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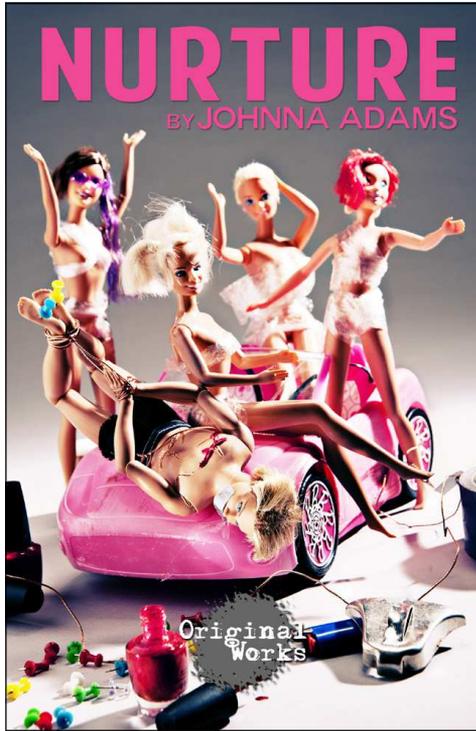
*The Boat in the Tiger Suit*

© Hank Willenbrink

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**Nurture by Johnna Adams**

**Synopsis:** Doug and Cheryl are horrible single parents drawn together by their equally horrible daughters. The star-crossed parental units' journey from first meeting to first date, to first time, to first joint parent-teacher meeting, to proposal and more. They attempt to form a modern nuclear family while living in perpetual fear of the fruit of their loins and someone abducting young girls in their town.

**Cast Size:** 1 Male, 1 Female

# **THE BOAT IN THE TIGER SUIT**

**By Hank Willenbrink**

*para Y.E.S.*

## PRODUCTION HISTORY

*The Boat in the Tiger Suit* was read at the quiet New Works Festival in February 2013. It was directed by Amber Lackey Moreno.

*The Boat in the Tiger Suit* received its world premiere at The Brick Theatre (Michael Gardner, Artistic Director) in New York on August 22, 2013. Set design was by Rich Larsen, costume design was by Caitlin Doukas, lighting design was by Christopher Brown, sound design was by David Margolin Lawson. The production was stage managed by Teddy Nicholas and fights were choreographed by Nic Grelli. It was directed by José Zayas.

The cast was as follows:

|          |                 |
|----------|-----------------|
| Rene     | Nic Grelli      |
| Gene     | Bobby Plasencia |
| April    | Diana Stahl     |
| Dave     | Brian McManamon |
| Margaret | Maggie Bofill   |
| Herman   | Hugh Sinclair   |

## CHARACTERS:

Rene – M, 20s-30s

April – F, 20s-30s

Gene – M, Puerto Rican, 30s

Dave – M, 20s-30s

Mom – F, 50s

Herman – M, 50s

## PLACE/TIME:

Part I: A boat on a man-made lake

Part II: Another boat, somewhere else, later

## **THE BOAT IN THE TIGER SUIT**

### **PART 1: A BOAT ON A MAN-MADE LAKE**

*(This opening could be a painting, the negative of a Norman Rockwell.*

*The deck of a boat on an inland lake, man-made, and big enough to hold a boat of this size which has six people aboard – Rene, April, Dave, Mom, Gene (in uniform), and Dad, who is dead and in a casket. Stillness. The iconic sound of a group of bagpipes playing “Amazing Grace” from Dave’s iPod.*

*Everyone stares at the casket trying very hard to cry.*

*The audience might enter during this. Maybe they should try to cry as well.)*

GENE: Why do white people love bagpipes?

*(Mom steps forward. Gene moves with her. He is just about to hand her a folded flag when the song ends and a new one begins.)*

DAVE: Uh oh.

APRIL: Uh oh, what?

*(On the recording, a voice yells: “1, 2, 1, 2, 3, 4.” The squeal of an electric guitar in very earnest hands.)*

APRIL: Uh oh.

*(A rehearsal recording of a song titled “The Band Name Sex Pistols is a Euphemism for Penis” as recorded by a high-school aged April (vocals and guitar) and Dave (clarinet).)*

MOM: David?

DAVE: Yes, Mam?

APRIL: Turn it off, Dave.

DAVE: You don't know what she's going to say.

APRIL: Dave!

DAVE: She could really like it.

*(The phrase “I'll cut your dick off Axl Rose” is heard.)*

MOM: I've always applauded initiative.

GENE: Who is it?

RENE: Their high school band. April was really into progressive feminism.

APRIL: I'll turn it off.

DAVE: Why do you have to do that? Your mother was enjoying it.

MOM: It does have a certain air to it.

DAVE: See, it was playing “Traditional Irish Bagpipes” and the next artist is Translucent Vagina.

APRIL: I got him the iPod for Christmas.

