

Ink

By Amo Natamea

Characters

Robert Cozens (ROBERT)
Sharon Cozens (SHARON)
Bobby Cozens, age 7 (YOUNG BOBBY)
Bobby Cozens, age 19 (BOBBY)

Soldier One (SOLDIER ONE)
Vietnamese Woman (WOMAN)
Vietnamese Boy (BOY)

Soldier Two (SOLDIER TWO)
Soldier Three (SOLDIER THREE)

(BOY can be played by same actor as YOUNG BOBBY. SOLDIER TWO and SOLDIER THREE can be played by same actors as SOLDIER ONE and WOMAN.)

Set

The stage is bare, except for a lectern midstage right, a longish rectangular kitchen table and three kitchen chairs downstage center, and one similar chair, but with arms, upstage left. On the kitchen table is a baseball glove, and a baseball bat rests against one of the kitchen chairs.

There is no scenery.

When stated, lights should rise and drop quickly, so that characters appear and disappear.

The lights are very dim except for one down spot illuminating a freshly oiled baseball glove which sits on the downstage table. The mitt holds a baseball and is tied tightly shut by some twine.

Every few minutes, beginning about 20 minutes before the play starts, while the audience is entering and being seated, a boy of about seven years old runs on to the stage and examines the mitt - touching but not picking it up, feeling and smelling the oil between his fingers - and then runs off stage.

This is YOUNG BOBBY, and he is impatient for things to happen and for promises to be fulfilled.

YOUNG BOBBY runs on stage and checks the mitt for the last time. He looks briefly about and then, towards audience:

YOUNG BOBBY

Daddy?

(YOUNG BOBBY runs off stage. A few moments pass, and then ROBERT enters from rear of auditorium, carrying a book and notebook. He has the erect carriage and no-nonsense manner of an ex-Army Colonel, which he was some years before. His speech is direct. He is an imposing man, but softens at home.)

ROBERT

(while approaching stage from back of theater)

My apologies for being late, everyone. Take your seat, take your seat.

(ROBERT climbs to stage, stands behind lectern, and looks out to audience.)

Lights, please!

(All lights drop except for on him at lectern.)

So, last week we wrapped up King Lear, and your first paper is due at end of class today. I trust you all remembered to bring your paper. This week we'll take on Macbeth. If you thought Lear was a barrel of laughs then you'll love Macbeth. I trust you all remembered to bring your text.

(pauses and scans audience)

(mildly annoyed) I see that not all of you have bothered to bring your book today... It's not a very heavy book, everyone, so I wouldn't think it much of a burden to carry around...

In fact, I consider myself as being rather reasonable as far as that goes. I could have assigned both volumes of the 2000 page hardcover Riverside Shakespeare. Wouldn't take too many professors doing that before you'd all be walking around carrying ninety pound backpacks, teetering on unsteady legs from building to building. A good strong gust of wind and campus would be filled with toppled students, flat on your backs with your legs flailing about and your butt cracks hanging out of the top of your jeans, like a field of overturned turtles without sense enough to wear clothes that fit.

But I've assigned a small volume, and I ask that you try to remember to bring it to class with you from now on.

In any case, for those of you without a book today, please find a neighbor who has brought theirs and who's willing to share.

(slight pause while everyone finds someone to look on with)

It is generally thought that Macbeth was written shortly after King Lear, in about the year 1606. Here it is a year short of being 400 years old and Macbeth is still relevant to today. It's the story of a deranged usurper of the throne who leads his country to ruin, and there are witches, ghosts, regicide, suicide, and the on-stage murder of a child.

Another fine candidate for adaptation to the musical theater.

In any case, the beginning of a play is always a good place to start, so let's start there, shall we?

(ROBERT begins to wander away from the lectern, still addressing the audience but ending up at the downstage table just as SHARON addresses him.)

You know, a couple of generations ago it was common for people to walk into a movie theater at any point during a movie, not just at the beginning. They'd watch until the end, stay for the start of the next showing, and watch until that point in the movie came where they had entered. Hence the phrase "Isn't this where we came in?"

(SHARON enters with a newspaper under her arm, sits, and reads the newspaper starting from the back page.)

My wife, Sharon, doesn't read the newspaper from front to back, as a normal person does.

(She stops reading, gives him a look, and resumes.)

Every day she reads the first section of The New York Times backwards. She starts reading at the back page, and works her way, page by page, to the front. And she doesn't just read one story at a time, either, but she reads *all* the stories. Simultaneously. Backwards. Keeping all the threads straight. I still marvel at this.

(She stops reading, smiles at him, and resumes.)

Newspapers, of course, are out of date the minute they're printed. I get my news by watching CNN; cable news, it's the wave of the future. She still reads newspapers. She says she likes newspapers.

SHARON

(to audience)

I like newspapers. I like the smell of ink on paper, the crinkle of the pages, the fwwwp sound when you turn pages. I like that I can take the paper outside and sit under a tree and drink a cup of coffee and smell flowers and listen to the birds.

ROBERT

And why does she read the newspaper backwards? She doesn't want to be told right away what happened. She says she wants to try to figure out what's happened.

SHARON

(to audience)

I want to try to figure out what's happened. Each article is a story - they're called news stories. But unlike in real stories, where you're kept in suspense of the end while the story unfolds, newspaper stories tell you what happened in the first paragraph, followed by the background. Now where's the challenge in that?

I like to read the background first and then see if I can figure out how it's going to end up. It's just that in a newspaper it ends up at the beginning. You have to go backwards in order to go forwards. Shakespeare didn't do flashbacks, and, well, something like modern drama is not really Robert's cup of tea, so he doesn't quite understand.

