

HERO'S WELCOME

A Drama with Music

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by  
David Jacklin

© 1985  
David Jacklin

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## THE CHARACTERS

THE PIANIST, balladeer and interrogator

THE SINGER, a "thrush", red and black silk and fox furs

LARRY PRITCHARD, returning war hero, 24

MICHAEL PRITCHARD, Larry's kid brother, 14

RUTH PRITCHARD, their mother, hard-working farm-wife

BOB PRITCHARD, her husband, self-made, country-boy

ELOISE PHILLIPS, Larry's pre-war sweetheart, 22

CLAYTON WYSTAN, Larry's army buddy, also a returning war hero, 25

## THE PLACE AND TIME

A small, rural community in Southern Ontario

The events and remembrances of one night in late April, 1945

## THOUGHTS

This play is based, very loosely, on actual events that happened to my father during his tour of duty in England, Sicily and Italy with the Royal Canadian Regiment in 1942 and 1943. However, my father is, by no means, to be construed as the central, or indeed as any, character in this piece. I simply felt that a play of some kind could be written around those events, as related by him to me. The reason I mention it at all is to legitimize the descriptions of battle sequences. I have no experience of my own which I can relate to them, therefore all of Larry and Clayton's experiences are based on actual incidents from my father's life, as is Larry's fall from the tree. I have then extrapolated and modified them, while trying to remain faithful to the effect which they may have had.

The set should be simple: a screen door; a bit of wall; a piece of picket fence; a bench seat from a truck. Props: the mickeys; the hockey sticks; a bowl for Eloise to "put in the bottom of the ice-box"; the duffle bags. I have specified a large number of silent moments in stage directions. Much of the intent of the play is carried in these and they should be observed. BEAT: a moment which is complete in itself; PAUSE: a moment between one train of thought and a new one; SILENCE: a moment which suspends the tension of previous moments and carries them into the next series.

HERO'S WELCOME received top honours in the 1982 Theatre Ontario New Play Workshop and was workshopped and given public reading by the New Drama Centre in Toronto, under the direction of Carol Bolt, and by the Blyth Festival, under the direction of Katherine Kaszas. Its first public performance was on July 31, 1985, by the Perth Summer Theatre, at the Agricultural Building, Perth, Ontario, with the following credits:

Direction & Design.....David Jacklin  
Administrator.....Normalyn McLelland  
Stage Manager.....Laurie Hirst  
Costumes.....Lynn Chase, Colleen Mott

THE PIANIST.....Gerard LePage  
THE SINGER .....Sheri Madden  
LARRY PRITCHARD.....Glen Gaston  
MICHAEL PRITCHARD.....Doug Bond  
RUTH PRITCHARD.....Heather Majaury  
BOB PRITCHARD.....Tim O'Ray  
ELOISE PHILLIPS.....Beverley Wolfe  
CLAYTON WYSTAN.....Michael Erion

In April of 1990, HERO'S WELCOME was the recipient of the Ottawa Valley Book Festival's inaugural Dave Smith Playwrighting Award.

HERO'S WELCOME  
a drama with music  
Act One

THE SETTING: the set is a skeletal wall, with a screen door and window SL, with a bench under the window; UC is the seat of a pickup, behind which is a gobo projection of the constellation Orion; SR is a piano)

(the PIANIST enters; he is a slightly bizarre fellow with narrow black tie and rather ruffled suit; he carries a gin bottle, from which he occasionally takes a swig; the SINGER runs on, late, tottering on spike heels and clutching her fox furs and pill- box hat; she takes a sip from the gin bottle and they sit at the piano; he starts to play)

PIANIST

WE'VE HAD THE ARMY LIFE,  
WE'VE HAD THE OL' HUP-TWO!  
WE'VE HAD THE LEFT-RIGHT-LEFT,  
AND THE CHIPPED-BEEF STEW.  
WE'VE HAD THE CORPORALS 'N' SERGEANTS  
AND BIG, BRASS HATS.  
WE'VE HAD THE MORTARS AND THE BOMBS  
AND THE RAT-A-TAT-TATS.  
WE KNOW YOU DIDN'T WANT US GOING OFF TO WAR,  
BUT, WE'RE BACK ON CIVVIE STREET, ONCE MORE.  
HEY, WE'RE BACK ON CIVVIE STREET, ONCE MORE!

