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# Butterfly Wings

by G. Bruce Smith

A Contemporary Work  
For Bare Stage

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# Butterfly Wings

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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

by G. Bruce Smith

*(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.

ZANDER

God is forgiving and loves everyone.

MAGGIE

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

RAJIV

Amen.

ZANDER

Then discuss it from a natural law perspective.

RAJIV

Do good, avoid evil.

ZANDER

Respect others.

MAGGIE

But human survival is good!

ZANDER

Whose survival? The Japanese or the Americans?

RAJIV

Therein lies the rub.

MAGGIE

Ethical egoists and Hiroshima!

RAJIV

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

ZANDER

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

RAJIV

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

MAGGIE

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

RAJIV

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

MAGGIE

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.

RAJIV

The shame!

ZANDER

You know I'm no good at sports.

RAJIV

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

ZANDER

Funny Brahmin.

MAGGIE

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.)*



What? What's up?

RAJIV

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

MAGGIE

No.

ZANDER

What is it, then?

MAGGIE

I...I didn't...

ZANDER

Didn't what?

RAJIV

I never...applied.

ZANDER

*(Beat.)*

You're shitting us.

MAGGIE

No.

ZANDER

What the—?

RAJIV

I don't want to go to grad school.

ZANDER

Why the hell did you lie to us?

MAGGIE

I don't know. I just...Sorry.

ZANDER

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

RAJIV

I know, I know. I can't go home for spring break.

ZANDER

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.

RAJIV

I know.

ZANDER

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

RAJIV

It's different. It's...good.

ZANDER

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.

ZANDER

What do you mean?

RAJIV

My mother's flying out here.

ZANDER

No way.

RAJIV

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

ZANDER

Are you serious? An arranged marriage?

RAJIV

It still happens, you know.

ZANDER

Who is she?

RAJIV

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

ZANDER

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.

ZANDER

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.)*



MAGGIE  
You seen Rajiv?

ZANDER  
What? Oh...um...no.

MAGGIE  
You know, I'd really like a cigarette.

ZANDER  
You don't smoke.

MAGGIE  
I don't? You writing your philosophy paper?

ZANDER  
No.

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

ZANDER  
That's all right. You're just...just...

MAGGIE  
A bitch. I know.

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

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

*(ZANDER smiles.)*

ZANDER  
Okay.

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

ZANDER  
Okay.

MAGGIE  
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.

ZANDER

Dad? Dad, I'm home!

*(DONALD 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?

ZANDER

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?

ZANDER

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.

ZANDER

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.

ZANDER

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?

DONALD  
Yeah.

ZANDER  
Okay, tell those stories. Write them down.

DONALD  
What do you mean?

ZANDER  
I know you like to write.

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

ZANDER  
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.

DONALD  
I got nothing to hide.

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

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

ZANDER  
Forget it.

*(Beat.)*

DONALD  
You sure I can't get you a brandy?

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

DONALD  
Already? You just got home.

ZANDER  
It's been a long semester.

DONALD  
Okay, okay. I know you study hard, you must be tired.

ZANDER

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.

*(ZANDER 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! RAJIV

Help me understand! ZANDER

SARITA! RAJIV

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

What did you mean by that? RAJIV

What? SARITA

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

We need not speak of it now. SARITA

Tell me! *(Beat)* Tell me! RAJIV

It is about you, Rajiv. SARITA

What about me? RAJIV

You must know...what people say. SARITA

Tell me. RAJIV

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

*(Beat.)*

I don't believe what you're saying. RAJIV

Rajiv— SARITA

I don't fucking believe it! RAJIV

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— SARITA

I am never coming back to India! Never! RAJIV

*(RAJIV exits.)*

RAJIV!!! SARITA

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.)*

ZANDER

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.

ZANDER

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.

DONALD  
Yeah?

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

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

ZANDER  
You mean that? I can do whatever I want?

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

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

DONALD  
What?

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

DONALD  
What are you talking about?

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

DONALD  
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?

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

DONALD  
What do you mean?

ZANDER  
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!

MAGGIE

Yeah sure.

ZANDER

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

MAGGIE

No, Zander, you're drunk.

ZANDER

Two shots of tequila, and I'm drunk!

MAGGIE

You're a lightweight.

ZANDER

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

MAGGIE

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

ZANDER

To unemployment!

MAGGIE

To summer vacations on the French Riviera!

ZANDER

To unemployment!

MAGGIE

To Harvard Law School!

ZANDER

To soldiers who father war orphans!

MAGGIE

And fathers who pay for Harvard!

ZANDER

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

MAGGIE

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.

MAGGIE

Zander...

ZANDER

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

MAGGIE

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

ZANDER

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

MAGGIE

Nothing makes me happy.

ZANDER

I know. 'Cause you're a bitch.

MAGGIE

Up yours.

ZANDER

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

MAGGIE

Yeah, whatever.

ZANDER

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



Enough already!

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.

ZANDER

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?

MAGGIE

Okay, who?

ZANDER

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

MAGGIE

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

ZANDER

This was the first time you took me drinking.

MAGGIE

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

ZANDER

I'll drink to that! *(Beat)* I really am in love. I'm still trying to figure it all out in my head.



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.

MAGGIE

You sure?

ZANDER

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

MAGGIE

Call me in the morning.

ZANDER

I'm going to miss you, Maggie.

MAGGIE

Yeah, well...

ZANDER

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?

RAJIV

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.)*

SARITA  
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!

ZANDER  
If I could reach him, if I could just tell him.

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

I want you to back me up on this.  
ZANDER

On what?  
MAGGIE

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

How can I—  
MAGGIE

Promise!  
ZANDER

*(MAGGIE is taken aback.)*

All right. I promise.  
MAGGIE

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?  
ZANDER

What did you tell him?  
MAGGIE

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.  
ZANDER

What is this all about?  
MAGGIE

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

What's going on with you?  
MAGGIE

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.  
ZANDER

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

Journey. What New Age bullshit.

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, dammit! 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, rumped.)*

## 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!

ZANDER

That's not fair.

MAGGIE

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

ZANDER

*(Beat)* How was your summer?

MAGGIE

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.

MAGGIE

You got laid finally.

*(ZANDER nods, smiling.)*

MAGGIE, *Continues*

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

ZANDER

Jarheads are Marines.

MAGGIE

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.

MAGGIE

I don't believe it for a second.

ZANDER

I don't really expect you to understand.

MAGGIE

I'll bet you're scared shitless.

ZANDER

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

MAGGIE

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.

SARITA

You were with her? This late?

RAJIV

Oh yes, we were together.

SARITA

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

RAJIV

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

SARITA

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

RAJIV

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

SARITA

I am going to bed.

RAJIV

Do you know why?

SARITA

This is not the time to discuss this.

RAJIV

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.

SARITA

Stop this!

RAJIV

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

SARITA

I will not listen to this!

RAJIV

Nothing! Nothing happened! You know why? I could not perform.

SARITA

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?

ZANDER

You are an inspiration to me.

RAJIV

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

ZANDER

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**