DAVE: I don’t like music.

RENE: Except your own.

MOM: I don’t think young people are creative enough anymore.

DAVE: Prince only listens to his own music.

RENE: Well, that’s Prince.

APRIL: Dave Jr. is taking painting classes.

MOM: I thought he was three.

APRIL: Finger painting.

DAVE: This sounds better than I remember. It’s like when you go back and start rereading your diary and you suddenly think: oh, life wasn’t so bad back then, maybe things are worse now than they were back then. Of course, then if you think about it too much you might start to live in the past, but we wouldn’t want that would we? No. You could also go back and look at your yearbook photo and say: oh, I wasn’t that bad looking. But no one ever has good yearbook photos.

MOM: I’ve been reading *The Artist’s Way*. Have any of you read that book?

APRIL: You hated that band.

DAVE: Well, sure, back then.

MOM: It's a very good book. Very educational.

APRIL: I spent like 200 dollars on that thing. And it's the 16 gig one and you only have two songs on it.

DAVE: It costs money to download songs, too, April. And by the way, there were two people in the band. You and me. I helped with the lyrics, remember: "With a name like Syd Vicious / How can you not be misogynist?" That was me.

APRIL: It's misogynistic.

DAVE: Doesn't rhyme.

*(Pause.)*

RENE: Where'd the wine go?

MOM: I'd prefer if no one drank during the ceremony.

RENE: Is that what this is? A ceremony?

*(They stare at the casket.)*

GENE: You don't mind if I do?

MOM: Of course not, you're a guest.

APRIL: You said no one else could be in the band, that it would ruin the musical purity of our songs.

RENE: It's not fair if you're going to let him drink and not let us.

MOM: Please, Rene, grow up.

APRIL: Later, I found out that you were afraid, if we had other band members, that they'd try to touch my thigh.

RENE: My dad's dead, isn't he? How more grown up can I be?

MOM: Really, Rene.

DAVE: You can never tell what's going to happen when you're loading equipment.

APRIL: Like your clarinet case, Dave?

DAVE: That wasn't what I was being protective of.

APRIL: I told you I was sexually attracted to Jacob Schlesinger. I distinctly remember telling you that.

DAVE: You played truth or dare on the choir bus and dared him to / feel your thigh.

APRIL: Those rumors are unsubstantiated.

RENE: He stopped doing choir. Which probably says more about April's thigh.

APRIL: Choir members are the bottom feeders of the high school food chain.

DAVE: I loved doing choir.

APRIL: There's more to life than high school.

RENE: Says the social reject.

APRIL: Who knew being the gay best friend could get you so far?

RENE: I was the prom king. Did you go?

MOM: Children. Your father's dead.

APRIL & RENE: Sorry, Mom.

*(Stillness again. It doesn't take. Everyone starts fidgeting like kids in church.)*

MOM: We should find a way to honor him.

APRIL: Yeah, this really isn't working.

RENE: This wasn't my idea.

MOM: Does anyone know any good songs?

APRIL: *(to Rene)* If you didn't want to be here, then you didn't have to come.

RENE: I didn't say I didn't want to be here.

APRIL: You should start acting like it, then.

MOM: Maybe we could keen: explore our grief and unfulfilled desires through ambiguous vocal tones. Can any of you keen?

GENE: Are you Irish?

RENE: WASP.

MOM: Anything is better than standing here.

GENE: Because you miss him?

MOM: Because I can't cry.

APRIL: Mom, he kinda left you for the Army.

MOM: Does that change anything?

RENE: ...yes?

MOM: Well, it shouldn't.

DAVE: What's bigger than your family? Your country, am I right buddy?

*(High five requested.)*

GENE: Are you talking to me?

DAVE: Are you or are you not serving your country?

GENE: I am.

DAVE: Well, don't leave me hanging here.

*(High five, reluctantly, given.)*

DAVE: Your father left his family for his country. That's amazing. That's sacrifice.

APRIL: Don't be patronizing, Dave.

DAVE: I'm not being patronizing.

RENE: "That's sacrifice."

DAVE: That was patronizing.

MOM: You should be able to feel something for someone you love, loved.

*(April looks at Dave.)*

RENE: What was that?

APRIL: Nothing.

RENE: Are you two splitting up again?

DAVE: No.

APRIL: Kinda.

DAVE: Can't you keep anything quiet? I'm trying to have a nice time at your dad's funeral.

MOM: Your father always wanted a burial at sea. So do I, when I go. There's something romantic about it. Maybe I was a sailor in a past life.

GENE: This is a lake.

MOM: Do you know what it costs to ship a casket to Florida? They charge you by weight. By weight. I did my research. You can't just Fed-Ex a body. You can't just stick a dead body in the Fed-Ex.

GENE: You could have left him over there.

MOM: Why? So you could have him.

GENE: I barely knew him.

