROLPERSON JEN

Got it?

(PATROLPERSON BETSY picks a bottle off the shelf.)

PATROLPERSON BETSY

Yup.

PATROLPERSON JEN

That's it.

(PATROLPERSON JEN and PATROLPERSON BETSY exit.)

SHIRLY

The keys?

MANAGER BOB

I gave them to you, didn't I?

SHIRLY

Yes. I'm late. Take the cleaning charges out of Paul's paycheck.

(SHIRLY exits.)

PAUL

What did the big boss want?

MANAGER BOB

Some deer got into the produce.

PAUL

Deer?

MANAGER BOB

Yeah, they're everywhere around here.

PAUL

Deer.

MANAGER BOB

Huh?

PAUL

Never mind. Just reminded me of something I miss, and I don't even know what it is. A habit. A habit I liked.

MANAGER BOB

Cleaning charges?

PAUL

Popcorn in the Volvo. Sucky date. Big mistake. I ate 2 bags to avoid her.

MANAGER BOB

How is the cottage?

PAUL

It's good. Thanks for letting me stay there.

MANAGER BOB

My pleasure. Anything for a friend. Stay as long as you like.

PAUL

Thanks again.

MANAGER BOB

You know, Toodie asked me something. Well, in his way. What did happen when you were taken prisoner?

PAUL

I'd rather not talk about it.

MANAGER BOB

Just thought it might help.

PAUL

I know. I know. It's not that I can't.

MANAGER BOB

You wanna try?

PAUL

Why? What's the point? You're not getting all touchy feely on me, are ya?

MANAGER BOB

Paul. We all got feelings.

PAUL

Not me. Not anymore.

MANAGER BOB

Let's put that to the test.

PAUL

I don't know.

MANAGER BOB

Come on, Paul. Give it a shot. Might be good for you.

PAUL

Never is. What do you wanna know?

MANAGER BOB

How did it happen?

PAUL

It's fuzzy, Bob. I remember getting taken. The war going out of me like a sigh. Relieved I didn't have to break into people's houses anymore, roomfuls of family. No more domination. No more killing.

MANAGER BOB

Did you?

PAUL

Yeah. Twice. From a distance. I didn't know standard issue could kill at that range.

MANAGER BOB

Didn't know?

PAUL

You know what I mean. Not really. It was just an intense video game until then. But I found out different, I saw the blood wasn't green. He wasn't an alien. He wasn't even a bad guy. I was the bad guy. He was just in his own country fighting for his life, for his family, for his friends, his faith. I was just policing. Doing a job. Defending freedom. Freedom! Whose? Whose freedom? Not mine. Not theirs. In all the raids, going into peoples' houses, while they were in the middle of a meal or getting ready for bed or...not once did I set anything or anyone free. *(Pause)* Yeah, we were the shit. We had the guns and the gear. IEDs started multiplying, soldiers you ate with, partied with getting vaporized. Nothing left but a foot. It got me real angry, now I just see it as payback.

MANAGER BOB

Don't be so hard on yourself.

PAUL

If I'm not, who will be? Who cares enough?

MANAGER BOB

You always had a sense of rightness. You're a good person.

PAUL

I was a police soldier, protecting and serving the oil. Fed a load of hypocrisy so damn deep...

MANAGER BOB

Go on. What happened?

PAUL

Our Humvee ran over a bomb. All in slow motion. Then I was out. Woke up in the dark, another dark. With a sack on my head.

MANAGER BOB

Sorry.

PAUL

That was nothing. Then they...I don't know, Bob.

MANAGER BOB

You're doing great.

PAUL

Doesn't feel great.

MANAGER BOB

Thought you said you don't have feelings.

PAUL

They...they started interrogating me. Pulled out the coals with huge tongs. Started beating me. One guy had tattoos all over. I didn't know where I was. Where anyone was. No rescue for this grunt. I tried to hang on...no.

MANAGER BOB

Keep going.

PAUL

Keep going. Yeah, keep going. Why?

MANAGER BOB

Paul.

PAUL

I just erased. I was erased, so I erased. Everything, everyone. Gone.

MANAGER BOB

Hey...

PAUL

Everyone gone.

MANAGER BOB

We can stop.

PAUL

The sack doesn't come off this heart.

MANAGER BOB

Take it off.

PAUL

I couldn't if I wanted. Bob, a whole part of my life I don't even remember anymore, just a blank space. Empty.

MANAGER BOB

Gone?

PAUL

Vanished. Gone. Dead. The part that means the most. Don't we need to alphabetize or something?

MANAGER BOB

Wanna take a break?

PAUL

Please give me something to do.

MANAGER BOB

(After pause) The...the tinctures need to be faced.

PAUL

Thanks. Sorry.

MANAGER BOB

The date went pretty bad, huh?

PAUL

Handfuls of popcorn. Couldn't stuff it down fast enough.