PIANIST & SINGER

SO, GET YOUR SUIT ON, WILLY,  
'CAUSE WE'RE GOING TO TOWN!  
SHINE UP THOSE DANCING SHOES!  
WE'LL BOOGIE AND WE'LL WOOGIE  
'TILL THE WALLS COME DOWN!  
WINE THOSE WOMEN, IGNORE BAD NEWS!

(the SINGER adds the phrase "Doot- doo-wah! Doot-dah-oowah-oowah!", under the next section)

PIANIST

WE'VE HAD THE REVEILLE,  
WE'VE HAD THE BOOT CAMP BLUES.  
WE'VE HAD THE BRASS TO CLEAN  
AND SHINE THOSE SHOES!  
WE'VE HAD THE ROUTE MARCH,  
HAY-FOOT, STRAW-FOOT, SON!  
WE'VE HAD THE BUZZ-BOMBS, V-BOMBS,  
ROCKETS AND GUNS, AND  
TOSSING IN THE BOATS ON THE D-DAY SHORE,

BUT, WE'RE BACK ON CIVVIE STREET, ONCE MORE.  
HEY, WE'RE BACK ON CIVVIE STREET, ONCE MORE!

(lights down on PIANIST and SINGER; up on MICHAEL, playing hockey  
by himself; ELOISE enters)

ELOISE

Hi, Mikey!

MICHAEL

My name is Michael. Mom! Eloise is here!

RUTH

(off)

Well, don't just stand there and bellow! Tell her to come on in!

MICHAEL

You can go in, Eloise.

ELOISE

Thank you, Michael. You look very nice.

MICHAEL

Yeah, sure.

(RUTH appears at the door, holding it open)

RUTH

Come on in, dear. Things are about ready; I'm just setting the table. We're only waiting for them to arrive.

ELOISE

Do you need any help?

RUTH

No . . . unless you wouldn't mind polishing some silver?

(they have gone in; MICHAEL resumes his play)

MICHAEL

Number five, Michael Pritchard, on a breakaway! One man back! He shoots; he scores!

(MICHAEL throws his arms up in victory; RUTH puts her head out the door)

RUTH

Michael, don't get all hot in those clothes. Put that stick away and go shut the drive-shed door. That's the last time I'm going to tell you.

MICHAEL

Alright! Jeez.

RUTH

Watch your mouth! You'd better come in; it's getting dark.

MICHAEL

Aw, mom, just a few more minutes! I'm not doing nothing!

RUTH

Alright, but I want you in before your father gets back. Just a few minutes.

(she exits)

MICHAEL

(under his breath)

Thanks for nothing!

(he tugs at his collar)

Shit!

(proud of his usage, he repeats it, louder)

Shit!

(remembering his mother, he moves away from the porch, assuming the role of a commando on a raid)

BUP-BUP-BUP-BUP! BCHOOW!

(and so on; "they" get him)

AAAAGH!

(he dies spectacularly, lays spread-eagle on the ground; RUTH enters)

RUTH

Michael!

(he tries to look casual)

Oh, for heaven's sake, make an effort! Go shut the drive-shed door! And, stay clean!

MICHAEL

Yes, ma'am.

RUTH

Well, go on.

(MICHAEL exits; RUTH looks up at the sky for a moment, then goes back into the house; after a moment, BOB, carrying a duffle-bag, enters with CLAYTON, who leans heavily on a cane; LARRY, also with a duffle

bag, enters a couple of seconds behind)

BOB

. . . about thirty-five acres, here, but I lease it out; I don't work it myself.

CLAYTON

Nice place. Clean.

(LARRY puts his gear down)

LARRY

(looking at the house) God. (beat) Oh, god.

(he runs up onto the porch, stands for a moment, then comes back down)

You see, Clay? This is it. It's what I was telling you . . .

(the door bursts open as RUTH comes on, followed by ELOISE; RUTH comes down the steps from the porch, slowly; she moves to LARRY, not certain of how she should behave; LARRY is equally uncertain; she sees his scar, which runs from temple to jaw on the left side of his face)

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RUTH  
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Oh, my . . .

(she reaches up to touch it; LARRY jerks his head away; a pause, then LARRY leans down and embraces his mother, who hugs him fiercely, but briefly; their embrace relaxes)

LARRY

You're smaller than I remembered.