MOM: I'm sorry, honey, that sounded so personal. I didn't mean you. I meant the army. You know, the military industrial complex.

RENE: You didn't tell me you're splitting up.

APRIL: Nothing's final. I'm just tired.

DAVE: I'm right here.

APRIL: We'll have to see how it goes.

DAVE: Your name is Eugenio?

GENE: Sí.

DAVE: Great. I'm going to call you Gene. Color Guard Gene. That isn't a comment on your ethnic background.

MOM: Night was your father's favorite part of the day. It was in the night that he could get thinking done.

APRIL: Dave?

DAVE: What?

*(She takes his hand.)*

RENE: Why don't we, uh, do what we came to do? Sir, if you don't mind.

*(Gene steps forward, again, with the flag.)*

MOM: Someone should say something.

RENE: Mom...

MOM: Someone should pray.

RENE: A little late for that, isn't it?

DAVE: I like to pray. You usually begin "Oh God" or "Our Father."

APRIL: Other people knew their father.

GENE: I could say something.

MOM: But you barely knew him.

GENE: In the military sense. We were in the same unit.

RENE: Is that an actual military term? Unit?

DAVE: Funerals are odd occasions. There's so much that's emotionally expected of us, but do we have the tools to grieve? I mean properly feel something for someone. Anyone. Much less a father or friend, for example. Often I find myself worrying about my own fate much more than the one who has passed on.

APRIL: I'm afraid to die.

DAVE: Exactly. If you're afraid to die, then how can you expect to talk to someone who's dead?

RENE: Christ.

DAVE: That's a great way to start the prayer. Christ! Go on.

RENE: No thanks.

DAVE: Did you know that we no longer have a birthing ritual? For millennia we had a ritual to bring people into the world, into the tribe. Now what do we do? Pull 'em out, shove 'em in a box, in another box, kick 'em out of that box and say get a job, son and don't disappoint your old man, because his future happiness relies on you living up to his fabricated standards.

GENE: In my hometown, we sit with a body after it dies for 24 hours.

APRIL: In the same room?

RENE: That sounds unsanitary.

GENE: It can be very beautiful. A way for you to mourn.

MOM: You'll have to excuse my children. They're emotionally challenged. Enlighten us more about your culture.

GENE: Uh, well, we sit with the body.

MOM: You covered that.

GENE: And the body is out.

MOM: Uh huh.

GENE: Sometimes we pray.

MOM: So the body is just lying there.

GENE: Yes.

MOM: Well, I think that's a splendid idea. Rene. Help David get your father out of the casket.

GENE: I'm not suggesting / you do it.

MOM: We've kinda run out of options here and this seems to be the best way to go.

APRIL: Mom, you really shouldn't rely on Dave, his back has been killing him all week.

DAVE: I can help.

GENE: Really, don't bother with, it's a weird tradition. You don't have to copy it.

MOM: No, no, no, don't belittle yourself. We'll think of this as a cultural exchange. Rene?

GENE: I should really tell you something first.

MOM: That's alright, you've been quite the help and comfort. April?

APRIL: Coming.

GENE: Please. Just a second.

*(But, it's too late. They've got the casket open. And there's nothing inside.)*

APRIL: I think there's something wrong with this casket.

MOM: Why?

APRIL: It's empty.

*(They close the casket.)*

DAVE: They can have secret compartments.

APRIL: For what? Dental Floss?

DAVE: I don't like your tone.

APRIL: I don't like yours.

DAVE: You're being a real bitch, you know that?

RENE: So let me guess, you were going to tell us that there's nothing in the casket.

GENE: Sí.

RENE: Fantastic.

APRIL: Like that bitch Gloria from work you're always talking about.

DAVE: Gloria is not a bitch.

APRIL: Not to you, not to you!

DAVE: You have a jealous streak about my close associates.

APRIL: How close?

DAVE: Close close, okay.

APRIL: I should have never entered into a domestic partnership with you.

DAVE: Why not? It's not like we're married.

RENE: You couldn't have given us any heads up about that?

GENE: Confidential.

RENE: What kind of a burial is confidential?

GENE: That's confidential as well.

RENE: He's dead, what's the secret?

APRIL: Marriage is a heterosexual religious construct.

GENE: I can't say.

APRIL: Promulgated by centuries of sexist oppression from the church--

RENE: Then fuck it, I'm getting drunk.

*(Rene tips back a bottle.)*

APRIL: --The state, and society. It's an excuse for you to wrest control of my estate from my family!

DAVE: I don't want to wrest anything! Of course, I wasn't reading Betty Friedan when everyone else was trying to make it through *Johnny Tremain*.

APRIL: You resent me because I'm smarter than you.

DAVE: I resent you because you resent me! I wanted to be married to you, because it's nice. That's all. Not everything has to be a political stand!

APRIL: Breathing is a political stand!