(as YOUNG BOBBY enters)

You see, in a play, time itself is malleable. Sometimes all it takes is a change of lighting or the appearance of a new character...

YOUNG BOBBY

Hi, Mom.

SHARON

Hi, Bobby.

(to ROBERT, referring to newspaper)

Well, it looks like President Bush really is going to go to war with Saddam Hussein.

(ROBERT removes his jacket, places it on the back of a chair, and sits. The light on the lectern drops.)

ROBERT

Hi, Bobby.

YOUNG BOBBY

Hi Daddy. Is the mitt ready yet?

ROBERT

Well, I don't know. The oil should have soaked in by now. Let's find out.

(ROBERT reaches for the mitt.)

SHARON

Don't get oil on your clothes, Robert.

(ROBERT gives YOUNG BOBBY a look and rolls up his sleeves, revealing a couple of rather impressive tattoos on both forearms. YOUNG BOBBY never fails to be impressed by them.)

ROBERT

Yes, dear.

(ROBERT starts to untie the twine and examine the mitt. He tightens straps and generally fusses with it during the following exchanges.)

Well, let's see... *(to Sharon)* What was that you said about Bush and Saddam, Sharon?

SHARON

I said it looks like President Bush is going to go to war with Saddam Hussein.

ROBERT

Hrmph. Well, Bush wasn't elected to go to war, but it looks like he's found one. That Saddam is a madman. We're going to have to get him out of Kuwait, and I don't think he's going to want to go.

SHARON

Yesterday T. Boone Pickens said if it wasn't for the oil it'd just be a couple of Arabs arguing over a line in the sand.

ROBERT

T. Boone Pickens is an oil man, Sharon, what do you expect him to say... We're going to have to go in to Kuwait and blow things up and shoot people.

Probably have to go blow things up and shoot people in Iraq too.

You can bet a lot of that oil's going to catch fire soon.

YOUNG BOBBY

(a bit worried) Dad, is Kuwait near here? Will we be near the fire?

ROBERT

No, no, Bobby. Kuwait's a long ways away from here. You're not in any danger from a war in Iraq.

YOUNG BOBBY

Is it near where *you* were in the war?

ROBERT

No, Vietnam is on the other side of the world from Kuwait and Iraq. And the Vietnam war was fifteen, twenty, years ago, before you were born.

YOUNG BOBBY

Dad?

ROBERT

Yes, Bobby?

YOUNG BOBBY

When can I get a tattoo?

ROBERT

Well, when you're-

SHARON

Bobby, you will *not* get a tattoo. Robert, don't encourage him.

ROBERT

(changing the subject) Here you go, Bob. All ready for Little League.

And it's big enough that you can use it when you grow up into a big league baseball player. Are you going to be a baseball player when you grow up?

YOUNG BOBBY

Yeah, a baseball player *and* a soldier. Like you.

ROBERT

So, you want to be a soldier like your old man?

YOUNG BOBBY

Yeah, can I, Mom?

SHARON

Well, Bobby, that's a long ways off.

ROBERT

Oh come on, Sharon-

YOUNG BOBBY

Yeah, come on, Mom.

SHARON

Ok, sure, Bobby, I guess so.

YOUNG BOBBY

(excited) So I can be just like daddy?

SHARON

Of course, Bobby.

YOUNG BOBBY

Great, then that means I can get a tattoo.

(ROBERT and SHARON laugh.)

SHARON

Sounds to me like you should be a lawyer...

ROBERT

(Gives mitt and ball to YOUNG BOBBY, who checks it out.)

How's that mitt feel?

YOUNG BOBBY

Great! Dad, you said you're going to coach Little League this year, right?

ROBERT

Sure. I have to see that mitt in action. Maybe we can take it to a Tigers game and catch a foul ball during batting practice.

YOUNG BOBBY

Ok! C'mon, Dad! Let's go across to the park and try it out.

ROBERT

No, Bobby, I can't now. I have work to do.

YOUNG BOBBY

Aw, Dad! Come on, let's play catch.

ROBERT

(a bit sharply) I said not now.

SHARON

(mildly reproaching) Robert...

YOUNG BOBBY

You're not mad at me, are you?

ROBERT

No, I'm sorry, Bobby, I'm not mad. I've just got a lot to do. I've got a paper to finish up for tomorrow's conference and I have to leave tonight. Maybe when I get back from Seattle. Why don't you go next door and see if Jack wants to go to the park with you.

YOUNG BOBBY

No, I don't want to play with him anymore, he's a farthead.

SHARON

Bobby!

ROBERT

Well, Sharon, maybe Jack really is a farthead, his *dad* sure is a farthead.

SHARON

Robert! Language.

ROBERT

Well he is. And Jack probably is too. There's nothing so annoying as other people's children. Bobby, isn't there someone else you can find to play with?

YOUNG BOBBY

(disappointed) No, that's ok, I'll just go outside.

SHARON

(as YOUNG BOBBY gets up to go)

Don't go far, Bobby, dinner's soon. I'm making chicken pot pies.

YOUNG BOBBY

Oh, good, Mom. I like those.

SHARON

Yes, I know you do.

YOUNG BOBBY

Ok. B'bye mom-mom.

ROBERT

Oh, Bobby-

YOUNG BOBBY

Yeah, Dad?

ROBERT

Don't tell Jack I said his dad's a farthead, ok?

YOUNG BOBBY

Ok, B'bye daddy.