MANAGER BOB

Good for the intestines. *(Gently pats PAUL on the back)* Good to have you here.

PAUL

I'm not here. I'll never be back.

MANAGER BOB

Yes you are, Paul. It'll all come back.

PAUL

What if it doesn't? Years of my life gone, love...gone...trust...lobelia, Lavender...

MANAGER BOB

Why don't you take the day?

(TOODIE enters.)

TOODIE

Dudes.

MANAGER BOB

Toodie.

PAUL

Toodie.

TOODIE

Whoa. I'm picking up some major sad vibes. Bad hair day?

(CINDY enters.)

CINDY

Um...Hi...um...Not to be all judgey, but I just got directions from some guy in a like head towel over on aisle 12, next to fruits and veggies--um, ah, Hel-LO, earth calling...

MANAGER BOB

Aisle 3. This is earth. And what planet you call home?

CINDY

Yeah what-EVER. As if.

(RICHARD enters; stares at CINDY.)

RICHARD

Can I help you miss? Are you finding everything okay?

CINDY

What's it to ya?

RICHARD

I'm the Manager of the store, miss.

CINDY

How nice for you.

RICHARD

Store closes in 10 minutes.

(PAUSE.)

TOODIE

Does anybody feel crowded?

(LIGHTS FLICKER; BETH enters.)

BETH

Cin-Cin, I found cherry lip-gloss. Way bomb-o. And you know Robbie... *(Notices everyone else)* Take a picture, last ya longer. Judgey wudjers. Now?

TOODIE

Did anybody notice the lights?

RICHARD

That was not authorized.

MANAGER BOB

A blackout? Huh.

PAUL

(Pause) Did I miss any other ones?

RICHARD

What is with the new hire?

TOODIE

What's with you?

RICHARD

Sir. Can I help you?

(LIGHTS SUDDENLY OUT.)

CINDY

W-T-F!

BETH

I'm scared.

TOODIE

You're not supposed to say that in the store.

CINDY

Bite me, soldier man/boy.

TOODIE

Bare it.

MANAGER BOB

Toodie.

BETH

Eeew! I'm not scared now. I'm gonna hurl if I hear another—

TOODIE

Crack? Hahahaha! (*Snorts*) Get it. I said crack. As in—

RICHARD

SIR!

(*As emergency lights come on, LIGHTS UP DIM & STARK.*)

BETH

This is creepy, Cin-Cin.

CINDY

Yeah. I'm going to another aisle, B.

BETH

Yeah, let's go to another aisle. Right?

CINDY

Right. Like she said.

(*CINDY exits.*)

BETH

Yeah, me too. Wait up!

(*BETH exits.*)

TOODIE

Gotta boog.

MANAGER BOB

Toodie.

TOODIE

I'm allowed to shop.

(TOODIE exits.)

RICHARD

I'd like to have a meeting. New man, take notes.

MANAGER BOB

Here? Now?

RICHARD

Yes. We need to resolve a few issues, and we can't just table them. Are we clear? New man, did you get that down?

PAUL

I don't have a pen.

RICHARD

Packet?

MANAGER BOB

Here's a pen, Paul.

(MANAGER BOB gives PAUL a pen.)

RICHARD

It should have been part of his hiring packet.

MANAGER BOB

It was.

(RICHARD glares at PAUL. CINDY and BETH enter, marching up to MANAGER BOB.)

CINDY

Take us to your leader. Are you the leader?

BETH

Cin-Cin, it doesn't go like that.

CINDY

Right. Okay. I got it.

BETH

Right? Right? You linked up?

CINDY

Right ON, double snap and a half, B girl.

(BETH and CINDY do their "secret handshake", which involves lots of movements of hands and arms.)

BETH

Sweet. Did Preston call you today?

CINDY

Just Facebook.

BETH

Poke or message?

CINDY

Poke.

BETH

He'll call. He gets so emo.

(BETH and CINDY do another brief exchange of gestures.)

RICHARD

May I help you, ma'am and ma'am?

CINDY

He's gotta be the leader.

BETH

The boss.

CINDY

The big blogger.

(CINDY steps up to RICHARD.)

BETH

Go.

CINDY

We have terms.

RICHARD

For what?

The release of hostages. CINDY

That's not yet. BETH

Should we call her? CINDY

I'm out of minutes. BETH

(CINDY takes out her cellphone.)

Hold up, I've got a text. CINDY

Ladies! RICHARD

Hold UP! CINDY

(PAUSE as CINDY reads.)

Ma'am, may we help you? RICHARD

(In another aisle) CLEAR! TOODIE, O.S.

More yelling! This must cease! RICHARD

Dial it down, fatty. CINDY

Go, Cindy, go Cindy. BETH

We're here to discuss terms. CINDY

Terms? RICHARD

CINDY
We're going to capture...she said capture, right?