(RUTH gives him another short hug, then steps back, smoothing his lapels; LARRY looks past her to ELOISE)

Hello.

(ELOISE simply smiles)

BOB

Ruth, this is a friend of Larry's, Clayton Wystan. Clayton, this is Larry's mother . . .

RUTH

How do you do, Mr. Wystan?

CLAYTON

Clayton, please.

(ELOISE has come down from the porch; she raises on her toes and gives LARRY a quick, sterile kiss, steps back)

BOB

And, this is Eloise Phillips, Larry's . . . friend . . . of Larry's. Eloise, this is Clayton.

ELOISE

How do you do, Clayton?

CLAYTON

Well enough. Larry's talked about you.

BOB

Clayton was in Larry's section, but he picked up a leg wound and got shipped out. They ran into each other at Union Station.

RUTH

Well, welcome, Clayton

(beat)

Here we are, talking, and you'll want to get that leg up, after that long ride in the pickup. Let's all go in.

LARRY

Where's Mikey?

RUTH

He was out here. No telling where he went.

LARRY

He ought to be here.

RUTH

He'll be back before supper, I promise.

(she notices CLAYTON trying to relieve his leg)

Let's all go in and let Clayton get his leg up, shall we?

LARRY

Eloise and me'll try to find Mikey.

ELOISE

Larry.

RUTH

Oh. Bob, why don't you take Clayton into the living room and I'll check the roast.

BOB

Surely. Surely. Clayton, it's just to the right, inside the door . . .



LARRY

You alright, Clay?

CLAYTON

Sure. Leg hurts.

LARRY

Yeah.

(beat)

Dad, there's some beer in my duffle bag, if Clayton wants one.

RUTH

I don't allow liquor in my house, Larry. I'm sorry, Clayton, but, I've never allowed . . .

LARRY

I'm sorry, I forgot.

RUTH

Funny kind of thing to forget.

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BOB

Well, mother, seeing as this is a once in a lifetime thing . . .

CLAYTON

I really don't want a beer. Thanks, Larry, but . . .

LARRY

You're sure? Alright.

RUTH

You see, all this wasn't even necessary, was it?

LARRY

Mom.

(he looks at her pointedly)

RUTH

Bob, Clayton, let's go in, shall we?

(they start to exit)

BOB

Clayton, here, is to get a bar to add to that DSM, mother. We've got two heroes under our roof . . .

(they are gone, leaving LARRY and ELOISE)

Damn. LARRY  
(beat)

What? ELOISE

Just damn. LARRY

(silence)

ELOISE  
Your mother saved meat stamps for months and got a roast for tonight.

LARRY  
Yeah? They hard to come by?

ELOISE  
Oh, sugar, coffee, meat, flour, everything. We have two meatless day a week. Monday and Saturday.

LARRY  
No kidding?  
(pause)  
She didn't have to.

ELOISE  
Well, she knew you were coming . . .

LARRY  
... and couldn't get enough flour for a cake?

ELOISE  
Larry.

(he sits at the edge of the porch; silence as ELOISE sits beside him; she plucks at the hem of her dress; he finds a pebble and tosses it from hand to hand; silence)

LARRY  
Damn.

Just damn? ELOISE

Just damn. LARRY

(silence)

Does it hurt? ELOISE

What? LARRY

(she indicates his scar)  
No.

It's very red ELOISE

(a bit of a laugh)

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LARRY  
It should go away, after a while. Doctor said.

How long? ELOISE

Couple of years. Three. Four. LARRY

I'm glad. ELOISE

LARRY  
Doesn't matter. Lets me know it is when I look in the mirror.

(he stretches, gets up and moves away a bit)

Are you glad to be back? ELOISE

(no answer)  
Larry?

LARRY

I suppose so.

(beat)

I suppose so.

(silence)

ELOISE

I'm glad you're back.

(silence; suddenly, she jumps up and runs to him, kisses him fiercely, then drops her arms and steps back; lights down on them, up on BOB, sitting uncomfortably in a spot)

PIANIST

Just relax, Mr. Pritchard and look at the camera. Give us some background, say. What did you do before the war?