(YOUNG BOBBY goes upstage left, in a different light, where he plays catch by tossing the ball against the wall, slaps the ball in his mitt, catches short fly balls, etc. ROBERT and SHARON watch him leave.)

ROBERT

Bye Bobby. *(to SHARON)* He needs a haircut.

SHARON

He doesn't need a haircut, and why don't you take him to the park to play catch? You figure you'll do it on the next go-round? When he's seven years old again? Well, he's not going to be seven years old again, Robert, this is it.

ROBERT

(they've had this fight before) What do you want me to do? I have to present a paper in two days and it needs three more days of work. Besides, he and I spent time yesterday oiling the glove-

SHARON

Yes, and now he wants to use it to play catch with you. You need to follow through with things. You just promised to take him to a baseball game soon. Now when are you going to do that? You have another conference next weekend, then the next semester starts and the year's over. And you said you're going to coach his little league team! Again.

ROBERT

Well, this year I'm going to try. Really, I will. Besides, when we do spend time together, it's quality time.

SHARON

Quality time? *Quality* time? Robert, "quality time" is a crock of sh-. Kids don't want quality time, they want quantity time. Big honkin' gobs of quantity time.

ROBERT

I don't have quantity time now. Look, I'm doing this for him. The money from this summer's conferences are going towards this winter's hockey: lessons, ice time, league fees, tournaments.

SHARON

Yes, I know.

ROBERT

Well, it's expensive, and he really likes to play.

SHARON

Yes, I know.

ROBERT

And he needs new skates and gear each year. I can't believe how fast he's growing.

SHARON

Yes, and you're missing it.

ROBERT

What do you want me to do?

SHARON

Sometimes I think you pushed him into hockey because you can't skate.

ROBERT

What do you mean by that?

SHARON

Nothing.

ROBERT

Look, I try to find time to do stuff with him. I don't miss *all* his soccer games, do I?

SHARON

(resigned that he still doesn't get it) No, no, you don't.

ROBERT

Well, ok then. This summer I'll get enough money to cover this year's hockey and I'll try to coach little league, ok?

SHARON

Ok.

ROBERT

Now if it's all right with you I'm going to try to get some more work done.

(ROBERT puts his jacket on and moves to lectern to write. Perhaps the light on him changes. YOUNG BOBBY is still playing ball upstage.)

SHARON

(to audience)

That wasn't the first time we'd had that... discussion. And it wouldn't be the last. I didn't push it - I never pushed it, I guess, because I knew he really did mean well.

We tried to take vacations, usually if the summer Modern Languages Association convention was in some exotic place. Like Milwaukee. Or Syracuse. One year we all went to Toronto, and stayed in the hotel at the stadium that overlooks the baseball field.

We would have had the perfect seats if there had been a game that weekend, but they were playing in Anaheim. Instead Robert and Bobby sat on the hotel balcony, listening to the game on the radio and staring at the empty field, imagining the game being played in front of them.

One time we did go to Disneyworld. At least there's that.

Bobby so looked up to Robert - remember Sylvia Plath's line about her daddy: "A bag of God" - and Robert tried... But there was something holding him back. I felt like his... inability... to make time for Bobby wasn't the real problem so much as it was a symptom of a different problem. A problem I could never...

(pause)

I wasn't alone in this. Talking to the mothers of Bobby's friends - they were going through the same thing. The moms of Bobby's friends and I would carpool to soccer games and together we'd drink coffee in the cold mornings and white wine in the warm evenings while our husbands were late at the office or out of town.

This was the 1990s, there was money to be made in the stock market. This was the time of the dot-com boom, and if you were in the right high-tech company at the right time you could be set for life. Bobby had a friend whose father, an engineering professor, got a consulting job with a little startup making embedded processors. Whatever they are. He worked insane hours and got paid a small salary and some stock options. He missed a lot of soccer games too. But then his company - Broadcom - took off, and although he still didn't get to many soccer games, they were very happy to have those options to buy stock at five dollars a share when the stock hit 480.

It's hard to make that kind of money in the English Department. It's hard to make *any* kind of money in the English Department. I did some substitute teaching and Robert talked at conferences and taught at summer programs and didn't get to very many baseball games.

And time passed.

One day you have this little boy, not much older than a baby really, and before you're ready, in the time it takes to smile, or blink, or to take a breath or swing a bat or toss a ball

(Upstage, YOUNG BOBBY tosses the ball in the air and when it comes down YOUNG BOBBY has disappeared, replaced by older BOBBY, who catches the ball. Older BOBBY now continues to play catch with himself.)

your little boy is gone.

You were there the whole time, watching it happen, every moment of every day. And every once in a while you'd feel this epiphanous moment of clarity, where you understood the power, the force, of the raw truth of the passage of time, and that force seemed to have mass, an immense mass, and the gravity of that mass pulled on you, on your every cell, pulled you towards... an end. You can feel a force pulling you towards an end, and you're abjectly helpless to do anything about it.

(BOBBY stops playing ball and approaches SHARON while she speaks.)

Yet it still takes you by surprise when one day your baby walks up and says "Well, Mom, in a couple of days I graduate from high school."

BOBBY

Well, Mom, in a couple of days I graduate from high school.

(All light quickly down. Light quickly up on ROBERT at the lectern.)

ROBERT

"Fair is foul, and foul is fair."

With that warning from the witches, our play begins. Nothing is as it seems. The dualities of human nature are shown. Macbeth fights bravely, savagely, victoriously, for King Duncan, his cousin, and is honored as a hero, yet all the while he plots to kill the King and take over the throne.