BETH
Double snap in a circle. Cap – sure.

CINDY
We need the guy named Paul.

PAUL
Me?

BETH
Look, he knows his own name. Cheese!

CINDY
Melted, on white.

TOODIE, O.S.
(In another aisle) CLEAR!

(CINDY's cellphone rings with a pop tune ringtone.)

CINDY
(Checking phone) Oh my GOD!

BETH
What?

CINDY
It's him! It's him it's him it's him!

(CINDY and BETH scream and dance, then immediately get very cool. CINDY answers.)

Hello? Hey Preston, what's up?

RICHARD
I don't have time for this! Ma'am!

TOODIE, O.S.
(In another aisle) CLEAR!

MANAGER BOB
Dick...

Zip it! RICHARD

(SUZY enters in fatigues, holding a gun.)

Everybody DOWN! SUZY

(CINDY drops phone. TOODIE enters.)

All clear! Hooah! TOODIE

Hooah. SUZY

What is this!?! This is unacceptable. RICHARD

Get down, everybody! Hands out, no funny stuff! TOODIE

(CINDY and BETH start to get on their knees.)

(To CINDY and BETH) Not you two. SUZY

Hey, you're... PAUL

Yes? SUZY

That lady. PAUL

Down! Now! SUZY

(Pause; SUZY fires the gun; BLACKOUT.)

END ACT I

ACT II; Scene 1

(AT RISE: 4 A.M. at the store. The usual aisle. Lighting is muted, but not emergency red as in previous act. SOUNDS OF SMALL GUNFIRE AND EXPLOSIONS in the distance. PAUL enters, with a muslin sack over his head, followed by MANAGER BOB and RICHARD. RICHARD's mouth is taped shut. They are exhausted. Halfway down the aisle, the three captives collapse on the ground. TOODIE enters, following.)

TOODIE

Yella yella!

MANAGER BOB

Toodie, stop it. Please.

TOODIE

Yella yella.

PAUL

Toodie, I know that's you.

MANAGER BOB

It is. Fat lot of difference it makes. We've been marching through the store for hours, Toodie. What is the point?

RICHARD

Mmmm mmmmp!

PAUL

I agree.

TOODIE

Yella yella!

(RICHARD, MANAGER BOB, and PAUL rise with much grunting and groaning. SUZY enters and motions TOODIE to keep them moving. TOODIE makes a sign back, very military, and ushers them offstage. SUZY is alone onstage.)

SUZY

He gave so much. He gave everything. Where did you leave your heart, Paul? Let's find it, love. Don't worry, I remember what it looks like. Don't worry. Am I the only one who knows it? Who really knows you? You see how depressed you are, like you've never been anything different? I know you're there, inside there, and because I love you, because I have a duty to you above all others, to this love, I take this risk. I hear your voice from somewhere, an echo maybe, when you were a prisoner, whispering to me. Or it seems like a whisper. I'm so sorry I couldn't hear it then. I might have, I don't know. I hear it now. I feel impossible longing, and

SUZY, *Continued*

that echo, pleading for an answer. This is my reply; this is my answer to your call. This. It's crazy, illegal, plain nuts, but it's all I have. What makes a cause just? To find that part of you that makes living life, that is the cause of joy, of compassion, what could be more right? I still have that part, and it breaks seeing you like this. It kills me. Buck up Suzy, it's worth it. This is a just cause. More than the war, that war that took him. Paul, come back. Come back to me. We'll get it all back. Whatever it takes. We'll get it back.

(CINDY and BETH enter and take snacks off the shelves.)

CINDY

I'm kinda like tired.

BETH

Way past my bedtime. I have never ever been up this late. Ever.

CINDY

Nuh uh. 'Member the slumber party last Saturday, B? 'Member?

BETH

Truth or dare, right?

CINDY

Yeah. Yeah. Oh my God! What Bethany did. Do you remember that?!

BETH

Yes! That was so queer!

SUZY

Let's keep on task, girls. You can go home too. Thanks so much for your help.

CINDY

Anything, Suzy. We feel you. We're all over what you're doing.

BETH

Yeah, all over it.

SUZY

Thanks. Like I said, you should go if you're too tired. Go.

BETH

I'll stay. Cindy is the tired one.

CINDY

Nuh uh.

BETH

Are too. You're buggin'.

CINDY

I am not! Am not am not am not! I can't believe you think that. Judger. You're not the boss of me. Don't make me open up a can on you! I was the one who figured it all out, I'm the one who, who, you know, GOD let me think!

SUZY

Cindy, come over here. That's good. It's alright. I know you're a super trouper. You did great. Get some rest. Does your mother know where you are?

CINDY

Sleepover with Cindy.

BETH

You're Cindy.

CINDY

Duh. Right? With Beth. You're Beth. I'm Cindy.

SUZY

Take a rest in the breakroom, okay?

CINDY

Are you sure?

