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Butterfly Wings

by G. Bruce Smith

A Contemporary Work For Bare Stage

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CHARACTERS

ZANDER; 21-22, American, smart, intellectual, shy, sensitive.

DONALD; Zander’s father, late 40s, early 50s, computer programmer.

RAJIV; 21-22, Indian, smart, athletic, confident.

SARITA; Mid 40s, Rajiv’s mother, Indian, controlling, angry, bitter.

MAGGIE; 21-22, smart, cheeky, focused.

CHORUS; unseen by the other characters except during the cemetery scene. The Chorus is played by 3 to 10 actors with 5 the ideal number. Note: In script, CHORUS denotes 2 or more members of the Chorus while CHORUS 1, CHORUS 2, etc. denotes an individual member of the chorus.

TIME

Now.

ETC.

STAGING: Butterfly Wings can and should be produced very simply on a bare stage, utilizing theatrical cubes

COSTUMES:
ZANDER, DONALD, RAJIV and MAGGIE wear simple, everyday street clothes for the most part.
SARITA’s costumes should include several saris.
CHORUS costumes range from fairly simple to elaborate, depending on the scene. Scarves and fabric can also be used effectively.
Butterfly Wings
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(IN BLACK, SARITA enters, wearing a beautiful sari and carrying a lantern, which provides the only light on stage. She moves slowly, gracefully. She turns her back to the audience and kneels. Using only her hands and arms, she creates an Indian inspired graceful dance, as if her hands are creating a butterfly ballet. At the end of her movement, she blows out the flame in the lantern and exits. The sound of a drum follows; a series of single beats. LIGHTS RISE on ZANDER and DONALD. They face each other, with a distance between them.)

DONALD

Hello, son.

ZANDER

Did you get the news?

(DONALD nods yes, almost imperceptibly.)

ZANDER

You were right. About butterfly wings.

CHORUS 1

It was just a touch.

CHORUS 2

Soft. So soft.

CHORUS 3

Barely perceptible.

CHORUS 1

Like a butterfly kiss.

CHORUS 2

A soft breeze.

CHORUS 3

A faint flutter.

(LIGHTS UP on RAJIV and SARITA. SARITA's back is turned to RAJIV.)

RAJIV

Did you hear what I said? (Silence) I said, did you hear me?! (Silence) Listen to me! Answer me! (Silence)
CHORUS 1
It was just a touch.

CHORUS 2
A faint flutter.

ZANDER
(Beat) You were right.

DONALD
(Beat) I don't know if I can ever forgive you.

(BLACKOUT; the sound of a drum, a series of single beats. ZANDER, DONALD, RAJIV and SARITA exit. LIGHTS UP.)

CHORUS
In spring are the butterflies set free,
To dance on the wind, to seek their lives,
Each on its own wing.

CHORUS 1
And yet, hesitating, as if uncertain in its frailty,
As if seeking the sweetest flower to light upon,
The safest branch to rest on.

CHORUS 2
To the human eye, they are free,
Light as a laugh of glee,
Or soft as a long, low sigh.

CHORUS 3
And man calls out, "Fly!"

ONE YEAR EARLIER. LATE WINTER
AN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

(ZANDER, RAJIV and MAGGIE enter. They are all 21-22, seniors in college.)

MAGGIE
He's such an idiot!

RAJIV
(Imitating one of their professors) I want you to take the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and argue its justification from a divine command perspective.
God is forgiving and loves everyone.

Ah yes, the victims too. They will live in peace, in heaven, forever and ever.

Amen.

Then discuss it from a natural law perspective.

Do good, avoid evil.

Respect others.

But human survival is good!

Whose survival? The Japanese or the Americans?

Therein lies the rub.

Ethical egoists and Hiroshima!

Didn't our esteemed professor write his thesis on that?

And then, there's my favorite. Utilitarianism, as it applies to nuclear devastation.

(Reciting) Utilitarian theory is applied on a moral community which consists of all sentient beings.

What bullshit. God, I hope I don't have to take philosophy in law school.

It's required. Philosophy 101 for lawyers: The utilitarian value of the almighty dollar.

Stuff it, Rajiv. I'm going to work for the ACLU.
ZANDER
You're going to have to get an A in this course if you want to walk the hallowed halls of Harvard.

MAGGIE
Who, among us, has the 4.0?

RAJIV
Why you, of course. I, lowly towel head that I am, have seen my grade point average plunge to a 3.95, just this last semester.

ZANDER
Tsk, tsk.

RAJIV
And what happened to your perfect record, Zander?

ZANDER
Do you want me to explain my plunge into imperfect purgatory from an ethical egoist perspective or shall I invoke divine command?

MAGGIE
Right. God commanded you to get a B in badminton.

The shame!

RAJIV
You know I'm no good at sports.

ZANDER
Badminton isn't a sport. It's an excuse to exercise a loose wrist.

RAJIV
Funny Brahmin.

ZANDER
We can't all be jock blockheads like you, Rajiv.

RAJIV
You both hate it that I break all stereotypes. (In an exaggerated Indian accent) The smart kid from New Delhi doesn't write software, but he's the captain of the basketball team.

MAGGIE
Why do we put up with him?

ZANDER
Worse, why do we go to all his games?
MAGGIE
You go to all his games. I only go when I'm bored and want to see his skinny legs sticking out of his baggy shorts.

RAJIV
Girls love my legs.

ZANDER
Seriously, guys, what are you going to write in your paper?

MAGGIE
We're going to write what we always write. Bullshit. With footnotes. And we'll get A’s.

ZANDER
I don't know, maybe you can make a good case for Hiroshima.

RAJIV
Yeah, right. Just like you can make a case for this war.

ZANDER
Well, we got rid of a despot.

MAGGIE
What's up with you?

ZANDER
No, I mean...well, we did get rid of a despot. It's not always black and white.

MAGGIE
Oh, God, are you preparing for your next earnest discussion with Daddy?

ZANDER
Don't remind me.

RAJIV
Just two more weeks to spring break. And it's off you go to spend a whole week with Papa.

MAGGIE
Maybe you'll have good news by then.

RAJIV
Early admission into grad school. That will make Papa very happy.

MAGGIE
I can't believe you haven't heard from anyone yet. With your grades and GREs.

(ZANDER remains silent.)
RAJIV
What? What's up?

MAGGIE
You have heard! Did you get rejected by one of them?

ZANDER
No.

MAGGIE
What is it, then?

ZANDER
I…I didn't…

RAJIV
Didn't what?

ZANDER
I never…applied.

(Beat.)

MAGGIE
You're shitting us.

ZANDER
No.

RAJIV
What the—?

ZANDER
I don't want to go to grad school.

MAGGIE
Why the hell did you lie to us?

ZANDER
I don't know. I just…Sorry.

RAJIV
Your dad is going to kill you. Hoist you on a petard of his broken dreams.

ZANDER
I know, I know. I can't go home for spring break.
MAGGIE
What the hell are you going to do when you graduate?

ZANDER
I don't know. Get a job.

MAGGIE
Good thinking. I hear world lit majors are in high demand at McDonald's.

RAJIV
What are you going to tell your father?

ZANDER
I don't know. The truth? Oh, shit.

MAGGIE
Tell him you're an ethical egoist.

RAJIV
Your happiness is the highest moral good!

MAGGIE
You better email him. After spring break.

RAJIV
Yes, yes! I vote for the coward's way!

ZANDER
Come on, guys. I'm dying here. It's so easy for you two. Poor little rich girl Maggie and a handsome inheritance check for the Third World Brahmin.

MAGGIE
In case you didn't know, the trust fund baby's burden is heavier than the white man's burden.

RAJIV
And as for me, I may be taking a six-month trip around the world, but it's in search of a higher good.