Which he does.

(ROBERT can wander away from the lectern here)

Let's talk a little about taboo.

The word "taboo" is Polynesian in origin, first encountered by Captain Cook while exploring native Pacific females in the late 18th century.

(Lights up on upstage chair. SOLDIER ONE enters, carrying a map and some papers in a file folder. He is dressed in Vietnam War-era jungle fatigues. He sits, reads the file, and examines the map. ROBERT continues the lecture.)

As originally used, something that was taboo was restricted to the use of gods, kings, priests, and chiefs, and was forbidden for general use. As currently used, something that is taboo is something banned by society on grounds of morality.

Note that since moral codes are one of the defining characteristics of a society, as societies evolve their underlying moral codes must also evolve - some would say devolve - and so society's taboos change.

An evolving society will, by necessity, simultaneously contain conflicting sets of moral codes, and therefore, conflicting notions of acceptable behavior: in other words, conflicting taboos.

Simply put, though: there are some things that you do not do.

(Lights off on upstage chair. SOLDIER ONE disappears.)

In Shakespeare's time the king was considered God's representative on earth. Regicide, therefore, was an attack on God, an unforgivable taboo. By committing regicide, Macbeth, then, commits an unpardonable crime.

And if that regicide in itself weren't egregious enough, by taking over the throne he was also usurping God's power and claiming a relationship with God. A false relationship with God. He assumed the position as leader of his country through duplicity and treachery, and in wearing that mantle he was saying to his country "God speaks to me."

(Lights off on ROBERT. lights up on SHARON and BOBBY at downstage table.)

BOBBY

When's dad going to be home?

SHARON

Bobby, you're so impatient. What is so important?

BOBBY

I want to tell you something, and I want you both here.

SHARON

(excited) Bobby, did you get into Yale?

BOBBY

No, Mom, I-

SHARON

Because I know your father wants you to go Michigan-

BOBBY

No, Mom, that's not-

SHARON

But since I went to Yale I know we could convince him-

BOBBY

Mom, that's not-

SHARON

What is it, then? Is it a girl?

(ROBERT enters)

BOBBY

No, it's not a girl-

ROBERT

Bobby, do you have a new girl-

BOBBY

No, it's not a girl-

ROBERT

Did you get into Yale, then, because you could stay here
in Mich-

BOBBY

No, look, both of you sit down.

SHARON

Ok, then. What is it?

(ROBERT sits. BOBBY pops up. He's excited.)

BOBBY

I've joined the army!

ROBERT

What!

*(SHARON gives a cry like a duck being strangled.
They both look at her.)*

Bobby, take it slow. What did you do?

BOBBY

Well, I've been thinking about this for a little while
now, and I've been down to the recruiting station, and,
I, well, I-

(SHARON gives another strangled duck cry.)

I joined this morning.

SHARON

Can you unjoin this afternoon?

BOBBY

No, Mom, this is something I want to do.

SHARON

But college... Yale...

ROBERT

You mean Michigan.

SHARON

(angry) He could go to fucking Ohio State for all I care, just go to college, don't join the army.

ROBERT

Now calm down, Sharon. Bobby, why this sudden desire to join the army. Is it because of September 11th?

BOBBY

Well, partly.

SHARON

You know it looks like President Bush is going to go to war with Saddam Hussein?

BOBBY

I know.

ROBERT

And you still-

BOBBY

Yes, look, I know there's probably nothing to that stuff about WMDs and Al Queda.

SHARON

See, you're bright, you should go to college.

BOBBY

Mom! There's more. I saw on the news... they were testifying about Iraq and how bad it is over there for the Iraqi people.

ROBERT

Yes, that seems true.

BOBBY

And I thought. Look, this is probably my only chance to do something good for a whole lot of people, a whole nation of people.

SHARON

But, Bobby...

BOBBY

If I wait until after college, well, that'll be 2006, and we won't be over there anymore. This is my chance.

SHARON

(sort of resigned herself to it) Bobby...

BOBBY

I can go to college afterwards.

SHARON

Bobby...

BOBBY

Look, Mom, what really got to me is... I read that Saddam Hussein... that they take kids... that these are guys who torture children in front of their parents.

ROBERT

What sort of man does something like that?

SHARON

Robert! This is ok with you?

ROBERT

Sharon, that's barbarous. What kind of man does something like that? There are some things you do not do.

BOBBY

Right. I mean, that's something I can do something about, to get him out of there.

ROBERT

You say you've already signed up.

BOBBY

Yep. This morning.

(SHARON makes the duck sound.)

ROBERT

Well, when do you ship out?

BOBBY

A week from next Tuesday.

(SHARON again)

BOBBY

Mom, are you ok?

SHARON

(with preternatural calm) Yes, dear. I'll be fine.

(pause, then she rises, makes the duck sound, and leaves. BOBBY looks at ROBERT.)

ROBERT

It's ok, Bobby, give her a minute and talk to her again.

BOBBY

Dad, you're not mad at me, are you?

ROBERT

Mad?! No, not at all. Bobby, what you did took a lot of guts. I'm proud of you.

BOBBY

Dad, you... you never talk about your time in Vietnam.

ROBERT

No, it's not something I like to... it was like a previous lifetime to me. I don't think about it much.

BOBBY

But you didn't see much fighting, right?

ROBERT

No, Bobby, I guess in that respect I was one of the lucky ones. I worked in an office in Saigon. In the middle of a city.

BOBBY

So you never shot anyone?

ROBERT

Well, I got shot at a few times, riding in a chopper, but no, I never shot anyone. Never even fired a gun there.