SUZY

Yes. It's okay.

CINDY

(Yawns) Thanks Suz. Chillaxin'.

(CINDY exits.)

SUZY

Beth, I need you to relieve Toodie so I can speak with him.

BETH

Sure thing. 10-4. Um. I really believe in what you're doing.

SUZY

Thanks, Beth. I appreciate that. Now get a move on, soldier!

(BETH exits. YOGI DEV enters.)

Hello. YOGI DEV

Hello. SUZY

Abiding. YOGI DEV

How did you get in here? SUZY

I never left. YOGI DEV

I cleared the building. SUZY

Ah yes. We were meditating in produce, near the broccoli. YOGI DEV

We? SUZY

We are never alone. YOGI DEV

Then why do I feel that way so often? SUZY

Who is this "I" you refer to? YOGI DEV

Let's take this somewhere else. SUZY

(SUZY ushers YOGI DEV off as TOODIE enters with RICHARD, MANAGER BOB and PAUL, not seeing SUZY.)

TOODIE
We'll bivouac here. Er... *(Motioning to floor)* Yella.

MANAGER BOB
What? What do you want us to do?

PAUL

That's the only word he's been saying all night. Can I take this thing off? Can you? Come ON!

TOODIE

Yella!

MANAGER BOB

He wants us to sit.

(MANAGER BOB helps PAUL and RICHARD sit. RICHARD is beyond exhausted.)

TOODIE

(Indicating a bottle on the shelf) Yella!

MANAGER BOB

WHAT DO YOU WANT NOW!?

(TOODIE is taken aback. He motions to the bottle again, more emphatically.)

TOODIE

Yell...

MANAGER BOB

No! Just tell me, Toodie.

TOODIE

I can't. SPIDERS!

RICHARD

Mmph?

(TOODIE drops his gun, which fires. It glances off the side of a shelf and explodes a jar of a red liquid supplement, which splashes on TOODIE. EVERYONE freezes.)

TOODIE

I'm hit. I'm hit. Man down! Medic!

(PAUL faints; BETH runs in.)

BETH

OH...MY...GOD! Who did you kill?! WHO? TELL ME, you freak!

(BETH notices PAUL slumped against a lower shelf.)

MANAGER BOB

It's not like you think. It's beet root. Taste it.

(TOODIE grimaces, then tastes the liquid.)

TOODIE

Yummers.

(BETH hits TOODIE)

BETH

He's the reason we're doing this, I mean, he's the man she's talking about. How could you even fire a gun? Did you not know it was loaded? OH...MY...

MANAGER BOB

Don't panic. He's okay. He's not hurt, he just passed out. Wait. You said he is, was, is...

BETH

Shut up...maggot.

TOODIE

I didn't kill him. Watch the mouth.

(BETH picks up the gun.)

BETH

I'm relieving you.

TOODIE

Stand down. Stand down. Stand down. How many times I gotta say?

SUZY, V.O., *Off*

(Over loudspeakers) All military personnel to office. Doubletime. *(Pause)* Toodie, this means you.

TOODIE

I gotta go. Gimme that.

(TOODIE grabs gun from BETH. TOODIE removes and pockets the clip, then gives the gun back to BETH.)

BETH

(Mouth open) Wha?? How am I gonna guard 'em, military dude man, without bullets?

TOODIE

Just intimidate.

BETH

Okay.

TOODIE

It's easy. Roger that? Roger dodger sister? Ya got er down? Ya kickin it with the ole instructionales, or do I gotta send you back to basic training, um, ah, maggot?

BETH

Don't ever call me that again, wangsta, or I'll tear your eyes out.

TOODIE

Excellent! Carry on.

(TOODIE exits.)

MANAGER BOB

Just take it easy, er...what's your name?

BETH

Are you talkin to me?

MANAGER BOB

I was just asking...

BETH

Are you talkin to me? *(Getting very DeNiro)* Are you talkin to me? There's nobody else here, who you talkin to? You talkin to me...?

(PAUL rises for a moment, groggy. MANAGER BOB takes the sack off PAUL's head.)

MANAGER BOB

Take it easy, Paul.

BETH

(Threatening MANAGER BOB) I will use this. Don't put it back on. Poor guy.

MANAGER BOB

Who are you again?

BETH

Are you talkin to me? Who are you talking to?

PAUL

Taxi driver?

(PAUL collapses, unconscious.)

BETH

He got it! Sweet! It's him.

MANAGER BOB

Who did you think he was?

BETH

You insist on talking to me. Why? She said it was his favorite movie, as if it's any of your business, mister manager. Tell ya what. Like why don't you shut up for awhile, and I'll get back to my texting. Yes, I think that's how we're gonna fly now. K? Hear me? Or do I have to get medieval?

MANAGER BOB

What?

BETH

(Goading him) What what?

MANAGER BOB

What did you just say?