ZANDER
Stifle it, would you! Both of you! The clever act is old. I mean, what are we doing with our lives? Harvard Law? First class hotels in Paris? Give me a break!

MAGGIE
Get over it, Zander. Your crisis of conscience is so outré. (Silence) Okay, boys and girls, I'm out of here. Coming Rajiv?

(RAJIV shakes his head no.)
MAGGIE
Fine. Let me know when you two have outgrown adolescence.

(MAGGIE exits.)

ZANDER
I'm sorry, Rajiv. Damn! I just open my mouth and out it comes.

RAJIV
Zander, you're the nicest guy on this campus. You don't need to apologize.

ZANDER
There's some kind of weird stuff that happens when we get together with Maggie.

I know.

ZANDER
When it's just us, it's…I don't know.

RAJIV
It's different. It's…good.

Yeah.

(Beat.)

RAJIV
But I have to say, I wonder about you. You sound like you're turning into a closet fascist.

ZANDER
Nah, it's not that. It's just that I've been…I don’t know…thinking a lot. About a lot of things.

RAJIV
You think too much, my friend. You should do what I'm doing. Take a few months off after graduation, see the world, get laid a lot, have fun. We're young only once.

ZANDER
Like I have the money.

RAJIV
You better make up your mind soon. You're going to have to tell your dad something.

ZANDER
I know, I know. All I want is to get as far away from him as I can.
RAJIV
You've got to stand up to him. *(ZANDER remains silent; beat)* If it makes you feel any better, you're not the only one who's got to deal with parental craziness over spring break.

What do you mean?

ZANDER
My mother's flying out here.

No way.

RAJIV
She's gone off the deep end. Sending me pictures of my bride-to-be in Delhi.

Are you serious? An arranged marriage?

RAJIV
It still happens, you know.

Who is she?

RAJIV
I don't remember her name. The whole thing is ridiculous.

Wow.

RAJIV
*(Imitating his mother)* You are coming home, Rajiv, to help me run your father's business. What kind of son have you become? I can't sleep at night; my heart is getting weaker every day. You need to get married, settle down, have a family. Do you want me to die without having grandchildren? And what is this nonsense about you traveling after school? I told your father never to let you go to the United States. I told him not to leave you any money. But your father never listened to me. He was as selfish as you are.

What are you going to do?

RAJIV
I'm not going back. I've applied for a green card through the lottery.

ZANDER
And what if you don't win the lottery?
RAJIV
If I have to, I'll find an American girl and marry her.

ZANDER
You better start dating then.

RAJIV
These girls? Here? Anyway, who has time?

ZANDER
I thought maybe you were out on a date last night. I came by your place but you were out.

RAJIV
I was at the library late. Speaking of the library, let's go my friend. We have lots of studying to do.

ZANDER
I can't. I'm doing an article on this student here, a veteran, who adopted a little boy in the war and brought him home with him. I'm meeting him in half an hour.

RAJIV
Okay, later.

ZANDER
Rajiv, the library closed at 9 last night. I came over at 10.

RAJIV
I took a late walk. I've got to go. Good luck with the article.

( RAJIV exits. ZANDER watches after him a few beats and exits. LIGHTS DIM. SARITA, RAJIV's mother, 40s, enters. She walks slowly across the stage, as if in a trance. )

CHORUS 1
Look! She comes again.

CHORUS 2
Asleep and yet not.

CHORUS 3
Heavy with dreams.

CHORUS 1
Last night, she danced in her sleep.

CHORUS 2
A dance of joy. She was young again!
CHORUS 3
She was free!

CHORUS 1
In her dream, in her dance,
She was Psyche and seduced Eros.
She flew with the gods and was touched by divine love.

CHORUS 2
But tonight she is bound by tribulations of mortals.
She does not dance, but moves like a stone through the night.

CHORUS
Poor Sarita!

CHORUS 3
It is of her son she dreams,
And she is sorely troubled.

CHORUS
Poor Sarita!

CHORUS 3
Like a god, her son changes his shape.

CHORUS 1
He is a beast in the night, prowling for—

CHORUS 2
Hush!

CHORUS 3
Do not say it!

CHORUS 1
Look! Sarita speaks!

SARITA
Where are the gods?

CHORUS
The gods have abandoned her.

SARITA
WHERE ARE THE GODS? (Falls to her knees) RAJIV!!!

(BLACKOUT. SARITA exits. LIGHTS UP: ZANDER is sitting, deep in thought, typing on a laptop.)
CHORUS 1
This is the story of a man, a boy and a war.

CHORUS 2
This is the story of a soldier with a wounded heart…

CHORUS 3
Who found love in an orphanage of boys.

CHORUS 1
Some boys were without limbs.

CHORUS 2
Some without hope.

CHORUS 3
All without parents.

CHORUS 1
All without love.

CHORUS 2
This is the story of an Army captain.

CHORUS 3
And an eight-year-old boy whose parents were killed by a mortar.

(ZANDER stops typing. He is lost in his thoughts.)

CHORUS 1
Did this Army captain kill?

CHORUS 2
Yes, he killed.

CHORUS 3
He was a soldier.

CHORUS 1
But he killed.

CHORUS 3
He was a soldier. He carried out orders.

CHORUS 2
He was deeply troubled.
CHORUS 3
He dreamed the dreams of soldiers.

CHORUS 2
Unimaginable things.

CHORUS 1
And he speaks of it?

CHORUS 2
Some of it.

CHORUS 3
Most is unspeakable.

CHORUS 2
His soul was heavy with sorrow.

CHORUS 1
Yes, yes, but he—

CHORUS 3
Loved this boy.

CHORUS 2
This orphan.

CHORUS 3
His heart led him to the orphans.

CHORUS 2
He and the other warriors.

CHORUS 1
Hah! The warriors cared for the orphans?

CHORUS 2
Yes.

CHORUS 1
To salve their guilt!

CHORUS 3
To find...humanity.

(ZANDER is still lost in his thoughts. MAGGIE enters.)
You seen Rajiv?

What? Oh…um…no.

You know, I'd really like a cigarette.

You don't smoke.

I don't? You writing your philosophy paper?

No.

Look, Zander, I'm sorry I got kind of weird the other day.

That's all right. You're just…just…

A bitch. I know.

That's not the word I would have used. I was going to say that you're just…spirited.

Spirited. That's such a Zander word. No, I'm a bitch.

(ZANDER smiles.)

Okay.

I really do want to work for the ACLU, you know.

Okay.

Or maybe Amnesty International. Ah hell, maybe I'll get myself to a nunnery.
ZANDER
That's good.

MAGGIE
I can't help it if I'm rich. A rich bitch. God, I'm turning into my mother. (Beat) Do you remember much about your mother?

ZANDER
Not really. I was too young. It seems I vaguely remember her singing to me at bedtime. But who knows if those memories are just the creation of a child's longing. (Beat) Did Rajiv tell you his mother is flying out for spring break?

MAGGIE
No way.

ZANDER
He told me he's not going back to India. Even if he has to marry an American girl to get a green card.

MAGGIE
Well, that will be a marriage of convenience in more ways than one.

ZANDER
What do you mean?

MAGGIE
Nothing. So, what are you writing?

ZANDER
Huh? Oh, I'm writing an article for the paper. It's actually an amazing story. There's a student here, a soldier who recently came home. When he was over there, he adopted an eight-year-old war orphan. The guy really loves this kid.

MAGGIE
Really?

ZANDER
He told me a lot of soldiers volunteer at orphanages over there.

MAGGIE
The Pentagon propaganda machine is working overtime.

ZANDER
C'mon Maggie stop being so cynical. This is a good guy, who's done a really good thing.