*(Mom is bent over the casket, crying.)*

APRIL: Oh God, Mom.

RENE: What are you doing?

*(A door opens in the floor and the sounds of war explode out of it as Herman pulls himself out in full combat gear. The sounds of choppers, bombs, and machine guns explode in the distance.)*

HERMAN: First day in the army you know what they teach you? How to be a part of the team. Know why? The scariest thing out here is isolation. You go too far, you get the supply line cut off, they cut off your head. They don't teach you the way that you're taught in school. They shave your head. They make you the same as everyone else. You look at yourself and say – look at you, asshole. You're no different. Later on they yell that at you. They know how to get the point across.

You run until you puke and then you run some more. It's a good thing they shaved your head because it's hotter than Texas. I ran next to a woman from Russia who had moved to Texas when she was a baby. She says that Texas is hotter than two rats fucking. Later she told me the phrase "hotter than two rats fucking" was her favorite English phrase. After that she said that my ass looked hotter than two rats fucking. I told her that I wasn't into women anymore. She asked why. I said I was married.

The first time they sent me over, everything was already over. It was like going to a party at someone else's house and no one is there and you've gotta clean everything up and you don't know where the serving trays go.

They didn't tell us where we were going. Just loaded everyone up into Humvees with blindfolds on more to protect our eyes than anything else and dropped our asses off in the middle of this jungle. I swear I had sand in every orifice imaginable but by the time I pulled off the mask, you couldn't see anything but green. The kind of green that lawns look in magazines. The kind that the jungle looks in picture books and nature programs. And it was about that time that I realized that this wasn't a picture book or a tv show or a magazine that we were actually in a jungle and that the jungle had materialized out of the desert like, well, like someone turning water into wine. And it was beautiful. A big marble fountain in the middle was the only thing that looked like it had been touched by man though I assume that the whole thing must've been man-made because how the hell else does a jungle get out in the middle of a land that God forgot?

There were three of us. The specialist, Natasha, and my buddy Eugenio. Natasha had a bunch of sun-block on because like my family she burned easily. Any insect that came within ten feet stuck to her so that she turned into a human fly strip. So she was swatting and bitching and Eugenio and I are laughing at her.

The orders are to secure the area and since nothing is going on, we decide it's secure. Eugenio lays down his pack. Natasha finally stops swatting and suddenly a sense of calm seems to fall, and after a while they're

both dozing like children in the sun; like kids do after a long day at the lake when the sun has finally been enough and there's been so much fun had that there's no choice but to shut your eyes, because really what else in the world could compare; I decide that I've gotta taste the water coming out of that fountain. The way the sun catches it, you can see right through it like it was made outta glass. So I take my canteen, dip it into the water, and once it's good and full, I put it to my lips and I swear to you I have never tasted anything so sweet in my life. Time seems to stop and I can feel that water moving down my throat, I swear to God, I can feel the water going into each of my little cells and making it wet, making it breathe, making it turn alive again. And then I hear it: from under the brush, a low, guttural growl. Maybe it was me that heard it. Then: there it is again. I look over and I'll be damned if there isn't a motherfucking tiger poking his monstrous head out from under the green canopy. It's then, right then, that I get the feeling that I've never had before and that I'll never have again: that we truly are not safe here. That we are just visiting and that no matter what we do, we will never be back.

*(The sound of machine guns and bombs and aircraft grow louder. Herman disappears back through whatever hole brought him here in the first place.)*

*(Rene (in a tiger mask) drinks wine from the box on the aft of the ship. It seems peaceful if cheaply decadent. Gene enters.)*

GENE: Is that supposed to be a joke?

RENE: I'm sure it is, but it never felt like it.

GENE: I mean your costume.

RENE: Let me guess, you don't like tigers. It's understandable. They're number two on the big cat list. Everyone prefers lions.

GENE: What?

RENE: When April and I were little, we looked very, very alike. Because we're twins—if you couldn't tell—anyway, Dad used to make me wear this to tell us apart. So, no, it's not a joke. It's a tribute, which is why it never felt like a joke.

GENE: It's funny.

RENE: Really?

GENE: No, I mean, it's a funny tribute.

RENE: Thank you.

GENE: I don't think we've officially met. I'm Eugenio.

RENE: I know. I heard my brother in law butcher it earlier.

GENE: David?

RENE: Dave. Mom calls him "David" because she saw a movie once where this rich woman called people by

their full names even though they have nicknames and everyone found her endearing, so Mom thinks it'll do the same for her. But it doesn't.

GENE: It's good to meet you.

*(Gene extends his hand.)*

RENE: Put that thing back, I'm not touching it.

GENE: Why not?

RENE: I don't want to get whatever you've got.

GENE: I served with your dad.

RENE: Tell me something I don't know.

GENE: Your mother's overbearing.

RENE: She's alright, you just have to give her a chance.

GENE: Okay...