BOB

Well, before the war, I was running my own construction business, here in town, light contracting, you know. Then, when they opened the Nobel plant, the general manager was a fellow I'd worked for, years back, and he offered me a job as shift foreman, packing shells. Well, it was a good job, so I took it. I would have like to have enlisted, but, well, I have responsibilities, elsewhere. I didn't quite make it into the First War, and I guess I'm too old for this one. Well, I do my part at the plant. Still, I was happy when my oldest son, Larry, told us he had enlisted in the RCR's ... oh, maybe I shouldn't have said that. Loose talk costs lives, and all.

PIANIST

No problem. We can cut that out.

BOB

When we heard he had been wounded, of course, we were quite worried. Then, about a week later, we got a letter from Larry's commanding officer, saying that Larry wasn't in danger and that he'd been recommended for a DSM. That much was in the papers, so I guess I can say that. You did know about the medal, did you?

PIANIST

That's why we're here, Mr. Pritchard.

BOB

Of course. I'm sort of nervous. Never been in the movies before.

PIANIST

That's all right, sir. How did you feel when you heard about the medal?

BOB

Well, we were very proud, of course. And, relieved that Larry wasn't hurt too bad. Then, when we heard that he'd be coming home, but that it'd take six months, at least, well, I thought it was a hell of a long time for him to have to wait. Can I say hell?

PIANIST

No, but we can cut it out.

BOB

Good.

(lights down on BOB; up on LARRY and ELOISE)

ELOISE

Are you glad to be back?

(no answer)

Larry?

LARRY

I suppose so.

(beat)  
I suppose so.

(silence)

ELOISE

I'm glad you're back.

(silence; suddenly, she jumps up and runs to him, kisses him fiercely, then drops her arms and steps back; silence)

I'm very proud of you, Larry. The medal and all, I mean.

LARRY

Yeah. Can we not talk about that, please?

ELOISE

Sure. I'm sorry.

LARRY

No, no. It's just ... I don't know, hard.

ELOISE

Getting a medal?

LARRY

Because a lot of friends of mine died, which is one reason I'm getting the medal.

ELOISE

I'm sorry.

LARRY

No, it's ... it's got nothing to do with you. Hey, here I am! Back again!

ELOISE

Welcome back.

(LARRY looks down at her for a long moment, then kisses her)

Welcome back.

LARRY

Thank you. (beat) Should go in, I suppose.

ELOISE

Mm-hm. (beat) Larry, I know you don't want to talk about ... the medal and, and so on ...

LARRY

But ...

ELOISE

Your parents are going to want to ... to show you off, sort of, to show that they're proud of you. Don't take that away from them. Let them have their time.

LARRY

Yeah. Alright.

ELOISE

They're planning on a party after we get back from the ceremony, tomorrow. With the whole town invited.

LARRY

Oh, jesus.

ELOISE

And, there's a newsreel crew coming after supper.

LARRY

What!

ELOISE

They called earlier this week, wanting to do interviews with you and the family.

LARRY

Jesus.

ELOISE

They thought it would be a nice surprise, that's why they didn't mention it. I thought, maybe, I should. (beat) Larry, it'd make them feel very good.

LARRY

Sure, all right! Why not? (beat) I'm going to go get Mikey.

ELOISE

Michael. (beat) He likes to be called Michael.

LARRY            Michael.

(he starts to exit; stops and turns, but has nothing to say;  
he continues out)

ELOISE            Welcome home.

(lights down on her; up on the PIANIST and SINGER)

PIANIST

WE'VE HAD THE REVEILLE,  
WE'VE HAD THE BOOT CAMP BLUES.  
WE'VE HAD THE BRASS TO CLEAN  
AND SHINE THOSE SHOES!  
WE'VE HAD THE ROUTE MARCH,  
HAY-FOOT, STRAW-FOOT, SON!  
WE'VE HAD THE BUZZ-BOMBS, V-BOMBS,  
ROCKETS AND GUNS, AND  
TOSSING IN THE BOATS ON THE  
D-DAY SHORE,

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BUT, WE'RE BACK ON CIVVIE STREET, ONCE MORE.  
HEY, WE'RE BACK ON CIVVIE STREET, ONCE MORE!

(with "Doo-wah"s; lights down on them; up on  
LARRY, coming onto the porch)

LARRY            Mikey? Mike! Ma says you're supposed to come in!