MAGGIE
He's a soldier. He's trained to kill. Maybe he even killed this kid's parents.
ZANDER

That's really low.

MAGGIE

Wake up, Zander.

ZANDER

You know something? I've got to go.

MAGGIE

You're playing right into the hands of this corrupt government.

ZANDER

Goodbye Maggie.

(ZANDER exits.)

MAGGIE

Shit.

(MAGGIE exits. LIGHTS DIM: Two members of the CHORUS move slowly to center stage, kneel in unison, side by side, and bow their heads.)

CHORUS

They kneel at the grave of fallen soldiers.

CHORUS 1

The Army captain.

CHORUS 2

And his son.

CHORUS 3

But these are warriors, and warriors killed the boy's mother and father.

CHORUS 1

These were his friends. His brothers in arms.

(ZANDER enters and kneels behind the two members of the CHORUS who are kneeling.)

CHORUS

The young student follows them to the graveyard. Like a supplicant, searching for answers.

(DONALD, ZANDER'S father, 50's, enters.)
CHORUS
The father of the student, he stands defiantly.
He bows to nobody.

DONALD
Stop the war!

CHORUS
Support our troops! Bring them home!

DONALD
Stop the war!

CHORUS
End the killing!

DONALD
Stop the war!

(DONALD exits; beat. ZANDER slowly rises. He watches the kneeling figures for a beat or two and exits. BLACKOUT. LIGHTS UP on RAJIV. He is reading the college newspaper. ZANDER enters.)

ZANDER
Hey.

RAJIV
This is good, Zander. Really good.

ZANDER
Thanks. The material was there. I just told their story.

RAJIV
It makes you think.

ZANDER
Today I followed them to the graveyard where some of his buddies are buried. He took his son with him. He told me he and his boy have nightmares.

RAJIV
It's weird. He admits to killing people, but then he adopts this kid. I guess he's ambivalent about the war.

ZANDER
But not about his troops. I believe there's a kind of...love...between men in war that we can never fully understand unless we experience it ourselves.
RAJIV
I used to love old American war movies. When I was a kid in Delhi, I would watch war movies, comedies, romances, all of it. It wasn't Bollywood for me, it was America. I think that's why I started to play basketball because that was the only major American sport played in India.

ZANDER
We're hardly perfect.

RAJIV
Of course. But you are the land of the free, as trite as that sounds. I feel free here. I think – and this is very Indian of me – I was an American in a previous life.

ZANDER
Have you told your mother you want to stay here?

RAJIV
Not yet. And she flies in tomorrow.

ZANDER
I leave in the morning and I'm dreading it. I still don't know what I'm going to tell my dad or what I'm going to do after graduation. But…I've been thinking a lot.

RAJIV
Me, too.

ZANDER
What about?

RAJIV
Just stuff. You?

ZANDER
Spring break, my father, the war, graduation, grades. And uh…I've been thinking about…us. I mean, like, will we keep in touch after graduation.

RAJIV
Of course we will. You're my best friend. (Beat) You haven't missed a single basketball game, have you? I see you in the stands.

ZANDER
The games are fun.

RAJIV
Why don't you come see me after the game?

ZANDER
I don't know; you're busy. I can't exactly follow you into the locker room.
RAJIV
Next time, just come down and say hey. If we win, go crazy.

ZANDER
Okay. I will.

(RAJIV reaches over and gently places his hand on top of ZANDER's.)

RAJIV
Goodbye, my friend. Good luck with your father.

(RAJIV exits.)

CHORUS 1
It was just a touch.

CHORUS 2
Soft. So soft.

(ZANDER moves the hand that RAJIV touched closer to his face, as if something has changed. He marvels at it and smiles. He exits.)

CHORUS 1
Woe the man who seeks to hold
That which will not be contained.

CHORUS 2
For when a drum beats inside,
No matter how distant . .

CHORUS 3
Then must one move
To folly or freedom; it matters not.

Dad? Dad, I'm home!

(ZANDER enters.)

DONALD
Zander! Let me look at you!

(DONALD gives ZANDER a quick and awkward bear hug.)

DONALD
You look good. You've been studying hard?
ZANDER
Yes, Dad.

DONALD
Your last spring break as an undergraduate! Damn, that's exciting. Next year at this time, you'll be starting to think about your dissertation. You hear from any schools yet?

No, not yet.

DONALD
Should be soon, right? Is your first choice still—

ZANDER
Dad, I don't want to talk about school. That's why they call it spring break. We get a break from all that.

DONALD
But graduate school is different. I mean, you'll be surrounded by really smart kids, hell, not even kids any more, young adults, smart men and women, like you.

ZANDER
Yeah, well, I've got to get through this semester first.

DONALD
What does that mean? Your grades slipping?

No, Dad, my grades are fine.

DONALD
Of course, they are. You're a smart kid. And you're going to have the kind of opportunity I never had.

That's right, Dad.

DONALD
You want a brandy? Let's have a brandy, talk philosophy, I've been reading Kierkegaard. And more Nietzsche. Damn, I miss our talks; we'd stay up all night, wouldn't we? Let me get you a brandy.

No, thanks.

DONALD
You hungry? Want me to fix you something to eat?
ZANDER
Naw, thanks. I'm not hungry. You go ahead.

DONALD
Already eaten. Tell you what, let's play some chess, that's always relaxed you.

ZANDER
No, dad, let's just…talk…a little.

DONALD
Yeah, yeah, sure. Tell me what they've been teaching you. I can keep up, son, you know I can.

ZANDER
Sure, Dad, but I just want to talk about ordinary stuff, okay?

DONALD
Okay, you start.

ZANDER
I was wondering if we could go to a basketball game sometime this week.

DONALD
What?

ZANDER
Basketball. I've really gotten into it lately. My friend Rajiv, I've told you about him, he's captain of the team.

DONALD
You got a jock friend?

ZANDER
Actually, Rajiv's brilliant but that's not the point.

DONALD
Sports are for losers.

ZANDER
You know, that's bull. Because of you I never tried out for any sport. I struggled through P.E. all through high school and ended up taking badminton last semester. How pathetic is that? Who knows, I might have been good at something. And I think I missed out, not being part of a team.

DONALD
Most jocks are dumb shits who end up living lazy lives and don't care enough about this world to want to change it. Believe me, I know.
ZANDER
You know because you got to play football in high school.

DONALD
Yeah, and I know the kind of idiots they were and the kind of idiots they've become. I work with them, a bunch of pasty faced, corporate managers with big bellies and dull eyes. Weekends they're with wives in malls, or downloading porn off the internet, or getting numb in front of the TV. That's no life. Don't go looking for that life.

ZANDER
But we never went to one game together. Not one.

DONALD
A good brain, that's all you need. Keep it active and everything else will follow. Now that you're away, I've got to work extra hard to keep my brain going. But I do it, you know I do, right? Keep active, keep involved, make a difference in this world. I've always said that, haven't I?

ZANDER
Yes, Dad, you've said that.

DONALD
It's all chaos theory. We're all connected and we can make a difference, a big difference in this world. That's what I'm going for. It's just like what Lorenz said, that small changes can produce large changes in the long-term outcome. Butterfly wings, you remember that, right?

ZANDER
Yeah, I remember.

DONALD
Okay, tell me. What did Lorenz say about butterfly wings?

ZANDER
I'm not in class now.

DONALD
Just do it for your old man, huh? Come on.

ZANDER
Lorenz wondered whether the flap of a butterfly's wings in Brazil could set off a tornado in Texas.

DONALD
That's right. That's why I'm out there every chance I get protesting this damn war. I may be small, like a butterfly, just beating my wings, but I could make a tornado. Right? A tornado, son.
ZANDER
Sure, Dad. But I think Lorenz was speaking metaphorically.