RENE: Oh I get it, that's the thing that I didn't know.

GENE: It took me a while to see that in my own mother.

RENE: Where is she? Back in the homeland?

GENE: She's dead.

RENE: Right.

GENE: I'm not Mexican.

RENE: Who said that you were?

GENE: People just assume.

RENE: Shame on you.

GENE: For what?

RENE: For assuming that I'm people.

GENE: They usually think I'm Mexican or an Indian.

RENE: Indian indian?

GENE: No, Native American.

RENE: Who thinks that?

GENE: People in the army.

RENE: No wonder we haven't won any wars lately.

GENE: I think they can only conceive of so many things at once.

RENE: I think you're an optimist.

GENE: That's a crime?

RENE: Where I'm from? Yes, yes it is.

GENE: We're from the same place. I'm Puerto Rican.

RENE: From the same country.

GENE: My father lives here.

RENE: Ah.

GENE: We're a colony.

RENE: Thought no one had those anymore. I'm kidding. I passed geography in ninth grade. I know California is on that side and that New York is on the other and that Texas thinks its somewhere else. If Puerto Rico seceded from the union, just decided to be done with the whole United States thing and stop sending kids to play for the Yankees, would you go down there and fight?

GENE: Of course.

RENE: Why?

GENE: Because that's what I have to do.

RENE: Thank you, thank you for saying that.

GENE: You're welcome. Why?

RENE: Because I'm glad to know there's someone who hates himself as much as I do.

GENE: I signed up.

RENE: No wonder you liked my dad so much.

GENE: He was a good solider.

RENE: Why are you speaking in the past tense?

GENE: Because he's passed on.

RENE: How do you know? There's nothing in the casket.

GENE: I was there.

RENE: Well, that's nice and all but you should know that he's been dead long before anyone told us about it happening. So, frankly, this whole thing is kind of a nuisance.

GENE: He was a great man. He was my lover.

RENE: Do you really think Mom's overbearing?

GENE: He was my lover.

RENE: No, I heard you. I'm not shocked. Do you want me to be shocked? I'm not shocked.

GENE: I thought you should know.

RENE: Well, it's good you're here. Because you'd bomb your own people. So thanks for dropping the flag off now get the fuck out of here.

GENE: I can't.

RENE: Because you're going to prove to all of us how great he was? You're going to tell us war stories and we're all going to get together and have a nice big cry for this former asshole.

GENE: I can't swim. And we're in the middle of a lake.

RENE: I thought you were in the army.

GENE: We don't swim. That's the Marines.

RENE: What about rivers?

GENE: We build bridges.

RENE: And when someone destroys them?

GENE: Then we can't get across.

RENE: Yes, we've all got our problems.

GENE: Sí, es verdad.

RENE: I like it when you say things in Spanish.

GENE: Do you want me to say something else?

RENE: No.

GENE: I don't hate myself.

RENE: Of course you do. We all do. We're mammals. I sneaked a peek when they were loading him on board. I

wanted to see if I looked like him. It'd been so long since I saw him. I wanted to see if he was like I remember. The dirty joke was that it was exactly like I remembered—not there.

*(If Rene hasn't taken off his mask already, it should come off here.)*

GENE: Gracias.

RENE: Por?

GENE: Por no decirle a nadie lo que sabes.

RENE: De nada.

GENE: Sabes español?

RENE: Sí. Did you love him?

GENE: Tu padre?

RENE: Sí.

GENE: Sí. Mucho. Can I have some wine?

RENE: Sure.

*(Rene pours him some wine.)*

GENE: It was a tiger that did it.

RENE: No shit.

GENE: No shit.

RENE: Bueno, salud.

GENE: Por?

RENE: Por mi padre.

GENE: Salud.

*(They toast.)*

GENE: I'm sorry.

RENE: What?

*(From off stage: April yells "Rene?!?")*

RENE: What? *(to April)* One second!

GENE: We're at a funeral.

*(From off stage: April—"Where are you?")*

RENE: It's a boat, April, it's not that big!

*(From off stage April—"Like in the back? The aft?")*

GENE: I'm sorry.

RENE: *Eugenio.*

*(April enters with several bottles of wine.)*

RENE: Shit. I don't know what you call it.

APRIL: Hey. Found you!

RENE: Hey.

GENE: Hello.

APRIL: Mom's downstairs reading Joseph Campbell.

RENE: Again?

APRIL: Yeah, she's pretty boring.

GENE: I was just going to the front.

APRIL: You mean the stern.

GENE: Yes.

APRIL: No rush, stick around.

GENE: It's fine, really. I'll see what Dave's doing.

APRIL: Uh, okay, well, he's eating. So...

GENE: That's fine, I'm hungry.

RENE: I can get some food.

GENE: Esta bien. Adios.

RENE: Hasta luego.

*(Gene exits.)*

APRIL: That was weird.