(no answer; he looks up at the sky, out at the town;  
pulls a flask out of his tunic)

Here's to my home town!

(he takes a hit)

Not much changed in three years. Old Man Fischer's still got those awful  
lawn ornaments. Carl Phillips hasn't changed the display in the window of  
his hardware store. Not much changed. Nope.

(he takes another hit)

Jesus. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.

(he remains silent for a moment, then turns to the  
house)

Michael! Haul your butt in here!

(he exits; after a moment, MICHAEL enters from where he was hiding; lights down; up on RUTH, coming out onto the porch)

RUTH Michael! Michael!

(she looks into the darkness, as ELOISE comes on)

I don't know where he went to.

(seeing that ELOISE is carrying a small bowl)

Just cover that with a saucer and put it in the bottom of the ice-box.

(ELOISE goes out; silence as RUTH sits on the bench; ELOISE comes back and joins her)

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He's a funny boy. He's a lot like his brother, but he's very different, too. I just wonder what kind of idea Michael has of Larry. He says he remembers Larry playing hockey, but I doubt he really does. Mostly, things he's read in newspaper clippings. I kept all of those, for years. Really, Michael's grown up without Larry around, except for those clippings ... and letters, of course, from Larry. I just wonder what kind of an idea he has of him.

ELOISE Larry seems to think an awful lot of him.

RUTH It's funny, isn't it, how two brothers could be so far apart, yet, still have that ... bond, I guess. The hockey thing is something they both do, but I think Michael mostly does it because Larry did.

ELOISE The first time I saw Larry, he was playing hockey.

RUTH I'm not surprised.

ELOISE He was eighteen at the time, I was sixteen. I don't think he noticed me, then. I thought he was so good. He'd amaze me, the way he'd flash past, and the sound of his skates on the ice would be a clean sound, as clean as the morning was cold.

RUTH A clean sound. Why, yes!





thought I was going to die; my parents thought I was going to die; everybody thought I was going to die. All sitting around, waiting.

CLAYTON        So?

LARRY            So, I didn't die, Clay. I just kept on breathing. Really, that was where my world came down to. I lay there for weeks, forcing every breath. I didn't sleep for fear that I'd quit breathing. There was a point in each breath where the pain would stop. I don't know what it was, pressure on the ribs or something, but I'd feel the pain each time I inhaled, then, just when I thought I couldn't stand anymore, the pain would go away.

CLAYTON        Until the next breath.

LARRY            Until the next breath. But, for a space of, what? ... two seconds? . . . between breaths, I had a little victory celebration in my mind, because I was still alive! And, now ...

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CLAYTON        And, now?

LARRY            It's just like that. My whole world comes down to breathing in and breathing out. Only, this time, there's no little celebration ... and the pain doesn't go away.

(lights down on LARRY and CLAYTON; up on MICHAEL, in the spot, with his hockey-stick)

MICHAEL        There was one game where Larry scored six goals. It was a final or a semi-final and he spent the whole week before firing a puck against the drive shed, driving it as hard as he could, building up his slap-shot, see? That was his specialty. If he could get a clear slap-shot away, nobody could stop it; nobody could see it! So, he spent a whole week firing a puck against the shed. Bang! Bang! And, when he got on the ice for the game, nobody could touch him. He'd just skate away from the them, and Bang! I think we won 8-1, or something like that. That was a great game. The whole village turned up for it, and, after the game, everybody swarmed out onto the ice and they carried Larry home on their shoulders. Archie Stevens, he's a friend of Larry's, was saying it was a record, that nobody had

ever scored six goals in one game, before. Archie's dead now.

(lights down on MICHAEL; up on LARRY and ELOISE, outside somewhere)

LARRY

God, I need a drink. Know anyplace I can get one at this hour?

(ELOISE shakes her head)

No, I suppose you wouldn't. That's one thing about Europe, you can always get a drink when you want one. Except in England. I don't know why that is. I remember, Clayton and me were in a pub, there, in Aldershot, and we were the only two Canadians in this bar full of British soldiers, and the landlord calls out, "Time, gentlemen, please!" and one of them yells, "They're not gentlemen; they're bloody Canadians!", and the two of us just put our backs together and hit anything that came near, then, after about five minutes, we dove out the back as the Provosts came in the front. Next day, there's all these Brits with black eyes and busted glasses walking around the camp, and me and Clay without a scratch.