DONALD
I've flapped my wings real hard with you, too. Raising a son like you, now that could be a storm that changes the world.

ZANDER
Don't count on it.

DONALD
I know every boy should have a mother, she was a saint, you know that, don't you, and we lost her so young. But I think she'd be pretty satisfied with the job I've done to raise you. And I know she'd be proud as hell of you.

ZANDER
You're probably right, Dad, but—

DONALD
All we've got is each other. No cousins, no grandparents. It's just us. And I've had a good life, raising you and trying to teach you what I can about the world. Though you never really needed me to teach you much. You're smart, Zander, really smart. That's a gift, and don't forget it.

ZANDER
I appreciate that you sacrificed—

DONALD
Raising you has been no sacrifice. Don't ever say that. You're one hell of a young man. I just want you to remember some of the things I say. I know I might not have a college degree, but I've taught myself a lot of things. And there are some things I know that you don't, not because you're not smart, but because I'm older, I've got more experience. Am I right?

ZANDER
Yeah, Dad. You're right.

DONALD
What do you say about that brandy? We don't even have to talk, I promise. We can watch TV, just chill, isn't that what you kids say? Chill? Yeah, we can chill and watch this PBS special on the war.

ZANDER
There you go again, with your PBS specials that fire you up to protest something that's complicated.

DONALD
There's nothing complicated about this war. It's wrong.
ZANDER  
War isn't black and white. Good things can come out of it.

DONALD  
No, nothing good comes out of it.

ZANDER  
Sometimes you're pretty narrow-minded.

DONALD  
Yeah? I think people would call me a man of convictions.

ZANDER  
Convictions, huh? You know, I just did this story for the school paper about this Army captain who adopted this kid in the war. He's not an evil man. He did something good in all that violence.

DONALD  
Yeah, well the Army does some shitty stuff.

ZANDER  
I'm not talking about the Army. I'm talking about a particular soldier.

DONALD  
Who do you think makes up the Army? Soldiers.

ZANDER  
Now you're being patronizing.

DONALD  
The hell I am. You just don't know what you're talking about when it comes to war.

ZANDER  
And you do? *(DONALD does not respond)* And you do?

DONALD  
I knew lots of guys who served in the last big war.

ZANDER  
That's not the same as being there.

DONALD  
These guys, they told me stories. Bad shit went down.

ZANDER  
Yeah?
Yeah.

Okay, tell those stories. Write them down.

What do you mean?

I know you like to write.

I'm just fooling around with stuff. It's no good.

You're wrong. I've read some of your essays and they're good. But they come out of your head, not your heart. It's like you're hiding behind the words.

I got nothing to hide.

It's like us, Dad. You and me. Talk, talk, talk, that's all we do. But what have we said?

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

Forget it.

(Beat.)

You sure I can't get you a brandy?

No. Thanks. I'm tired and I just want to go to bed.

Already? You just got home.

It's been a long semester.

Okay, okay. I know you study hard, you must be tired.
See you in the morning.

DONALD

I'll probably be gone when you get up. But after work, there's this protest. I want you to come with me.

ZANDER

Let's see how I'm feeling tomorrow.

DONALD

I'm counting on you.

ZANDER

Good night, Dad.

(RZANDER exits. DONALD watches after him a beat and then exits. BLACKOUT. LIGHTS UP on SARITA and RAJIV. There is a silence between them.)

RAJIV

I just don't understand why you flew all the way out here when you'll be back in May for graduation.

SARITA

You know why.

RAJIV

I'm not coming back to India.

SARITA

You can take your ridiculous trip for one or two months after graduation, but then you will come home.

RAJIV

Yes, I'm coming home. To the United States. This is my home now.

SARITA

You will never get a green card.

RAJIV

I've applied for one through the lottery.

SARITA

Hah! What are the chances?

RAJIV

If I don't get it through the lottery, I'll marry an American girl. A marriage of convenience, Mum, you'll like that.
SARITA
You will come home and marry a nice Indian girl. The girl I told you about.

RAJIV
You can't control me anymore.

SARITA
You have obligations! Do you think my life has been easy since your father died, trying to run the company when all his relatives want to take it from me?

RAJIV
Sell it then.

SARITA
For how much? How long will the money last me? You are my only son, you must take care of your mother, you must give me grandchildren.

RAJIV
Rupali will have children.

SARITA
Your sister! She stays in London pretending to be a dancer. She is as selfish as you. No man will want her.

RAJIV
Mum, if anyone should understand her, it's you. She's going after her dreams, the kind of dreams that you once had.

SARITA
The foolish thoughts of a young person. She will learn, soon enough, that dreams turn to dust.

RAJIV
They don't have to. I remember, when I was young, how much you loved to dance. You were captivating on stage, you were a presence, you were…what you were meant to be.

SARITA
You speak rubbish.

RAJIV
I thought you were the most beautiful dancer in the world.

(Beat.)

SARITA
Rajiv, I have endured too much for too many years.
RAJIV
Then start over, begin a new life. You're young still, you're pretty, you can reclaim the life you want.

SARITA
I have endured the gossip of neighbors and friends for too long.

RAJIV
What do you care about the idle gossip of stupid women? (Silence) What? What gossip?

SARITA
We'll discuss it later.

(Beat.)

RAJIV
I'm tired. I'm going to bed.

(RAJIV exits. BLACKOUT. SARITA exits. LIGHTS UP, dimly.)

CHORUS 1
Sleep comes, darkly, over two houses.

CHORUS 2
Two young men,
Troubled by different worries,
Their orbits sway across the nightly universe,
Nearly colliding here, almost touching there.

(RAJIV and ZANDER enter, as if in a trance.)

CHORUS 3
Apart, their vexations feel one as the other, and yet not.

(RAJIV and ZANDER stand side by side, each unaware of the other, looking out into the audience.)

CHORUS 1
For one, a mother’s words disturb.

CHORUS 2
(Imitating SARITA) I have endured the gossip of neighbors and friends for too long.

CHORUS 3
For the other, it is the words of a father not spoken.

CHORUS 1
The father and son have shared much, and yet nothing.
CHORUS 2
They talk to fill empty spaces.

CHORUS 3
The father puts words between him and his past.

CHORUS 1
The other student prowls at night and feels sick.

CHORUS 2
(Imitating SARITA) I have endured the gossip of neighbors and friends for too long.

CHORUS 3
His mother's words fill his head like sharp tongues,
   Lashing out as grotesque apparitions.

CHORUS
Gossip, gossip, gossip, gossip, gossip, gossip.

CHORUS 2
The other beholds, in his dark hallucinations,
   The warrior and his son.

CHORUS 3
There, look!
   The soldier and the boy are together,
   Even in this unearthly darkness.

CHORUS 1
In the realm of nightmares,
   Where orphans' limbs are torn apart by bombs.

CHORUS 2
The soldier holds the boy's hand.
   They are at peace, in this nightscape of fire, wind and desolation.
   They understand.

CHORUS
Gossip, gossip, gossip, gossip, gossip.

CHORUS 1
In this nightscape of fire, wind and desolation…

CHORUS 2
They understand.

CHORUS
Gossip, gossip, gossip—
SARITA!

Help me understand!

SARITA!

(SARITA enters, moving toward RAJIV. ZANDER exits.)

What did you mean by that?

What?

The gossip of neighbors. What do you mean by that?

We need not speak of it now.

Tell me! (Beat) Tell me!

It is about you, Rajiv.

What about me?

You must know…what people say.

Tell me.

Since you were a teenager. It is why I insist so much that you marry this girl. She can…change you.

(Beat.)

I don't believe what you're saying.
Rajiv—

I don't fucking believe it!