RENE: Tell me about it. / That was some break down.

APRIL: / Haven't seen that mask for a while.

RENE: / Huh?

APRIL: / What?

RENE: Go ahead.

APRIL: No you.

RENE: I said: that was some break down.

APRIL: Break up.

RENE: What was?

APRIL: Earlier.

RENE: With Mom?

APRIL: I meant with Dave.

RENE: Oh. Just then?

APRIL: No. A month or so. She invited us both tonight. You know Mom. I didn't want to be alone anyway. More difficult that way. Not just here. But with

the kid. I mean you start to read the literature and you start to wonder: is my happiness worth the happiness of someone else – like how can you gauge that kind of question? And we're not even officially, so...

RENE: Right.

APRIL: No one's moved. It's easier for now. Just keeping things simple.

RENE: I didn't know.

APRIL: Why would you?

RENE: I don't know. A ripple in the universe.

APRIL: You don't call, Rene.

RENE: Christ, April.

APRIL: I'm just saying.

RENE: Phones work both ways.

APRIL: I didn't know how to start the conversation.

RENE: That seems pretty simple.

APRIL: Why?

RENE: Because, it's about, you just, you know, pick up the phone and say.

APRIL: Dave and I are through?

RENE: Something like that.

APRIL: I can barely say it now. You work for so long with someone to make it work.

RENE: I never really liked him.

APRIL: And that's why I couldn't. We were never any good at this. How's Jacob?

RENE: Jacob?

APRIL: Wasn't there a Jacob?

RENE: Yes?

APRIL: You know what we should have done?

RENE: Bought a calling card?

APRIL: No. We should have come up with a secret language. Like those twins who can talk to each other and no one else can understand them because they're speaking in this weird kind of code that that's unique only to them. Maybe we had one and we just forgot it.

RENE: I took Spanish in high school.

APRIL: Our heads were together for nine months in the same womb. Maybe we can transmit thoughts back and forth, like that thing that submarines do that make the dolphins wash up on the beach.

RENE: That's sonar.

APRIL: Well, you say it out loud. But you both have to know how it works.

RENE: How does it work?

APRIL: I don't know. Try it with me.

RENE: Um, ok. What am I supposed to say?

APRIL: Think back to before your first memory. Think like someone who isn't ready to think would think. Then, I'll think the same and we'll arrive at the same thought. Okay. Are you ready?

RENE: As ready as I'll ever be.

APRIL: Go.

*(April and Rene close their eyes. Nothing. Rene and April open their eyes.)*

RENE: What if we just took a Dutch class?

APRIL: Or we could hide.

RENE: Yeah.

APRIL: Yeah, like Dad. Where is Dad?

RENE: Evidently he was killed by a tiger.

APRIL: That's confidential?

RENE: Yep. Army stuff.

APRIL: Huh. No wonder we haven't won any wars recently.

RENE: Now we have to make it through the party.

APRIL: And then what?

RENE: Then...then. You know, April. There was a Jacob.

APRIL: Really?

RENE: Yeah.

APRIL: Recently?

RENE: No. High school. Schlesinger.

APRIL: No wonder he didn't like feeling my thigh.

RENE: No he did not.

APRIL: Solves that mystery.

*(A sound from off.)*

APRIL: Look out.

RENE: What?

APRIL: Mom.

RENE: Coming?

APRIL: Peace.

*(They exit in different directions.)*

MOM: Kids? Where did you go? Little jerks. You'll remember this when I'm gone. When I'm dead! That's right. I'm not going to be around forever. Just look at your father! Or, don't look at your father, I don't know. Look at him but don't, because he's not there. Missing in Action. Ha ha. We're dead for a long time. For most of our lives. You should get used to it. Think dead thoughts. Dead thoughts. I don't want to be unprepared. We should practice. Maybe all of us together. Like that play with all the dead people. God, what was the name of that play...who remembers? Anyway, dead thoughts. It's like Zen, Margaret, get a hold of yourself, you can do it.

*(Margaret closes her eyes. From a door in the floor, just behind her, Herman emerges.)*

HERMAN: Margaret.

MOM: I should've known they'd send you.

HERMAN: Who?

MOM: The dead thoughts.

HERMAN: It makes sense. I'm dead. A tiger ate me. I got here as fast as I could.

MOM: What's the rush? It's your funeral.

HERMAN: Well, about that...this isn't a burial at sea.

MOM: We must work on your tone if we're going to live together.

HERMAN: Live together?

MOM: In the afterlife.

HERMAN: What makes you so sure there's an afterlife?

MOM: You're haunting me. Isn't that proof?

HERMAN: It's proof of certain new age spiritualities, I'm not sure if it confirms the presence of life after death.

MOM: How philosophical you've gotten.

HERMAN: You have a lot of time to kill.

MOM: And what else do you kill?

HERMAN: People sometimes.

MOM: Because you're a murderer.