(beat)

I sure could use a drink, right now, though.

(lights down on LARRY and ELOISE; up on the SINGER and PIANIST; a phrase of the boogie beat; lights up on RUTH)

RUTH

Michael! Michael!

(lights down on her; another phrase; up on CLAYTON)

CLAYTON

Larry, you out here?

(lights down on him; another phrase; up on BOB)

BOB

We've got two heroes under our roof!

(lights down on BOB; a final phrase; lights down on SINGER and PIANIST; up on ELOISE, CLAYTON, and MICHAEL)

ELOISE (coming through the door) Michael? Is that you? Your father will kill you.

(she steps out onto the porch; MICHAEL runs off)

Michael!

(silence; CLAYTON stick-handles a bit with MICHAEL's hockey-stick)

Where's your cane?

CLAYTON Left it inside. Shouldn't have, I suppose.

ELOISE Does it bother you much?

CLAYTON Just aches. Mostly if I stand too long.

ELOISE You should sit down.

CLAYTON No. It doesn't matter.

(silence)

How long have you known Larry?

ELOISE Since just after I moved here. Six years. I first met him at a hockey game, just before the war.

CLAYTON Six years. And, he's been away for almost four.

ELOISE Three, really. He did basic training at Camp Borden and was able to come back and forth a bit. Were you with the regiment, then?

CLAYTON No, I transferred from the Essex Scottish, just after Dieppe. Spent some time at Repple/Depple in England, then went to the RCR when they filled out the cadre.

ELOISE Oh.

CLAYTON Replacement/Deployment. Repple/Depple.

ELOISE Oh.

(beat; CLAYTON stick-handles; beat)

ELOISE cont'd    Larry's happy you came back with him.

CLAYTON        Nowhere else to go, really.

ELOISE         No home?

CLAYTON        Not really.

ELOISE         No family?

CLAYTON        My fam ... none to speak of.

(beat)

ELOISE         Larry's folks are good people. They're very proud of him.

CLAYTON        Sure, they should be.

(beat; CLAYTON stick-handles)

ELOISE         Larry played a lot of hockey before the war. He's very good.

CLAYTON        Really? He never talked about it. Not as I remember.  
He's real good, is he?

ELOISE         His coach thought he could be a professional.

CLAYTON        That's good. I never saw sports in him.

(beat)

ELOISE         What did you see, then?

CLAYTON        I don't know. Strength – I mean, confidence, I guess.

(silence)

ELOISE         What do you get?

CLAYTON        From Larry?

ELOISE         From Larry.

(beat)

CLAYTON        He kept me alive.

(silence)

Mike asked me if I knew of a guy ... Archie?

ELOISE Do you?

CLAYTON No.

(pause)

ELOISE He was a friend.

CLAYTON Of Larry's?

ELOISE Yes. (beat) He's dead, now.

CLAYTON Oh.

(silence; CLAYTON stick-handles)

ELOISE I wish you hadn't come here.

(she exits through the door; lights down on CLAYTON;  
up on the PIANIST, who plays a section of the boogie;  
lights up on RUTH in the spot)

PIANIST: We'd just like you to talk, Mrs. Pritchard.

RUTH Just talk? Alright.

(silence)

PIANIST: What were Larry's interests at school?

(silence)

Sports, for example.

RUTH: Sports, oh, my word, yes! Larry loved sports.

(silence)

PIANIST Such as ... ..hockey, for instance?

RUTH Hockey! Yes! Larry loved hockey. He used to play it, oh, morning, noon

and night.

(a couple of beats)

He was really very good.

(beat)

His coach thought he had potential, for the NHL, you know. Or has potential, I mean. I suppose he'll pick it up, now that he's back.

(she runs down; silence)

PIANIST           When did he join up?

RUTH               1941. Summer of 1941.

PIANIST           What made him decide to enlist?

(silence)

RUTH               Why did anyone enlist? Larry loves his country.

(lights down on them; up on LARRY and MICHAEL, playing hockey; MICHAEL gets past LARRY and scores; he throws up his arms)

MICHAEL           And, number 5, Michael Pritchard, scores the winning goal for the Leafs to bring home the Stanley Cup! Yay!