Rajiv, that's not the only reason you must come home. You are Indian! India is your home and it is my home. It's where we—

I am never coming back to India! Never!

(RAJIV exits.)

RAJIV!!

CHORUS
(Mockingly effeminate) Behold the mariposa!

CHORUS 1
The mariposa flits from flower to flower.

CHORUS 2
Flit, flit, flit! Flit, flit, flit!

CHORUS 3
A social butterfly, fluttering from stem to stem.

(CHORUS laughs.)

CHORUS 3
Thrusting his long tongue into sweet rosebuds.

(CHORUS laughs.)

CHORUS 1
(Mocking) Rajiv!

CHORUS 2
Rajiv!!

CHORUS 3
Rajiv!!

(BLACKOUT. SARITA exits. SPOT on ZANDER. He smiles, holding up the hand that was touched earlier by RAJIV.)
DONALD enters, breaking ZANDER's reverie.

DONALD
Are you packed? It seems like you just got here and you're leaving already. Am I right?

ZANDER
Yeah, but just a few weeks, and it'll be graduation.

DONALD
We're going to celebrate big time! I want to take you and a bunch of your friends out to dinner.

ZANDER
That sounds good, Dad.

DONALD
I wish I didn't have to work so hard, I would have been able to see more of you.

That's okay.

DONALD
You should've come with me to the peace rally.

ZANDER
Sorry, Dad, I just wanted to take it easy.

DONALD
Next time you're home, okay? After graduation.

ZANDER
I may not be coming home after graduation. I might stay on campus and get a summer job.

DONALD
You didn't tell me about this.

ZANDER
I know, sorry. I'm not sure yet what I'm going to do.

DONALD
You let me know the minute you hear from graduate school. You got that?

ZANDER
Dad, you know, I've been thinking a lot.
Yeah?

DONALD

About...what I should do with my life.

ZANDER

You can do whatever you want with your life. The world is your oyster, am I right?

DONALD

You mean that? I can do whatever I want?

ZANDER

Hell yes. Once you get your Ph.D., your options will be wide open.

DONALD

Oh. Um, yeah, but what if I...don't want...

ZANDER

What?

DONALD

What if I don't want to get a Ph.D.? I mean, not right away.

ZANDER

What are you talking about?

DONALD

I'm young, and there's so much in this world to figure out...and maybe see...

ZANDER

There's time for that, Zander, after you get your life squared away, get your degree. Heck, maybe you can be an analyst for the U.N. or State Department and travel the world. They'll make you secretary of state, am I right?

DONALD

Dad, there's something I've got to tell you. (Beat) I didn't apply to grad school.

ZANDER

What do you mean?

DONALD

I'm sorry, Dad. I lied to you. I'm truly sorry.

DONALD

I don't understand.
ZANDER
I don't want to go to grad school. Not now, anyway. Maybe in a year. I just…I just need some
time off from school.

DONALD
This is bullshit.

ZANDER
I know this is what you want for me. And I respect that. But you've got to respect that I need...
I need to figure out my life.

DONALD
Is it the money? You know I'll pay whatever it costs.

ZANDER
I know that, Dad. And I appreciate it. Really, I do. Like I said, it might be just a year and
then—

DONALD
What the hell?! You know how important this is!

ZANDER
To you. Not to me.

DONALD
This is important to you, this is who you are supposed to be! You are meant to have a Ph.D.,
to make a difference in this world!

ZANDER
Dad, I'm just 21. I don't know who I'm meant to be but I—

DONALD
You know what? Just get out of here.

ZANDER
Dad…

DONALD
Go! You've got a long drive. (ZANDER doesn't move.) Go!

(ZANDER moves to exit but hesitates as if to say something. After a beat, he exits.
BLACKOUT. SPOT on SARITA. She makes a tentative move, as if to dance, then stops. She
repeats this throughout the scene. SPOT on DONALD. He says nothing.)

CHORUS 1
The mother tries to dance, to move freely, as she once did.
CHORUS 2
The father reads books, but the ink is wet,
Running down the page in hurt and disappointment.

CHORUS 3
Didn't the mother do all she could for her children?

CHORUS 1
Didn't the father do all he could for his son?

CHORUS 2
If only they could see their sons now.

CHORUS 3
If only they would understand…

CHORUS 1
How the one boy rages, in hurt and fear.

CHORUS 2
How the other boy is filled with confusion...

CHORUS 3
And wonder.

CHORUS 1
As if, perhaps, on the threshold of something to behold.

CHORUS 2
But life is uncertain.

CHORUS 3
Its course strewn with dangers.

CHORUS 3
Its silences filled with sorrow.

(SARITA stops her movements; silence. DONALD exits. SARITA exits.)

CHORUS 1
Its silences filled with sorrow.

(LIGHTS UP on ZANDER and MAGGIE. ZANDER is uncharacteristically intoxicated.)

ZANDER
Would you just look up at those stars! They're amazing!
Yeah sure.

They're kind of spinning Maggie. Are they spinning for you?

No, Zander, you're drunk.

Two shots of tequila, and I'm drunk!

You're a lightweight.

I'll drink to that! Oh, wait a minute, we're not drinking anymore.

(Holding up an imaginary glass) Let's drink to graduation. To freedom!

To unemployment!

To summer vacations on the French Riviera!

To unemployment!

To Harvard Law School!

To soldiers who father war orphans!

And fathers who pay for Harvard!

To a poor little rich girl named Maggie who thinks she'll save the world by going to Harvard Law School.

And what do you want to save, Zander? The best you can come up with is working here this summer in the Admissions office. You gonna save some kid about to be tossed on the reject pile?
ZANDER
I feel free, completely free. For the first time in my life.

MAGGIE
Graduation is the day after tomorrow and you still don't have a plan.

ZANDER
Who says I don't? Maybe I do. Anyway, where were we? We were toasting fathers. Your father!

MAGGIE
I think we've done enough toasting.

ZANDER
No, no there's more. We haven't gotten to all the daddies. Here, here's one: To fathers who live vicariously through their sons! (Beat) Come on, toast! To fathers who live vicariously through their sons. To fathers who prop up their dreams on their kids' backs.

ZANDER
Zander...

MAGGIE
And forget how to… (Beat) Are you going to Harvard to make your parents happy?

ZANDER
No. I'm going 'cause I'm a hard ass, and I want to shake things up a bit.

MAGGIE
Go Maggie! You think Harvard's gonna make you happy?

ZANDER
Nothing makes me happy.

MAGGIE
I know. 'Cause you're a bitch.

ZANDER
Up yours.

MAGGIE
No c'mon, that's what you told me. You're a bitch.

ZANDER
Yeah, whatever.

MAGGIE
(Beat) But it's okay. I like big bitches and I cannot lie!
MAGGIE

Enough already!

ZANDER

Bitches and hos! Bitches and hos! That's what I like. And anyway, you're a cute bitch.

MAGGIE

Enough!

ZANDER

Okay, okay, sorry. But seriously, what do you really want? And I'm not talking about your career.

MAGGIE

C'mon, Zander, you're just drunk.

ZANDER

No, I mean it. I really want to know.

(Beat.)

MAGGIE

I want…

ZANDER

What?

MAGGIE

I want the three of us…

ZANDER

C'mon…

MAGGIE

To be…together.

ZANDER

Forever?

MAGGIE

I guess.

ZANDER

Wow. Thanks.

MAGGIE

For what?
ZANDER
Telling me that.

MAGGIE
If you tell anyone else, I'll disembowel you.

(Silence.)

ZANDER
Have you ever been in love, Maggie?

MAGGIE
We've had this conversation. About how the three of us are emotionally retarded.

I'm in love.

MAGGIE
You're drunk.

ZANDER
I know, but I'm still in love.