BETH

You talkin to me?

MANAGER BOB

Just please tell me what you said. His favorite movie. Whose favorite? Paul's?

(BETH pulls out her cellphone and starts texting.)

MANAGER BOB

Dick?

RICHARD

Mmmmp?

MANAGER BOB

I think I know what she's trying to do, and I'm telling you right now if it's that, it's not going to work. I've known Paul all my life, since he was born, and torturing him again is just plain cruel. She can't know what his experiences during the P.O.W. years were. We have to think of something and quick. Cause otherwise, and, well he's a trouper, we know and we know that well, but she might just break him completely. And I can't let that happen!

BETH

You're breaking my consecration, er concentration, stop talking.

MANAGER BOB

Look, Beth.

BETH

I AM TEXING! *(Pause)* You'll just have to wait. They'll bring food, okay, if that's why you won't shut up. Or here...

(BETH grabs a power bar and hits MANAGER BOB with it.)

MANAGER BOB

Ow!

BETH

It has Spirolina so shut up and eat it. Oh my GOD! Stop! Stop! You did NOT!

(BETH types furiously on her cellphone, gasping now and then, as LIGHTS fade to BLACKOUT.)

ACT II; Scene 2

(AT RISE: RICHARD's tiny office; SUZY cleaning her gun. The office is very stark, ordered, and too neat. Every spot is labeled. TOODIE enters, and stands at attention. He waits for her to respond.)

SUZY

At ease.

(TOODIE "relaxes" then begins moving or replacing labels, moving them around in random order. SUZY watches him, and motions him to sit.)

TOODIE

I'm cool.

SUZY

No really. Sit.

TOODIE

Couldn't be more relaxed, sister soldier.

SUZY

Have you had any sleep?

TOODIE

Sleep?

SUZY

Have you slept?

TOODIE

Don't need neat need need it. Ready for some backtelling sir!

SUZY

I need you on your best game, soldier. Take a few deep breaths.

(TOODIE heaves a few quick breaths.)

TOODIE

Ready.

SUZY

Slower.

(TOODIE breathes slower.)

TOODIE

Got it. Yeah, yeah I got it. Relaxed as a cucumber.

SUZY

You sure?

TOODIE

No, yeah. Yeah yeah yeah I got the relaxing thing. Go.

(TOODIE leans against a cabinet.)

SUZY

I need some intel. What was your rank? What did you do?

TOODIE

I was munitions. Just a grunt. I saw a little action, heard of a lot more.

SUZY

Like?

TOODIE

Well...

SUZY

What?

TOODIE

Usually it was just us guys.

SUZY

And?

TOODIE

I usually don't talk about, in front of a girl, don't talk about s-e-x ...you know...

SUZY

You're a gentleman.

TOODIE

Yeah.

SUZY

I'm not interested in the action you're talking about. I want the war action. Same thing, sometimes, god knows, but I want to know what you heard about interrogation, grunts getting captured. And don't skimp on the gory details. I'm a soldier, Toodie, just like you. Men and women both have blood running through their veins, and a trigger only takes a soft squeeze to kill, then it's just a corpse on the other end. And sex isn't an issue. Let's forget you're a gentleman on this one, okay?

TOODIE

Oh okay. Yeah. It'll take some getting used to.

SUZY

You wanna take a minute?

TOODIE

I'm good.

SUZY

Did you ever talk to P.O.W.s?

TOODIE

And how. Especially since I been back. One guy, Eddie, had his balls-

SUZY

Skip that one for now.

TOODIE

Well, I know the basics. Waterboarding.

SUZY

That one was on the daily news. Next.

TOODIE

Forced standing; that happened to a pal of mine. They put him in chains where he had to stand, hands behind his back, and he darn near crucified himself cause he couldn't go much longer without leaning forward.

SUZY

I thought only Americans did that. Go on.

TOODIE

Ah, let's see, there's about a zillion ways of it. Cutting off fingers or toes.

SUZY

Don't think I need to worry about that, I hope. Keep going.

TOODIE

Judas chair but I think that's old school, wire cutters, whips, slapping, cold cell...

SUZY

What's that?

TOODIE

Put a guy naked in a fridge around 50 degrees, douse him with cold water same temp. Rinse, repeat. Really it's worse than it sounds.

SUZY

Go on.

TOODIE

Big one was the ole blowtorch to the skin. Anywhere.

SUZY

Right.

TOODIE

Timmy with the eye patch, he had his eye taken out when he wouldn't give intel. He lives up near White Rabbit in a tent.

SUZY

White Rabbit?

TOODIE

It's a place on BLM land. Remote.

SUZY

I can imagine. Poor guy. Just...keep going.

TOODIE

Well, Timmy, he was dragged by a car for about a mile before they took his eye out.

SUZY

Oh.