BOBBY

(pause) I wonder if I could do it.

ROBERT

Do what? Shoot at someone?

BOBBY

Yeah, I mean, if they're shooting at you, then I guess it'd be easy, but, I don't know... I guess that's just it, you never know what you'll do until you have to do it.

ROBERT

Yeah, I guess so.

BOBBY

You were probably lucky, in a way, not to have to do anything like that. I mean, something bad.

(pause)

By the time I get there, the fighting'll probably be over anyway. I mean, I'm doing this to help people out, the kids over there.

ROBERT

You've got a good heart, Bobby. I'm proud of you. You're doing a very brave thing, and trying to do a good thing, too. That's commendable.

All right, now see if you can go calm your mother down. I think part of the problem is simply that you're leaving home. But you'll do that whether you go to college or you join the service. She's afraid you'll leave and not come back; you need to reassure her that you'll return home, to this table (*taps table*) in this kitchen. It's a mom thing.

BOBBY

Yeah, you're right. (*needling*) I'll tell her when I get back I'll go to Yale instead of Michigan. That'll make her feel better.

ROBERT

Bobby!

(BOBBY laughs and leaves. ROBERT goes to the lectern. Lights drop except on lectern.)

ROBERT

Macbeth is now king. But though the witches have prophesied that Macbeth will become king, they also say he will be childless, and that instead his friend Banquo, with whom he fought for Duncan, will sire a line of kings.

(Lights up on upstage chair as SOLDIER ONE enters.)

Banquo suspects that Macbeth has killed Duncan, and that his loyalties still lie with the murdered king.

Banquo, then, must die, and Macbeth sends assassins to kill Banquo and his son, Fleance. Though they succeed in killing Banquo, they fail to kill Fleance.

SOLDIER ONE

(To ROBERT. Whereas previously ROBERT was able to completely ignore SOLDIER ONE, now he's aware of SOLDIER ONE's presence, though he displays no more than a hint of that awareness.)

Colonel?

ROBERT

Macbeth is told of Banquo's murder at a celebration of his ascendancy. But just as soon as he's informed, Banquo's ghost appears before him.

SOLDIER ONE

(a little bit more insistent) Colonel. Colonel Cozens?

ROBERT

In Shakespeare's time, simply put, ghosts existed. An audience would not have been surprised that a man with blood on his hands would be haunted by an apparition, accusing him, reminding him...

SOLDIER ONE

Colonel. Please, Colonel Cozens, we have the woman now. She won't talk.

ROBERT

So now we see that in addition to treachery, duplicity, and murder, Macbeth starts to go mad.

(Upstage lights drop. SOLDIER ONE disappears.)

The appearance of Banquo's ghost marks the beginning of the decline of Macbeth's sanity, and with it the decline in the fortunes of the kingdom. The country is on a course it cannot sustain.

(Lights down on ROBERT, and up on BOBBY sitting in upstage chair. He is dressed in desert fatigues and holds a laptop on which he starts writing. SHARON enters carrying a printout of an email.)

SHARON

Robert! ROBERT! We got an email from Bobby!

(ROBERT enters)

ROBERT

Is it on the computer now?

SHARON

No, I printed it out. You know I need ink on paper.

(reading) July 15. Dear Mom and Dad. I got into Baghdad a couple of days ago and finally got connected to the net link in camp, so I'll be able to send email every once in a while.

I'm on patrol around the city during the day, looking for the Republican Guard, who ran when we marched in. It's really pretty eerie. We'll drive through the streets and people will come out and silently watch us. Some cheer and wave, especially the kids and younger people. The older people watch us but don't seem particularly unfriendly, they're a bit wary.

There's a group stateside that's been shipping toys over here for us to pass out to the kids. Lots of soccer balls and balloons and teddy bears. It seems weird to see kids with teddy bears out here in the desert but I guess fuzzy animals are fuzzy animals no matter where you are, and the kids really seem to like them.

BOBBY

(while typing) Hey, Dad, we decided to show the kids how to play baseball. Outside of camp we bulldozed away until we had a field, a real baseball field. In the middle of Iraq. We have bases and an outfield fence, a chain link fence, and even sort of a dugout, and benches. We don't have any grass because in the middle of summer here it's fucking hot... sorry mom.

SHARON

That's all right dear, I'm sure it's very fucking hot.

BOBBY

Well, anywho, since it's so hot we can only play at like three in the morning. We park all these trucks outside the outfield fence with their lights on shining in to the field so we can see. It's weird, we'll be playing baseball at three in the morning and all these Iraqis come out to watch us like we're fu- like we're absolutely crazy to be here. Which, I guess, we are.

Whenever someone hits a home run some Iraqi kid grabs the ball and takes off, to sell it or something, I don't know. It's a good thing no one can really see the ball very well with all those truck lights in our eyes. We don't hit many home runs.

Anywho, I've got to go. Thanks for the packages. It's good to get little things from home, especially baby wipes. Please send more. I really miss your cooking. B'bye mom-mom. B'bye dad. Love, Bobby.

SHARON

(reading) November 27. Dear Mom and Dad. Happy Thanksgiving. Today we got a visit by the President. He carried a big turkey into the mess hall. I didn't get to see him because you were required to sign a special loyalty oath to be allowed in to the mess hall when he was there, and... well, it's hard to explain but I just couldn't do it. Turns out a lot of us didn't sign it. It's ok though because it turns out that turkey he was carrying was made of plastic or something and not a real turkey after all. We ate ok, but, Mom, I wish I had one of your turkey pot pies.