MAGGIE
You're a virgin. Virgins can't really be in love until they've had sex.

ZANDER
I beg to differ. Don't you want to know who I'm in love with?

Okay, who?

MAGGIE
(Giggling) I'm not going to tell you.

ZANDER
This is the last time I'm taking you drinking.

MAGGIE
This was the first time you took me drinking.

ZANDER
Sweetheart, it's the first time you've drunk anything stronger than an iced cappuccino.

MAGGIE
I'll drink to that! (Beat) I really am in love. I'm still trying to figure it all out in my head.
MAGGIE
You spend too much time in your head.

ZANDER
Love surprises us.

MAGGIE
Love scares us.

ZANDER
Yeah. Surprises and scares us.

MAGGIE
Where are you going with this?

ZANDER
I don't know. Do you love me, Maggie?

MAGGIE
What do you mean?

ZANDER
Do you love me? Do you love me?

MAGGIE
I guess so. Like a brother.

ZANDER
See, you don't love me. Not really.

MAGGIE
Are you trying to tell me something? Because if you are…

ZANDER
What?

MAGGIE
Well, it's kind of weird.

ZANDER
What's kind of weird?

MAGGIE
Never mind.

ZANDER
Geez, the stars are beautiful tonight.
MAGGIE

I need to get you home.

ZANDER

Naw, you go on ahead. I wanna stay out here just a little longer, looking up at the stars. Did we ever do this? In the four years we were here together, you and I and Rajiv, we never looked up at the stars together. Maybe we should have. Maybe all the answers are up there in those celestial bodies. Maybe if we look hard enough we'll figure out why we do all the crazy things we do.

MAGGIE

Come on, Zander.

ZANDER

Naw, it's okay, really. I promise. I'll be here just a few more minutes and then I'll go home.

You sure?

MAGGIE

Yeah, I'm sure. Go on now. Go home.

Call me in the morning.

MAGGIE

I'm going to miss you, Maggie.

Yeah, well…

MAGGIE

You'll miss me too. It's okay, you don't have to say it.

(MAGGIE hesitates, then exits. ZANDER flops to the ground, lying on his back. A beat; RAJIV enters. In the dark, he does not see ZANDER and trips over him.)

ZANDER

Rajiv, Rajiv is that you? Geez, are you okay?

What the—?

ZANDER

Geez, I'm sorry. What are you doing out here…so late…

RAJIV

I take walks at night. What the hell are you doing?
ZANDER
Looking up at the celestial heavenly bodies of star clusters and new moons and…

RAJIV
Are you drunk?

ZANDER
A little. (Beat; holds up three fingers) Two shots of tequila.

RAJIV
You okay?

ZANDER
I'm fine.

RAJIV
Okay. Well, then…

ZANDER
Stay a minute. Check out these amazing stars with me.

RAJIV
Sorry, but I've got to go.

ZANDER
Just a few minutes. I've hardly seen you since spring break. Please.

(RAJIV hesitates.)

RAJIV
All right. Just a few minutes.

ZANDER
You just missed Maggie. We were talking about fathers and soldiers and love and I guess the whole damn thing. (Silence) You were amazing on the court your last game.

RAJIV
We had a losing season.

ZANDER
I thought you were amazing. Graceful and confident. (Silence) Have you ever studied chaos theory? The notion that some small event, insignificant really, can produce large and unexpected changes. When I look up at the stars, I think I begin to see it.

RAJIV
I'm familiar with chaos theory.
ZANDER
My father is fascinated by it, no, no obsessed by it. He drove me crazy with his talk about chaos and butterflies and all that stuff, but you know, I find myself waiting for some change to happen to me, and...I know this will sound dumb, but I feel as if...it's going to happen to me soon. Something...maybe wonderful. (Silence) Why have you been avoiding me?

RAJIV
I've been busy with school.

ZANDER
Did I do something?

RAJIV
No. Just classes, finals, you know.

ZANDER
You ever been in love? Maggie and I were talking about it. She thinks all three of us are emotionally retarded. She thinks maybe we're scared to love.

RAJIV
Zander, I—

ZANDER
Maybe Maggie's scared and maybe you are, but I'm not. I've figured it out. I'm not scared enough. I don't think I've ever felt fear in my life. Real, real fear.

RAJIV
I think you've drunk too much.

ZANDER
I think maybe love has the power to astonish.

RAJIV
I have to go.

(ZANDER grabs RAJIV with unexpected firmness. He reaches out slowly for RAJIV's hand. Their eyes meet. He takes RAJIV's hand and slowly brings it to his lips.)

ZANDER
I love you, Rajiv.

(Just before ZANDER is able to kiss RAJIV's hand, RAJIV pulls it away violently.)

RAJIV
What the fuck are you doing!?

ZANDER
Rajiv, I—
RAJIV

Are you a fag? Are you a fucking faggot!

(ZANDER reaches out for RAJIV.)

ZANDER

Rajiv—

(RAJIV hits ZANDER hard; so hard it knocks him to the ground.)

RAJIV

WHAT DO YOU THINK I AM, YOU FUCKING FAGGOT!

(RAJIV exits. ZANDER rolls around a couple of times, moaning. Two members of the CHORUS kneel by ZANDER. They do not speak.)

CHORUS 1
Cruel rejection!

CHORUS 2
Bitter hurt!

CHORUS 3
The soldier and the boy, they reach out from a soulful nightscape.

CHORUS 1
Does he feel them?

CHORUS 2
Does he sense their breath?

CHORUS 3
Do they whisper solemn and hopeful words?

(The two CHORUS members stand and rejoin the other chorus members. ZANDER rises slowly and exits.)

CHORUS
They rise and burn brightly, swarming from their haven.
Of all of the varied hues, they celebrate as one.
A thousand forms! A thousand different tribes!
People the blaze!

(CHORUS erupts into a storm of joyous movement, creating a kind of chaotic dance. Into this frenzy of movement and celebration enter MAGGIE, RAJIV and ZANDER, wearing graduation robes. They enter from different places and are in separate worlds, moving, weaving in and out of the CHORUS's bodies in motion. DONALD and SARITA enter, also moving in and out of bodies.)
Where is he? Where is my son?

DONALD

Where is my son?

ZANDER

I need to reach Rajiv. I need to talk to him.

MAGGIE

Where are they? Rajiv! Zander! We've done it! We've graduated!

ZANDER

I see him, but now he's lost again.

DONALD

Zander!

MAGGIE

Will I ever see them again?

SARITA

That boy there, I don't trust him. He knows my son too well.

DONALD

The proudest day of my life, and yet…

RAJIV

If I could just lose myself in this crowd forever.

ZANDER

Rajiv, where are you?

RAJIV

You win, mother.

DONALD

The proudest day, but it's not enough.

RAJIV

I'll come home to India. You win.

SARITA

I must keep this boy away.
(Slowly, one by one, The CHORUS begins to disperse.)

ZANDER

Rajiv!

DONALD

Zander!

(RAJIV and ZANDER are moving backwards. They bump into each other and turn to face one another. Everyone else on stage except SARITA freezes.)

ZANDER

Rajiv, I need to tell you…

(RAJIV moves away; bumps into SARITA.)

SARITA

Rajiv, I've been looking for you.

ZANDER

You must be Rajiv's mother.

SARITA

Yes. Come now, Rajiv.

ZANDER

Rajiv—

(SARITA and RAJIV exit hurriedly.)

ZANDER

Email me, please! I NEED TO TELL YOU—

(Everyone on stage resumes their movement. DONALD is lost in the crowd. ZANDER spots MAGGIE and pulls her aside. Everyone else on stage freezes.)

MAGGIE

So, this is it.

ZANDER

This is it.