HERMAN: Because I'm in the army.

MOM: Which means sometimes you die too.

HERMAN: That's the irony.

MOM: I often think what if I hadn't gotten pregnant.

HERMAN: And what do you decide?

MOM: That you wouldn't have gone off to the army.

HERMAN: Well, I'd probably have left, but I'm not sure about the army.

MOM: It was a very final decision.

HERMAN: It's not that I didn't love you.

MOM: Yes it was.

HERMAN: Yes, mostly it was. But mostly, I was never suited to love you.

MOM: Why?

HERMAN: Because you ask too many questions.

MOM: But they brought you here.

HERMAN: A form of punishment, I'm sure.

MOM: Why do you say that?

HERMAN: Because anytime anything ends in a question, I feel like there is a hot poker the size of my pinky pushing dully into my left fourth rib and I simultaneously feel that there is a cold poker the size of a matchbox car pushing into my right sixth rib. Both pokers are unbelievably sharp and serrated. When the question is answered, and the pokers pull themselves back out, they take a good deal of flesh with them.

MOM: I'm sorry to hear that.

HERMAN: You're not the only one.

MOM: Is there anything I can do?

HERMAN: Stop saying questions.

MOM: I want to put some music on.

*(Herman snaps his fingers. Music plays.)*

MOM: I don't think the kids want to talk to me. I cried.

HERMAN: I'm sorry, cookie. You cried. Who left the wine?

MOM: I want some.

HERMAN: Do you want do dance?

MOM: Yes.

*(They do.)*

MOM: You feel like Jello.

HERMAN: That would be the dead body.

MOM: It feels wonderful.

*(The song stops. Mom and Herman go. The bottle is left behind. Dave enters eating a piece of cake. He sees the bottle, washes the cake down with the wine. It's not a good combination, but that doesn't mean that he stops drinking. Gene enters. Dave turns to him and then back away.)*

DAVE: Thought you were someone else.

GENE: Who?

DAVE: Does it matter?

GENE: No.

DAVE: Did you ever go fishing as a kid?

GENE: Sure.

DAVE: Yeah, me too. I hated it.

GENE: I enjoy fishing. But not on lakes.

DAVE: My dad loved fishing. Best amateur fisherman around here. He used to joke that he wanted to be mounted on a wall next to the fish when he died.

GENE: Was he?

DAVE: No. He's not dead. Hey, know something? I'm proud of you, man.

GENE: You are.

DAVE: Yeah. Definitely. I know we're trying to treat veterans different this time around and we should because you guys keep us free and what not.

GENE: This time around?

DAVE: Yeah as opposed to Vietnam or whatever.

GENE: Huh. Okay. Apology accepted.

DAVE: I mean, I've never known anyone who was actually in the army, some people from high school, but that's like it. It's funny, I knew this one guy who was like a real stoner dude, the kind that always went around with one of those like dark green army jackets, know what I mean? Of course you do. So yeah, this guy was like a big stoner, beard and everything, pot smoker, and he got this girl pregnant and when he found out, he joined the army.

GENE: That's funny?

DAVE: Sure, because he was wearing the jacket ironically, right, then he's wearing it for real.

GENE: Poor girl.

DAVE: Well, yeah. That's. I mean, that's a given.

GENE: That's an awful story.

DAVE: Would it be better if you knew that he stayed with the girl and married her and the only reason he did the army thing was because he had to provide for her and that was the best way when he was 17?

GENE: It would.

DAVE: Cool, well, that's what happened. Have you been in war?

GENE: What do you mean? We're at war.

DAVE: Yeah, but have you been there?

GENE: Yes.

DAVE: How was it?

GENE: I kinda resent that question.

DAVE: Because...?

GENE: Because you're at war too.

DAVE: I'm not.

GENE: You are. We all are.

DAVE: Our country is.

GENE: And what's the country made up of? People. People like you and me.

DAVE: See, that's where you're wrong.

GENE: About the people?

DAVE: No, not about the people. Obviously there's people, but see, the difference is that you're being paid to do what you do. You chose to do it. So, I can be grateful to you for that, but let's be honest, it's a job.

GENE: It's not a job.

DAVE: It is.

GENE: It's service.

DAVE: So is waiting tables, you don't see any of them getting fancy flag caskets.

GENE: You must not read newspapers.

DAVE: Have you ever slept next to a woman who won't sleep with you any more?

GENE: I'm not / into women.

DAVE: Yeah, I figured you hadn't.

GENE: Why don't you move out?

DAVE: It's complicated.

GENE: How complicated?

DAVE: I still love her. It's like war.

GENE: What?

DAVE: It's war.

GENE: It's not.

DAVE: No?

GENE: No.

DAVE: Huh. Feels like it. Cake?

GENE: No thanks.

DAVE: Too bad, it's good.

GENE: I was actually looking for something else.