BOBBY

(typing) We're still on patrol, and we've had some pretty close calls. We've been pretty lucky, I guess, because I haven't been shot at yet or near a bomb. There's a lot of bombs going off and they seem to be getting bigger.

This place is like a ghost town, except it's filled with people. I don't see how they stay alive. There's no electricity, no running water. There's no sewer system, so the smell from the streets and the river is enough to make you sick.

I saw a bunch of kids out on the street begging and I asked one of the translators why that kid wasn't at home. You remember that children's prison where we freed all those kids? It was in the papers. Well, it turns out it wasn't a prison, it was an orphanage, and after the kids left the whole place was looted, picked clean, so even if the kids wanted to go back there wouldn't be anywhere for them to go.

I know where I'd like to be right now, and it's not here. B'bye mom-mom. B'bye dad. Love, Bobby.

SHARON

(reading) February 21. Dear Mom and Dad. This place really. really. really.

BOBBY

(typing) really. really. sucks. B'bye mom-mom. B'bye dad. Love, Bobby.

ROBERT

That's all?

SHARON

That's all.

(reading) June 13. Dear Mom and Dad. You'll notice that the email address I'm sending from isn't my regular army address. Some guys here said they're starting to censor our email. I know there are certain websites we can't get to anymore. Well, I sent you an email last week but you didn't respond. I think what happened is they didn't let it go through so I'm using yahoo mail, at least until they figure out what we're doing.

I had my first shooting incident yesterday. We were driving along the river when a car pulled up alongside us really fast. Well, we're all a bit jumpy because bombs have been going off all over the city, dozens a day, it seems. I've looked on the news sites on the web and don't see this but believe me this place is out of control. anywho, this car pulls up and I didn't think, I just reacted, and started firing. You wouldn't believe the power these guns have, Dad, much more powerful than anything in Vietnam.

Well, I missed, and the car stopped, and it was tense for a minute, but it was just a guy trying to get his kid to the doctor. Mom, remember that time

BOBBY

I broke my arm and you drove like crazy to get me to the doctor. I told the lieutenant about it and he said next time just keep firing because you never know, and he'd rather have to fill out forms because of some dead raghead than for a dead me.

I'm sure glad I missed, though. These guns can really do damage. I've seen the results. You don't see the results on TV there, believe me.

I heard we might be coming home for a couple of weeks at end of summer, but I can't make any promises. I'll let you know. B'bye mom-mom. B'bye dad.

SHARON

(reading) August 15. Dear Mom and Dad. Well, I'll be coming home on leave next week.

I've killed someone, I think. Well, no, I know I have, but I'm not sure how many. We were near this outdoor market and these two guys came running towards us carrying... something... and we thought for sure they were IEDs, that's for "improvised explosive device," that means bomb, and they were, they were bombs, and we just started shooting at them. In the middle of the market. And one of the bombs went off...

BOBBY

I just kept shooting. Until I could hear again after the blast of the bomb. And I heard screams. In the market, it was pretty terrible. I couldn't tell who the blast had killed and who I had killed. I'm not in any trouble because the bomb is what caused all hell to break loose.

The next day we drove past a funeral procession, and there were all these crying Iraqis carrying four open coffins on their shoulders. I was standing in the back of the Humvee, and as we passed I looked down into the coffins. I expected to see, you know, a regular body in each one, I've seen that before. Instead, each one of them had two or three dead kids inside. Little kids. Or what was left of them. And I wondered... did I kill them? Did I really do that?

Dad, you always said there are some things that you do not do. Is this one of them?

I'll let you know when I get in. B'bye mom-mom. B'bye dad.

(Lights down except for lectern. ROBERT goes to lectern.)

ROBERT

After the appearance of Banquo's ghost, Macbeth realizes he can't escape his past deeds:

I am in blood
Stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more...
(falters) should I wade no more...

(Lights down. Light up on Sharon at table, reading newspaper.)

BOBBY

(off) Mom! Mom, I'm home.

(BOBBY enters. SHARON jumps up and gives him a big hug.)

SHARON

Bobby! Oh Bobby, we're so glad to have you home...

(to ROBERT, off)

Robert! ROBERT! Bobby's home.

BOBBY

I'm not going back.

SHARON

You mean you've been reassigned back home?

(ROBERT enters.)

BOBBY

(with a little laugh) No, Mom, no one ever gets reassigned home. I mean I'm not going back to Iraq. There's no way I'll go back there.

ROBERT

Bobby, you have to go back. You'll be AWOL...

BOBBY

Then I'll be AWOL. You don't understand, Dad. I can't go back there. I...

(ROBERT and SHARON exchange a look. SHARON rises.)

SHARON

Bobby, I'm going to make chicken pot pies for dinner tonight.

(no response from BOBBY)

I'm going to the store. Is there anything special you'd like?

BOBBY

No. Thanks, Mom. I'll be fine.

(SHARON leaves.)

ROBERT

Bobby, what's happened? What do you mean you aren't going to go back?

(pause)

BOBBY

Dad?

ROBERT

Yes, Bobby.

BOBBY

Promise you won't tell Mom?

ROBERT

Tell her what?

BOBBY

I got a tattoo.

ROBERT

Where?

BOBBY

Over my heart.

ROBERT

(As BOBBY stands and with his back to the audience unbuttons the top buttons of his shirt to show ROBERT.)

No, I mean where...

(He stares horrified.)

That teddy bear he's holding looks a little like the one you had when you were a kid.

(pause)

Where's his other arm?