MAGGIE

You've avoided me the last couple days. (ZANDER does not respond.) And Rajiv's avoided both of us ever since spring break. He's gone, Zander.

ZANDER

I need to tell you something. Before you leave tomorrow.
What?

MAGGIE

ZANDER

I want you to back me up on this.

MAGGIE

On what?

ZANDER

Promise me. Promise you'll back me up on this.

MAGGIE

How can I—

ZANDER

Promise!

(MAGGIE is taken aback.)

MAGGIE

All right. I promise.

ZANDER

I want you to do something for me. I want you to email Rajiv because he'll probably delete any email he gets from me. Tell him...tell him I didn't mean what I said. Will you do that for me?

MAGGIE

What did you tell him?

ZANDER

No, wait; just tell him to please read my emails. Tell him if he doesn't, I promise to see him again and to explain everything.

MAGGIE

What is this all about?

ZANDER

Just do it. There's something else. I'm going away but I can't tell you where.

MAGGIE

What's going on with you?

ZANDER

You'll be able to reach me by email but that's it. I'll email you as much as I can. It should only be for a couple months.
MAGGIE
I'm getting scared, Zander. What the hell—

(ZANDER puts his hand over MAGGIE's mouth.)

ZANDER
You promised.

(MAGGIE slowly nods. ZANDER removes his hand from her mouth.)

ZANDER, Continues
I'll explain everything, I promise. Just not now. Trust me.

(ZANDER hugs MAGGIE.)

ZANDER
I love you, Maggie. Like the sister I never had. Give 'em hell at Harvard.

(MAGGIE, teary-eyed, punches ZANDER softly on his arm in frustration and sadness.)

ZANDER
Go now. Go find your parents.

(MAGGIE exits. ZANDER turns around and sees his father. The CHORUS remains frozen.)

ZANDER
Dad.

DONALD
I've been looking all over for you. This crowd is huge.

ZANDER
I'm glad you're here.

DONALD
This should be the proudest day of my life.

ZANDER
There's something I have to tell you, Dad. I'm going away for awhile, but I can't tell you where.

DONALD
What are you talking about?

ZANDER
It's part of my...journey.
DONALD

ZANDER
I understand you're upset with me.

DONALD
Cut the psychotherapy crap. You don't know a damn thing about me.

ZANDER
I'll email you every chance I get, I promise. I won't have my phone but I'll be in touch. And I'll come visit you in a couple months. I'll explain everything.

DONALD
You can't just leave, damnit! Where the hell are you going?

(CHORUS begins to move again, forming a military line behind ZANDER.)

ZANDER
I'll write you soon.

(ZANDER turns on his heel, military style, in unison with the CHORUS and all begin to march off.)

DONALD
You can't do this! Stop!

(BLACKOUT. IN BLACK: The FULL CHORUS marches, in unison, as if they are soldiers drilling, jogging. BOOM boom boom boom. BOOM boom boom boom. BOOM boom boom boom. The march gets increasingly louder and faster and then stops suddenly. SPOT on CHORUS 1 and ZANDER. ZANDER stands stiffly throughout the scene.)

CHORUS 1
One is afraid, yet happy.

(SPOT on CHORUS 2 and RAJIV. Throughout this scene, RAJIV dances furiously; athletically.)

CHORUS 2
The other races across the world,
Faster than Mercury, knowing freedom is fleeting.
He no longer prowls at night, except to dance to oblivion
Until dawn among the world's young, outpacing life itself.

(SPOT on CHORUS 3 and SARITA. Throughout this scene, SARITA sits placidly, brushing her hair slowly.)
CHORUS 3
The mother is satisfied, knowing her son will soon return.

(SPOT on CHORUS 4 and MAGGIE. Throughout this scene, MAGGIE paces.)

CHORUS 4
The young woman frets,
Wondering when she will see her friends again.

(SPOT on CHORUS 5 and DONALD. Throughout this scene, DONALD is slumped, rumpled.)

CHORUS 5
The father is bewildered,
Adrift on a sea of doubts and hurt.
He fears for his son.

(RAJIV, SARITA and MAGGIE become still, like ZANDER and DONALD. Each one, in turn, makes one small movement.)

CHORUS
A motion from one and the others feel the sharp sting
Of wind on their cheek, a sacred whisper on their lips,
A warm breath against their neck.

(One by one, DONALD, SARITA and RAJIV exit. ZANDER turns to Maggie.)

MAGGIE
You're here.

ZANDER
I told you I would come.

MAGGIE
You look…different.

ZANDER
Basic training changes you.

MAGGIE
Basic training for what? (Beat) Oh my God.

ZANDER
The Army. 122nd Infantry.

MAGGIE
You're effing kidding me.
ZANDER
I've signed up to go to the war.

MAGGIE
You what?! You're out of your mind!

ZANDER
Maggie, please don't. I need you on my side.

MAGGIE
On your side?! You're going to have a whole killing machine on your side!

That's not fair.

ZANDER
Are you looking forward to killing women and babies? Huh? *(Beat) Sorry.*

*(Beat)* How was your summer?

I was bored.

ZANDER
And next week you start at Harvard.

*(MAGGIE nods.)*

MAGGIE
Jesus, Zander, what's happened to you? Why didn't you tell me?

ZANDER
Because I knew I would get exactly this kind of reaction. I needed every bit of strength I had to follow through.

MAGGIE
You're way too old to be rebelling against your dad.

ZANDER
It's not just that. It's—

MAGGIE
You think you're gonna be some kind of American hero?

ZANDER
No, you know me better than that.
MAGGIE
You want to collect some medals? Prove you're a real man?

ZANDER
No! I don't know!

MAGGIE
Worried you're not macho enough? That this is the only way you can get it up for women?

ZANDER
What are you talking about!

MAGGIE
Is it because you're a fag?

ZANDER
Stop it, you bi–!

MAGGIE
Go ahead! Call me what I am! Then maybe we can get somewhere! Maybe you can be honest with me!

(Beat.)

ZANDER
You're right. I need to tell you the truth, as much as I understand it.

MAGGIE
Good.

ZANDER
I'm still trying to figure it out for myself. And yeah, part of it is I'm rebelling against my dad. I'm tired of thinking and thinking, living in my head, in books, intellectualizing everything. But it's more than that.

MAGGIE
I'm listening.

ZANDER
You remember "All Quiet on the Western Front," when the soldiers talk about an intimacy deeper than anything lovers have. I saw it, in a strange way, with that Army captain and his son. I saw it, though to a lesser extent, with Rajiv and his team. Maggie, I'm looking for that kind of love.

MAGGIE
Love? In the Army?!!
ZANDER
It all became clear to me the night that Rajiv hit me. Knocked me to the ground.

MAGGIE
He hit you?

ZANDER
Remember the night we went drinking and I was looking up at the stars and acting all goofy? I told you I was in love. I was talking about Rajiv.

MAGGIE
I knew something was up between you two. But I couldn't quite figure it out. I mean, Rajiv has this mysterious night life he tried very hard to hide from us, but you…I wasn't sure about you.

ZANDER
Really? He has a mysterious night life? You mean, he goes to like…Whoa, I never knew.

MAGGIE
That's because you're clueless.

ZANDER
It's funny, I don't even know if I was thinking he's gay and I'm gay. I just…fell in love with him. And I told him, and he hit me. Called me a faggot.

MAGGIE
Damn Rajiv. I wish he'd have told me instead of hiding in the closet.

ZANDER
I wish he'd told me, too. I don't know how he kept this from both of us.

MAGGIE
It's a classic case of self-loathing. I'm sure he hated himself for hitting you.

ZANDER
Anyway, I thought I loved him, but it was really admiration. I admired his masculinity, his ability to move in life with confidence. And more than anything, I wanted to be him, to be athletic and part of a team of men who share something more than books. I realized that after he hit me.