LARRY             Alright! Alright! I'm out of practice.

MICHAEL           You gonna play hockey when get you out of the army, Larry?

LARRY             I don't think so.

(MICHAEL circles LARRY as he stick-handles, ending up behind him)

MICHAEL           How come?

LARRY             I don't know. People change.

MICHAEL           Guess it's not very exciting, after being in the war and all. I wish I was in the war.

LARRY           No, you don't.

MICHAEL        Did you ever kill anybody?

LARRY           Yes.

MICHAEL        Really?

LARRY           Yes.

MICHAEL        Like, close up? Somebody you could see?

LARRY           Yes.

MICHAEL        Tell me about it?

LARRY           No.

(lights down on LARRY and MICHAEL; up on  
CLAYTON in the spotlight)

CLAYTON

Well, Larry saved my life, at least once. More probably. But, I suppose I've done the same for him. You don't notice when you do it for others; you do when somebody does it for you. See, I was out back of this house taking a ...

PIANIST         Yes, could you go on, please?

CLAYTON

Anyway, my pants are down around my ankles, my rifle's four feet away, and, all of a sudden, bullets start bouncing around my feet. I guess Larry could see from inside the house, 'cause I heard glass break and a rifle go off and I looked up and Larry was working the bolt of his weapon and the bullets had stopped. I never did find out where they were coming from. Wasn't important, really. I was more careful in choosing latrines from then on, I can tell you.

(lights down on CLAYTON; up on LARRY and  
ELOISE, in the truck; long silence)

ELOISE         This feels very, well, normal, I guess.

LARRY           What does?



ELOISE This. Being here, again, with you.

LARRY It's good.

ELOISE Mm.

(silence)

You're very quiet.

LARRY Got a lot to think about.

(beat)

ELOISE Was it very terrible?

LARRY What?

ELOISE There.

LARRY Not so bad. Not what I thought. Nothing like it.

ELOISE It must have been very frightening.

LARRY It is.

ELOISE Still?

(beat)

LARRY Not so bad.

ELOISE Still, a decoration. You came through all right.

LARRY I came through.

(beat)

ELOISE Yes.

(silence)

LARRY They knocked down Larkin's silo.

ELOISE It burned down. Some kids, they thought. Kids are always playing around here.

(pause)

LARRY           It had our names on it.

ELOISE          Yes.

LARRY                       A lot of names. Hell, Jimmy Larkin was the first one to  
put his up there.

LARRY          He was shot down over Holland.

LARRY          Jesus.

(silence)

That tree grew in just three years. It wasn't more than fifteen feet high  
when ... when I left.

(beat)

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Who else had their names up there?

ELOISE          Almost everybody, I think. Mr. Larkin used to hate us.

LARRY          I remember him chasing me and Archie off ...

(beat)

God, he was mad.

(silence)

And, Jimmy's dead, too?

ELOISE          His plane was on fire, they said. He didn't jump.

LARRY          Jesus.

(silence)

Did you know the stars are the same on the other side of the world as they  
are here?

ELOISE          Mm-hm.

LARRY Do you see the three stars in a row? Close together, just there?

ELOISE Orion's Belt.

LARRY Whatever. I remember spending the night in a hole, we were pinned down by a tank. All I could see were those three stars, right above me. That was the night Taffy Slater got it. He kept screaming. I just laid there, looking at those stars and thinking, "Poor, bloody bastard." But, he kept screaming and screaming and it was like a nail or something, at the back of the brain, every time he screamed. It would drive in a little further, each time, until I started thinking, "Shutup, shutup, shutup, shutup", over and over until I finally jumped up and screamed at him, "Shutup! Just shutup and die, God damn you!"

(beat)

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Then, I laid there for the rest of the night, watching those three stars and listening to Taffy scream. It was after four o'clock before ... he stopped.

(silence)

ELOISE I'm sorry.

LARRY For him or for me?

ELOISE For both of you. I'm sorry it had to happen to him; sorry you had to be there to listen to it.

LARRY Don't be.

(silence)

ELOISE What made you think of ... what was his name?

LARRY Who?

ELOISE The fellow who was ...

LARRY Screaming. Taffy.

ELOISE What made you think of Taffy?

LARRY I don't know.