BOBBY

(pointing) Up here on my shoulder.

ROBERT

And his legs?

BOBBY

(pointing) Down here on my hip.

(BOBBY pulls his shirt up)

See, his sandals are still on his feet, just like when I-
... just like when he got shot.

You won't tell mom, will you?

ROBERT

No, Bobby. I won't tell her.

(pause)

Bobby, you can't just go AWOL. They'll put you in the brig. That's desertion.

BOBBY

It's really bad over there, Dad.

ROBERT

Bobby, you're in a war. Bad things happen in wars.

(Lights up on upstage chair. WOMAN is sitting in chair, her hands bound to the arms. She appears to have been beaten. SOLDIER ONE lights a cigarette. As SOLDIER ONE becomes more insistent, the argument between ROBERT and BOBBY escalates, and BOBBY starts to crack.)

BOBBY

You don't know what it's like over there, every day...

ROBERT

I know that things happen in war, Bobby.

SOLDIER ONE

(to ROBERT)

Colonel?

BOBBY

It's all so senseless, Dad.

SOLDIER ONE

Colonel? The woman says she doesn't know where he is. Just somewhere here in Saigon. Colonel?

ROBERT

That's how war is, Bobby.

BOBBY

You don't know what I've done.

SOLDIER ONE

(more insistently) Colonel! We're running out of time.

ROBERT

Every soldier has done things, Bobby.

BOBBY

There was no bomb!

(SOLDIER ONE burns the bound hand of the WOMAN with his cigarette. She screams. ROBERT hears this and with effort tries to ignore it.)

ROBERT

What do you mean, there was no bomb.

BOBBY

When I shot all those kids in the marketplace. There was no bomb.

ROBERT

But you wrote that a bomb went off, and that's why you shot-

BOBBY

No, Dad. Don't you see, there was no bomb. I just shot... maybe I thought I heard something, I don't know, but I started shooting and couldn't stop.

They screamed and I kept on shooting. I kept on shooting. I kept on shooting.

SOLDIER ONE

Colonel!

ROBERT

No, Bobby, no. It's not your fault, it's ok.

BOBBY

No! It's not ok. It's my fault. You can't know-

ROBERT

No, you don't know!

BOBBY

What do you mean, I don't know? Nothing could be-

SOLDIER ONE

(loudly) Colonel!

(ROBERT quickly moves to upstage area. BOBBY watches.)

ROBERT

(to WOMAN)

Where is he?

WOMAN

I don't know.

(ROBERT slaps her.)

ROBERT

I said, *(slaps her again)* where is he?

BOBBY

Dad!

WOMAN

I don't know. I don't know. You have to believe me.

ROBERT

(to SOLDIER ONE) Bring in the boy.

(SOLDIER ONE leaves.)

Now tell me! *(slaps her again)*

BOBBY

Dad! No, no!

(SOLDIER ONE returns with BOY, who stands with his back to audience.)

BOY

Mom!!

WOMAN

I tell you, I don't know!

(ROBERT grabs the baseball bat from the kitchen table and moves upstage of BOY.)

Please, no!

(ROBERT cocks bat to swing at BOY's knees.)

BOBBY

Don't!

BOY

Mommy!

WOMAN

(screams) No!

(ROBERT begins a violent swing. Lights cut to black, except for very different light now on BOBBY, who collapses on his knees center stage. SHARON, dressed in flowing long white dress enters from upstage into same light. She stands over BOBBY and smiles at him beatifically.)

BOBBY

(in sort of a little boy voice) Mommy, I'm sorry.

SHARON

(pause) You foul. loathsome. creature.

To think, that I created you, from an egg that I carried within me from the time when I myself was created.

And then I carried you in me, nourished you with food from my body, with oxygen from my blood. That I lay down at night and fell asleep feeling you move inside me, growing larger and larger, demanding more of me, from me, which I was so willing to provide.

And then. I gave birth. To *this*.

(pause)

You were such a sweet boy, and I so loved raising you, watching you grow... loving you. If I had known that this is what you were to become, the pain you would cause, the shame you would bring... I should have aborted you, my dear sweet boy... If there were a way to undo what I've done, to erase you from the earth, to black you out...

My baby, you really are just like your father after all.

(All lights drop. Light up on ROBERT at lectern.)

ROBERT

(to audience)

To the rumble of thunder Macbeth enters a cavern to ask if the three witches will show him the future. The witches agree, and conjure three apparitions. The first is an armed head, warning Macbeth to beware Macduff. The second apparition is a bloody child...

(pause)

A bloody child...

(ROBERT leaves the lectern and wanders center stage. BOBBY stands upstage, in complete darkness. As ROBERT says the following a spot comes up, focused tightly on the tattoo on his chest.)

On his chest, right over his heart, he had a tattoo of a small boy, maybe five years old, holding a teddy bear in one hand... and one arm and both legs were missing, shorn off, and the stumps were bleeding... and his mouth was open - you could almost hear him screaming. His eyes were open wide and seemed to be looking right at you. At me. And lower down, on his side, the boy's two severed legs, bleeding, like they'd just been shot off and that's where they landed.

Well, Bobby disappeared. He didn't return home. He didn't return to his unit. A couple of MPs came looking for him, but we didn't know where he was. They didn't look very hard.

We didn't hear from him for six months, until this past Thanksgiving. Ha called and asked me to bring him one of his mother's chicken pot pies. He gave me the address, a small apartment not too far away. He didn't want Sharon to come, he said he didn't want to see her, and when I got there I saw why...