TOODIE

Electrocution, that's a good one. You get hung from the ceiling and get some voltage, but I never knew anyone it happened to. One guy, Tommy Bartless, he had his clothes ironed onto him.

SUZY

Ironed?

TOODIE

Yeah, a hot iron.

SUZY

A hot iron.

TOODIE

Yup.

SUZY

Eye taken out.

TOODIE

And hooks, lifts, chains, saws...

SUZY

Okay, okay, okay! It could have been anything. Anything. What would make him crack? What would cause him to blank everything out? How about psychological torture?

TOODIE

Another guy, didn't give me his name, was insulted, then treated well, then back again.

SUZY

Oh?

TOODIE

Yeah, for about a year.

SUZY

So he couldn't tell if they were on the level or not. I've heard.

TOODIE

Has serious trust issues now.

SUZY

I just hope that's it. Something did it. Something had to make him go there. How am I going to jog his memory?

TOODIE

Maybe it won't come back, you know? Maybe it's gone, it happens.

SUZY

I can't believe that. I won't. You know that's the whole point of this. To get his memory back, wake him up, something! Your orders are to revive him.

TOODIE

The whole point. The big reasonoli. Yeah yeah I got it.

(There is a knock on the door. TOODIE stands at military attention and looks to SUZY for orders.)

SUZY

Go ahead.

(TOODIE opens the door. YOGI DEV enters.)

TOODIE

Rank and serial number? Which outfit you from?

YOGI DEV

I'm a specialist.

SUZY

What can we do for you?

YOGI DEV

If you love something...

SUZY

Let it free. If it never comes back, it never was yours...

YOGI DEV

But it could come back.

SUZY

What difference does it make to you? Who are you?

YOGI DEV

Someone who cares. Why are you doing this?

TOODIE

Hey Suzy, can I put him in the brig? Do we have a brig?

SUZY

That won't be necessary, soldier. I saw Paul...and he didn't know a thing. And I need to have him back. I need our connection. I want him, only him, and I will do everything it takes, everything it takes to, everything it takes -

YOGI DEV

Including opening up to him?

TOODIE

Wow.

SUZY

I tried that.

YOGI DEV

What you are doing now will only leave both of you separate for much much longer.

(BLACKOUT.)

ACT II; Scene 3

(AT RISE: The market aisle. PAUL is still unconscious, MANAGER BOB is resting, and RICHARD is nearly comatose. BETH is still texting. TOODIE enters.)

TOODIE

What died? *(ALL turn to him; he pauses.)* What did I say? Geez, the Ibuprofens are on the top shelf, guys. Or if ya need somethin' stronger, and it sure as Shirley Temple looks like it, ya can take chamomile and Valerian root see, tea it up for about five minutes, then chase it with a shot of Robitussin. *(Pause)* You can take that to the bank. *(Pause)* What's up with Paulo?

MANAGER BOB

Surprised you noticed. Paul? Paul?

TOODIE

Orders are to wake him. Give him a slap.

MANAGER BOB

I already did.

TOODIE

Well it didn't work, did it?

MANAGER BOB

Toodie, give it a rest.

TOODIE

Slap 'im! That's an order.

MANAGER BOB

I told you I already did. Toodie, could you...

(MANAGER BOB lightly taps PAUL's face. YOGI DEV enters.)

YOGI DEV

Interesting.

MANAGER BOB

C'mon y'all. Really. Gimme some breathing room here. I got it under control.

BETH

Should somebody like call an ambulance?

(ALL murmur.)

TOODIE

Or maybe the manager.

BETH

Duh. Wait... *(Texting; to herself)* Oh no you didn't.

MANAGER BOB

I am the manager.

YOGI DEV

You don't look like the manager.

TOODIE

Listen up, I'm the manager now. Now slap 'im. A little harder. That'll do the trickers.

BETH

Slap him. If you're the manager, you can slap him. Just do it and get it over with.

(MANAGER BOB slaps PAUL a little harder.)

MANAGER BOB

There.

TOODIE

Again.

MANAGER BOB

Toodie, you're overtired.

TOODIE

I am not! Orders are to have him awake ay fuckin sap, okay? Do it!

MANAGER BOB

Why don't you?

YOGI DEV

He doesn't dare. You're closer to him.

MANAGER BOB

He's a close friend; I don't want to hit him. Is that what friends do in your world? Total strangers kill each other but good friends only maim. Okay Okay I'll try again, but only because if he can speak to her...this madness might stop.

(MANAGER BOB slaps PAUL again, trying to rouse him. PAUL mumbles.)

BETH

It's working.

MANAGER BOB

Paulie?

TOODIE

I think he needs another slap.

MANAGER BOB

Toodie, really, take a breather.

TOODIE

I'm already breathing.

MANAGER BOB

Paul? We're here with you.

PAUL

Where am I?

TOODIE

You slapped him too hard.

MANAGER BOB

It's me. Bob. Your pal, remember? Come on, you remember me, ole buddy.