DAVE: Which is?

GENE: The, uh, wheel.

DAVE: Gonna have to time travel for that one, solider.

GENE: I want to get off here.

DAVE: I don't know why I keep eating this cake.

GENE: I want to go home.

DAVE: It's like I can taste the fact that April made it and that just makes me want more. So I drink wine, because I know that when I go home she'll just be lying there with so many pajamas on, you feel like you're sleeping with the Michelin man.

GENE: The Michelin man?

DAVE: Yeah he's made out of tires so he's white and fat. I think they're tires, anyway, I have no idea.

GENE: I don't think I should have come.

DAVE: April in the morning? Now that's war. Her hair is all like \*RAWR\* and her breath? God, it's bad. And I say, honey, you know you should probably get that checked out. They have things they can do about morning breath now. Noninvasive surgeries, still, she does nothing. But I stick by her, because I care.

*(Gene rushes Dave and Dave's pretty easily taken to the ground. Dave looks up at him partly afraid, partly stunned with Gene's obvious strength and violence.)*

GENE: You want to talk about war now?

DAVE: I don't know what you mean.

GENE: Your girlfriend is not a war.

DAVE: It's a metaphor, ok? Sorry? Can I have my breath back now?

GENE: No.

DAVE: You're good at your job.

GENE: Yes, I am.

*(Gene relents. Dave manages to get up and, if a bit out of breath, at least not worse for the wear.)*

GENE: Sorry.

DAVE: It's fine. My bad.

GENE: We like to think that what we've done is good, right?

DAVE: You do. Don't speak for the rest of us. Remember that funny story?

GENE: The one that wasn't funny?

DAVE: Yeah. That one. Those were my folks, just so you know.

*(Dave rushes Gene, hoping to catch him off guard. He doesn't. And, so, Dave bounces off Gene and onto the ground. In the commotion, something has fallen out of Gene's pocket and onto the floor.)*

DAVE: Whatwasthat?

GENE: What?

DAVE: The thing that flew out of your pocket?

GENE: My pocket?

DAVE: It looks like...skin.

*(Dave peers down to look at the object.)*

DAVE: Ohmysweetjesusitlookslikea...finger...

GENE: Fuck, shit, fuck, fuck fuck!

*(April and Rene run in. The following is a cacophony of fear, curse words, and on Gene's part, shame.)*

APRIL: Dave, what're you doing?

RENE: Hey Gene, I thought—oh, shit / fuck fucking shit  
fuck shit.

APRIL: Oh my holy fucking shit. Jesus fuck my fucking  
shit.

DAVE: What the fuck—fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck!

GENE: I'm sorry, oh jesus shit fucking oh god fucking shit  
fuck.

RENE: Itlookslikeaknuckle—i'mgonnabesick, i'mgonna-  
besick, gonnabesiick.

APRIL: Whatisthatthing? Whatisit? Huhhuhhuhwhatisit?

DAVE: Wewerejuststandinghereandthenallofasudden...

*(Gene reaches reverently for the nubbin of flesh. Mom enters, placid, tranquil, among the chaos.)*

RENE: What're you...Gene?

DAVE: Don'ttouchit,pleasedon'ttouchthat. I DON'T  
KNOW WHAT THAT IS.

RENE: Ishegoingto? UghIdon'twannawatch.

*(The moment crests. Gene, unfazed, reaches over and picks up the knuckle. He holds it up.)*

GENE: When you're all garbled up. When they can't tell who you are. When a tiger eats you and there's nothing left. You'd be surprised how much we look the same. But, then again, maybe you wouldn't. When you're like that, just parts of a body. So maybe it's just as well that they force you to forget who you are in the army. That you forget who you are, because you become the role you play. Some are the brains, some are the golden ones, some are the duds. You are what you do. Fact of the matter is that you're a family in as much as you don't care to be anything else. Being anything else is just that anything else which might as well be nothing which is what it is. So you do what you do. And what does it matter what the truth is, or when anything happened? It's all the same. Same same. You think it's time passing, but it its just you falling apart. I knew that this was him, because he was married, so there was a wedding ring at some point right here. Right on his

knuckle. Which is all that's left. And that's ironic, because the reason he signed up was to get away from who he was and the reason we know who he is, is because of what he tried to get away from.

I told them I wanted to return. To explain to the family what had happened. They let me go, but said it was confidential. What was confidential, I asked. We can't let the American People know that tigers are eating people over here, they said. But it's his family, I replied. And he was one of ours, they told me. It's true, I said. He was ours.

*(Mom closes. Gene looks at her. She slaps him.)*

MOM: That's my husband.

*(Gene gives her the nubbin. Mom places it in the casket.)*

MOM: There, it's done.

## **BREAK**

*(During the break, perhaps a song plays. Perhaps there's dancing. Perhaps life preservers are passed out to the audience. Perhaps there's an intermission.)*