MAGGIE
I miss him.

ZANDER
Me, too.

(Beat.)
MAGGIE
So, you're in the Army and you like boys. Good timing on the “Don’t ask, don’t tell” shit.

ZANDER
I thought maybe I was gay, but nope. Believe me, now I'm sure I'm not.

You got laid finally.

(ZANDER nods, smiling.)

MAGGIE, Continues
Oh my God, you really have turned into a jarhead.

Jarheads are Marines.

Whatever you are, you're frickin' weird.

ZANDER
I know it probably makes no sense at all, but being in the Army now is what I need to do.

MAGGIE
How the hell do you think you're going to find love and intimacy with unemployed high school dropouts from Kentucky or robots brainwashed by ROTC programs?

ZANDER
They're not all like that. Not at all. The guys I'm with, they all have very different reasons for enlisting. One guy was Phi Beta Kappa at an Ivy League school and had been accepted at – guess? – Harvard Law. He joined because he wanted to help the people over there. He believes we can establish democracy and make their lives better.

I don't believe it for a second.

ZANDER
I don't really expect you to understand.

I'll bet you're scared shitless.

MAGGIE
I've never been so scared in all my life.

This is such bullshit.
ZANDER
You don't have to understand it, but I want you to respect my choice.

MAGGIE
Respect you? For killing people!

ZANDER
I'm just going to be a truck driver.

MAGGIE
I hate you! I hate what you've done, and I hate that you might get—

(MAGGIE stops herself.)

ZANDER
Killed?

MAGGIE
Damn you.

ZANDER
I told you, I'm just a truck driver.

MAGGIE
I don't care. You're part of it.

ZANDER
Come on, Maggie. I need you. I need you on my side.

MAGGIE
I can't. Sorry. I just can't.

(MAGGIE exits. ZANDER watches after her a beat, and exits. BLACKOUT. IN BLACK: SARITA enters. LIGHTS UP. RAJIV enters. He has been drinking.)

SARITA
It's late, where have you been?

RAJIV
The best place I can be. Away from you.

SARITA
You shouldn't be out so late. You need to be in the office early tomorrow. I want you in the office more. You still have much to learn about the business.

RAJIV
But you forget, you also want me to spend time with my bride to-be.
You were with her? This late?

Oh yes, we were together.

She is a good girl, from a good family. She should not be with you so late at night.

(Laughs bitterly) Are you afraid that I might despoil her before our wedding day?

You say these things to upset me. I will not allow it.

Don't trouble yourself, mother, you don't have to worry about her virginity. At least, not with me.

I am going to bed.

Do you know why?

This is not the time to discuss this.

We went out to clubs, we drank, we danced like animals, we kissed. She's not the sweet Indian girl you think she is. She's a cat in heat.

Stop this!

We went to a hotel. Yes, mother, a very nice hotel. She threw herself on me, and then you know what happened?

I will not listen to this!


These matters are private—
RAJIV
I am a homosexual, mother! Gaandu! You know it, I know it and all your gossiping friends know it!

SARITA
This means nothing. You were drunk, she was probably filled with guilt; things will be different when you are married.

RAJIV
I have been with men since I was 14. I took a fancy to older men, and they to me. The gay underground in India thrives, mother dear.

SARITA
Stop this now!

RAJIV
I've hated myself for it, for being dirty, filthy. It poisoned me so much that I could not comprehend love between men. But Zander, he understands love.

SARITA
Stop, this is disgusting!

RAJIV
You mean I am disgusting!

SARITA
Yes! You are disgusting.

(SARITA exits.)

CHORUS 1
When does a man become a man?

CHORUS 2
When he breaks free of fear?

CHORUS 3
When he spreads his wings to fly?

CHORUS 1
When he learns to love.

(SPOT on RAJIV. ZANDER enters. SPOT on ZANDER as well.)

ZANDER
Dear Rajiv, did you get my emails? Did you read them?
RAJIV
Dear Zander, I have read your messages, and I am sorry for any pain I have caused you.

ZANDER
Do you understand the way I love you?

RAJIV
Do you understand that my fear and self-hatred made me lash out at you?

You are an inspiration to me.

RAJIV
You made me see that two men can love each other.

Last night I dreamed of you.

RAJIV
Last night I dreamed of you.

ZANDER
You were a Hindu god, proud and strong.

RAJIV
You were a leopard, swift and light-footed.

ZANDER
Together we flew across the world on wings of gold. We touched, our fingers intertwined.

RAJIV
We swam in deep oceans and played with Neptune.

ZANDER
Dark storm clouds gathered on the horizon and threw lightning bolts toward the heavens.

RAJIV
Fire exploded across the sky and blew us apart.

ZANDER
But time will see us together again. We are brothers.

RAJIV
Yes. We are brothers.

(ZANDER exits. MAGGIE enters. SPOT on MAGGIE.)
MAGGIE
Dear Zander and Rajiv, last night I dreamed of both of you. There was fire, an explosion…something…I can't remember…I'm scared. I need you both. Come home.

(LIGHTS fade. RAJIV and MAGGIE exit. LIGHTS UP on DONALD and ZANDER. They sit awkwardly, a silence between them.)

ZANDER
Do you understand?

DONALD
No! I don't understand! This idea of love between men and soldiers with orphan sons, that's crazy! This goes against everything I am, everything I've done for you.

ZANDER
Don't take it personally.

DONALD
Don't take it personally! Don't take it personally!?

ZANDER
Look, Dad, I've made an honorable choice—

DONALD
You've made a stupid choice! You have a naive vision of war, and it's shit! It's shit! You have no idea!

ZANDER
I'm the one on the Army, not you! So don't lecture me!

DONALD
Listen kid, don't you ever—

ZANDER
What? For once, I've done something on my own and you try to tell me you know about war! What bullshit!

DONALD
It's not bullshit! I DO KNOW ABOUT WAR! AND IT AIN'T PRETTY!

ZANDER
How—?

DONALD
The last war! I was there! Do you understand, boy, I was there!

(A beat. ZANDER is stunned.)
DONALD

Two tours.

ZANDER

Why haven't you ever—?

DONALD

It's not something I'm proud of. (Beat) I saw a lot of shit there. I did a lot of stuff…

ZANDER

My God.

DONALD

You just don't know what it's like till you've been there. And you don't want to know. You understand?

ZANDER

How could you have lied all this time!?

DONALD

Listen, this was before you were born, it just wasn't something you needed to know.

ZANDER

What bullshit! You said you did stuff. What?

DONALD

Not good things.

ZANDER

This is frickin' unbelievable. (Beat) Huh. So. I guess I'm more of a chip off the old block than I thought.

DONALD

No, Zander! You're not like me. You know it.

ZANDER

This is really funny. Intimacy among men! A sense of purpose! And it's all about simple genetics.

DONALD

Listen to me, son. I'm just this dumb meathead kind of guy, a loser. But when you were born, I thought to myself, I'm gonna get it right. My son's gonna to be like his mom, smart, and good, you know, and maybe his brain will save us, save the whole damn world just a little bit.

ZANDER

Yeah. Save the world.
DONALD
Someday, I'll explain it all to you. What happened in the war, why I couldn't tell you. Look, son, it's not too late. Go back and tell them you want to do something else. You're too smart to be driving a damn truck. You could write for the Stars and Stripes or—

ZANDER
It is too late.

DONALD
It's not. I won't accept that! We'll move to Canada, you can be a conscientious objector, you can—

ZANDER
Dad, it's too late!

DONALD
No! You have to save the world, Zander, it's up to you. YOU'VE GOT TO SAVE THIS STINKING, KILLING WORLD!

(Beat.)

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