PAUL

Leaping.

MANAGER BOB

Paul?

TOODIE

Way too hard.

BETH

He's delirious.

(PAUL sees RICHARD.)

PAUL

Paul R. Jones. Private. 624787.

MANAGER BOB

Paul, it's me. Bob.

BETH

I think he still like thinks he's in like Iraq still probably.

TOODIE

Well he isn't. Why would he be thinking that?

MANAGER BOB

Take the tape off Richards's mouth.

TOODIE

Maybe you should slap him again. Who's Richard?

MANAGER BOB

Him. The general manager.

TOODIE

Oh yeah. Right a roonster.

(TOODIE rips the tape off RICHARD's mouth.)

RICHARD

Sir...

(RICHARD passes out then lets out a snore.)

PAUL

Am I?

MANAGER BOB

The store. You're in the store, in EarthFoods. With regular people.

BETH

Excuse you? I'm not just people.

MANAGER BOB

Let me help you up.

(MANAGER BOB helps PAUL to his feet.)

PAUL

I'm not...there.

MANAGER BOB

Where?

PAUL

Captive. Is it over? I remember praying for rescue, for you all, for...

MANAGER BOB

For what?

PAUL

For one person, for love, for...but I was abandoned. Yeah. I was, I am...Is that Toodie?

TOODIE

Yeah man. I'm here for ya bro.

PAUL

But you marched us around all night, just like those towel heads who kept me...and they didn't WANT anything! Just wanted to see another dirty American suffer...

MANAGER BOB

It's over, Paul.

(PATROLPERSON BETTY and PATROLPERSON JEN enter, followed closely by SHIRLY, who runs to MANAGER BOB. PAUL freezes, seeing the guns.)

SHIRLY

Robert, are you all right? I tried calling you after our show and ice cream time, and you never stay past closing. So I tried to feel your aura and astral project to you but I think an entity was trying to block it. By then, I think it was, what was it, yes, it was about 5 am. In the morning! So I called here and got the message on the machine. It was horrible! By then I just had to call the police. Oh, I was so worried, punkin. Is my boo boo okey dokey, huh? Is he? Is he? He looks so tuckered.

MANAGER BOB

I'm fine, poodiekins. Tired, but okay.

SHIRLY

I was so worried, woo wookins.

MANAGER BOB

Boo boo is with you now.

SHIRLY

Ooooh, Boo.

PATROLPERSON JEN

Ma'am.

SHIRLY

Oh...yes. Bob, what happened?

MANAGER BOB

Some lady took us all hostage.

PATROLPERSON BETSY

A woman? She, she took you hostage? That's a very serious allegation.

(SUZY and CINDY enter. EVERYONE tenses.)

TOODIE

She's the one. Be careful. She took me down. *(OTHERS look at him.)* I overdid the gingko. Don't touch me.

CINDY

I wouldn't touch you if you were the last chance at the prom, soldier boy.

BETH

You okay, Cin-Cin?

CINDY

Yeah, got great shutface. Way baby. You?

BETH

Tommy texted Karl went dumb gaga at Julies party.

CINDY

He did not!

BETH

So sick!

PATROLPERSON JEN

Okay, okay! Is this the woman who allegedly took you hostage?

MANAGER BOB

Not the girl.

CINDY

I'm not a girl.

TOODIE

Are too.

CINDY

Am not.

TOODIE

Too.

PATROLPERSON JEN

Stop! Which one then?

SUZY

Me.

PATROLPERSON BETSY

There was a report of gunfire.

YOGI DEV

I disarmed them.

PATROLPERSON JEN

Hmmph. Is there truth to this?

SUZY

Yes. I created a situation. I held everyone against their will. That man is my husband.

CINDY

Husband?

YOGI DEV

You're married to this man?

SUZY

We were married two years ago. A year later, we were stationed in different countries.

TOODIE

Do I need a lawyer?

PATROLPERSON JEN

Everyone slow down. I don't see any weapons, just a lot of folks who are very tired.

PATROLPERSON BETSY

But the party's over.

PATROLPERSON JEN

Who is your alleged husband?

SUZY

That man. Paul.

PATROLPERSON JEN

Sir?

RICHARD

Yes.

PATROLPERSON JEN

Not you.

PAUL

I don't know! I...can't.

SUZY

Paul...

(PATROLPERSON BETSY's radio beeps.)

PATROLPERSON JEN

I got this. Go ahead.

(PATROLPERSON BETSY exits.)

SUZY

We were married. And we loved each other. I love you so much. Don't you feel it too?

PAUL

Please. *(Turns head away)* I don't know you! I can't!

PATROLPERSON JEN

He doesn't know you. Now for a gun being fired, and holding others against their will. Those are serious allegations.

SUZY

Yes, I took everyone hostage. I fired a gun. I'll go quietly. Just take me away. Take me away from here. Anywhere.