(As ROBERT says the following the spot on BOBBY's chest slowly enlarges. BOBBY removes his shirt and holds his arms down to his sides. His entire torso should be tattooed. Ideally his back is tattooed as well, and he slowly revolves on a turntable.)

He had gotten more tattoos. All similar to the first, children, little boys and girls, in pain, shot, limbs blown off to various parts of his body, and small children's toys.

The children all had these hauntingly innocent eyes, staring right at you, right down into your soul, accusing you. Some seemed to be reaching out for help...

He had covered his chest, and back, and arms... his sides, his butt and legs and feet, his hands and his neck... his entire body was a giant mosaic of crying wounded children and arms and legs and toys.

In the middle of his back, in the midst of it all, he had written

For thou hast made the happy earth thy hell
Filled it with cursing cries and deep exclams.
If thou delight to view thy heinous deeds,
Behold this pattern of thy butcheries.

He called them his children. He talked about them as if they were real - "The children went to the park today." "The children didn't feel well yesterday, so we stayed in."

He said he could sometimes feel them moving around on his skin under his clothes, searching for their arms and legs. Sometimes they were playing with their toys. And he said they cried at bedtime, and called his name.

He'd call late at night, call crying, saying the children were more than he could bear, that they wouldn't let him sleep. He said if they didn't quiet down they were going to drive him crazy.

He decided to kill his children.

(As ROBERT finishes the following the spot slowly closes on the tattoo on BOBBY's chest. A second spot is on BOBBY's face, unseen until the first spot closes past it, leaving his face and a small portion of his chest illuminated.)

He completely blacked out some of the tattoos. Some of the images of the children had been completely inked over, completely black. Over the next month he blacked out a dozen children a day. But he left the limbs and the toys. He just blacked out the children.

Finally he had one child left, the first one he had done, the little boy in the middle of his chest. His body was completely black except for this one boy and hundreds of arms and legs and toys...

And then he started blacking out the arms and the legs and the toys until all that was left was the original little boy and *his* arm and his legs and the teddy bear.

And then he blacked out the little boy and his arm and legs, but he left the teddy bear. He was completely black except for a little teddy bear right over his heart.

(SHARON enters holding a letter and stands behind downstage table.)

And then we got a letter.

(When SHARON says the word "letter" the spots on BOBBY drop.)

SHARON

(As she reads ROBERT moves to stand next to her, and SOLDIER TWO and SOLDIER THREE enter and place a flag over the downstage table. This is BOBBY's coffin. They stand off a bit stage left. The chairs should somehow have been removed by this time, or SOLDIERS TWO and THREE can do it now.)

(reading) Dear Mom and Dad. I'm writing a letter, Mom, because I know how much you prefer ink on paper to email.

BOBBY

(voice of BOBBY, off)

Dad, I've made peace with the children, and will see them soon. Thanks for everything. B'bye mom-mom. Please don't have to be ashamed of me any more. B'bye daddy. Love, Bobby.

(SHARON drops the letter and turns to ROBERT. They remain standing. SHARON sobs softly. ROBERT has his arm around her. They all stand in silence for a bit. The SOLDIERS leave.)

SHARON

I remember when Bobby was four years old. We saved up and drove to Florida to go to Disneyworld for three days. Halfway through the first day Bobby insisted, very loudly, that he wanted to dress up like Mickey. We went in the Disneyworld stores and looked at all the Mickey costumes and they cost so much... we tried to put him off but he got more and more insistent.

I remember pushing him in his stroller and all of a sudden he got all excited yelling "there there mommy there" and pointed to one of those souvenir stands, and it had Mickey ears, those stupid little felt hats with the ears and a rubber band. That's all he wanted. Just a little hat. He wore it every minute of the next two days and was never so happy...

We worry so much about making money to give them these fancy clothes and music lessons and sports and vacations and classes and... and all they really want is a pair of Mickey ears... They don't really ask for much. Just our love... and maybe to play a game of catch.

(SHARON rises to leave.)

(in sudden confused anger) Ashamed of him. Ashamed of him! What did they do to my baby to make him think I'd ever be ashamed of him...

I want to kill someone. I'm just not sure who.

(SHARON leaves. ROBERT gets up and goes to lectern. Lights down except on lectern.)

ROBERT

When is regicide acceptable?

Macbeth has lain waste to Scotland, and Macduff has turned against him. Macbeth orders the murder of Macduff's family. Macduff's young son

(YOUNG BOBBY, holding mitt and ball, enters upstage, in different light, waiting.)

is slain onstage, run through by the sword of an assassin. Macduff returns to exact his revenge on Macbeth.

The ending battle between Macduff and Macbeth is one of our classic confrontations between good and evil. Macduff is victorious and appears carrying Macbeth's head.

The evil is decapitated and the land is saved.

(pause)

What will you do when a power-mad pretender to the throne comes for your son. To take him away and leave you with a flag and call it a fair exchange. Will you have the courage to resist, to say no, you may not use my child for your evil.

(ROBERT leaves lectern, ends up at flag-covered table by final line.)

Perhaps that day is not upon you yet. But you can see it down the road, and approaching fast, so don't be surprised when one day assassins show up at your door with lies and a flag.

Class dismissed.

(ROBERT falls to knees in mourning at the flag, bent over the flag, gently sobbing. YOUNG BOBBY approaches.)

YOUNG BOBBY

Dad?

(ROBERT can't hear him.)

Daddy?

(YOUNG BOBBY sets the mitt and ball on the flag in front of ROBERT, and leaves. Lights dim to black except for down spot on mitt. Spot slowly dims to black.)

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