(SUZY holds out her wrists. PATROLPERSON BETSY enters.)

PATROLPERSON BETSY

Hey, hurry it up, we got a call about some deer.

PATROLPERSON JEN

They can attack.

PAUL

Deer?

SUZY

What did you say?

PAUL

Deer. I remember...deer.

(PATROLPERSON JEN and BETSY hold SUZY back, who strains towards PAUL.)

SUZY

Deer. Jumping over our fence.

PAUL

Every morning. They'd been sleeping...

SUZY

...In our yard. When we came out. At first, we didn't know how they got there. Such a big...

PAUL

Stop it! No yard, no deer, no wife, nothing. No war. Nothing.

SUZY

The deer, Paul. Stay with me. Please stay with me.

PAUL

The fence. Our property. Ours. The first morning, when we moved in, we saw them sleeping.

SUZY

Our yard.

PAUL

Our new yard. With a long fence. I wondered how they got in, wondered how they would get out. *(Pause)* How would I get out!? I have no country, all those I loved...where are they? Where are you? Up at dawn, kicked up, moldy rice, no English spoken.

SUZY

They were so cute, remember? Remember the does. Remember the family, nestled together. We'd watch them.

PAUL

Steel biting my wrists.

SUZY

Just the fence, that's all. Paul? The first time, when we first moved in. The gate was locked and we didn't have a key for it.

PAUL

Where was I? You brought out the carrots. That was you? The deer, tell me about the deer.

SUZY

You didn't want to encourage them.

PAUL

In the dream, I thought, this is where they live. And I'm invading.

SUZY

You grabbed the carrots.

PAUL

I tried to be quiet. Just drop the carrots near the fawn.

SUZY

You got closer, but stepped on a twig.

PAUL

They all looked up at the same time. Big wide eyes.

Big black eyes. Staring.

SUZY

They all got up in unison. At the table, finishing a meal. The intel said to look in the bedroom. There was no bedroom, just the...eyes, staring.

PAUL

We didn't know what they would do.

SUZY

I thought the bigger one might attack.

PAUL

But they moved towards the fence.

SUZY

Keeping them in. A pen.

PAUL

Go on, Paul. Come on buddy.

TOODIE

They were trapped? The animals in the backyard, like.

BETH

They...

PAUL

They were never captives. Not really.

SUZY

I'd never seen it like that before. Up close. There they were. So graceful. Airborne.

PAUL

One by one.

SUZY

Over that fence. Every morning.

PAUL

Every morning. They jumped.

SUZY

Over the fence. As if it were nothing. At all.

PAUL

SUZY

All of them. Almost with joy. We watched them every day after that.

PAUL

Every morning. We watch them leap. So beautiful.

SUZY

So free.

PAUL

Suzy? Suzy?

SUZY

I'm here, Paul.

PATROLPERSON JEN

You know her?

PAUL

Suzy? Help me! I...I can't see! Where am I?

(SUZY runs to PAUL and holds him. He struggles, tears at himself.)

SUZY

Paul...shhhhh, I'm here. We're all here. Here for you.

PAUL

Suzy, they won't let me go. I can't jump the fence. It's too tall. It's too damn tall. And I'm so tired. Where are you?

SUZY

Here, my darling, right here. We're all here.

(PAUL begins shaking.)

CINDY

Oh wow. Like look at him!

BETH

He's shaking! Like all weird and stuff. Somebody help!

(ALL surround PAUL)

SUZY

We're here, Paul. We're all here.

PATROLPERSON JEN

I'll get a medic. Betsy?

PATROLPERSON BETTY

Making the call.

YOGI DEV

Wait! I've heard of this. He's releasing the trauma.

TOODIE

He's freaking out. Make the call! This is what Gurney did before he left for the woods again!

YOGI DEV

Let him be! Hear me out!

(ALL listen to YOGI DEV.)

PATROLPERSON JEN

What is it?

YOGI DEV

In the African wilds, if a Zebra got attacked by a lion or another predator, and somehow managed to get away, the Zebra would go to the rest of the herd.

TOODIE

Well that makes sense. That makes a whole buncha sense. Ain't jackin' you on this one.

RICHARD

Who was in charge? What did they do?

YOGI DEV

No one was in charge! The Zebra would go to the middle of the herd—right into the middle of it, and start shaking. It would go on for awhile, with the herd around it.

PATROLPERSON BETSY

Safe. A safe place.

YOGI DEV

After the animal stopped, the trauma was gone. It would get up and the other more obvious wounds would be tended. Let him shake.

PATROLPERSON JEN

They're doing that in VA hospitals. Just thought of it. Everyone, make a safe space. Paul, we're here for you.

(ALL offer consolation; ad libbing. "Paul, you're safe. We care, etc.")

SUZY

He's starting to relax. Give us some room!

(ALL except SUZY back off.)

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