(beat)

Yes, I do. That tree, the one that grew so much, is where they found Archie, after he ...

(silence)

ELOISE God.

LARRY See, maybe, Taffy wouldn't have been killed if I hadn't ... I don't know, done something. Or, maybe, if I had.

ELOISE Archie Stevens didn't kill himself because of anything you did.

LARRY Or didn't do?

ELOISE Or didn't do?

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(pause)

Archie Stevens was a very a ... a very ... confused boy.

LARRY He was two years older than you.

ELOISE And, a boy! And, what he did showed that he was ... unstable.

LARRY All right.

ELOISE So, you had nothing to do with Archie's ... death. And, that ... Taffy's was war, that's all.

LARRY All right!

(silence)

ELOISE Larry, do you still feel the same as you did, before you went overseas?

LARRY How do you mean?

ELOISE Do you still feel the same about wanting to ...

LARRY Say it.



LARRY            Yeah.

(silence)

CLAYTON            Do you realize the whole bloody section is dead, except for you and me?

LARRY            I hadn't thought about it. I suppose so. The Gruesome Twosome.

(they force a laugh; silence)

CLAYTON            The day in Sicily when the Provosts came busting in and you fell out of the window, trying to get your pants up?

(they laugh)

LARRY            And, liberating that wine cellar?

CLAYTON            And, that fat, old farmer chasing us off with a pitch fork?

(more laughter)

LARRY            And, that fight in Aldershot?

CLAYTON            "Just one quick beer, eh?" Us and fifty drunken Limeys.

LARRY            Close one.

CLAYTON            Lots of close ones.

LARRY            Yeah.

CLAYTON            Larry, I don't know, but I think it may have been me that killed them.

(lights down on LARRY and CLAYTON; up on SINGER and PIANIST)

SINGER            WHEN THE HEATHEN HUN DROPS ANOTHER ONE,  
THAT'S THE WAY OF IT. DON'T BOTHER TO COMPLAIN.  
THROUGH THE SKY HE HOPS; THROUGH THE ROOF IT DROPS.  
THAT'S THE WAY OF IT! JUST PRAY THAT IT DON'T RAIN!

THAT'S THE WAY OF IT, BROTHER.  
THAT'S THE WAY OF IT.  
WHEN YOU'RE LYING IN YOUR BED  
AND THE ROOF FALLS ON YOUR HEAD.  
THAT'S THE WAY OF IT, BROTHER.  
THAT'S THE WAY OF IT. BROTHER,  
THAT'S THE WAY IT GOES.

(lights down on them; up on ELOISE, coming onto the porch; she stands for a moment, staring at the sky, then shivers and pulls her sweater closer; MICHAEL enters at a run, stops when he sees her; she sees him)

ELOISE            You missed your supper.

MICHAEL         I just came for my stick.

(he retrieves it)

ELOISE            Aren't you hungry?

MICHAEL         Maybe I'll give up eating.

ELOISE            You have to eat, you know.

MICHAEL         Jeez!

ELOISE            That's not a very nice thing to say.

MICHAEL                            Aw, lay off me, Eloise, would you? You're not my mother or anything!

(beat)

ELOISE            I'm sorry.

MICHAEL         Yeah.

ELOISE                            I am. I'm sorry. I'm not your mother and I shouldn't boss you around. Can we be friends, now? If I'm going to be your sister, I think we should be.

(pause)

MICHAEL         Aw, you're alright. I'm sorry I got shirty.

(beat)

ELOISE Friends?

(pause)

MICHAEL Sure. Why not?

(silence as they sit on the porch)

ELOISE Why don't you want to go inside?

MICHAEL Too many people.

ELOISE Michael, there's only five of us.

MICHAEL There you go.

(silence)

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Are you and Larry really going to get married?

ELOISE Yes. Why wouldn't we?

MICHAEL I don't know. No reason, I guess. I just kinda got used to you being here and him being elsewhere, I guess.

ELOISE That wasn't from choice, Michael. There's a war on, you know.

MICHAEL Yeah, it's been in all the papers.

(pause)

ELOISE Aren't you glad that Larry's back?

MICHAEL Of course I am! You bet I am! He's my brother, isn't he?

(beat)

He just better not think he can come back and pick things up exactly where he left them, that's all!

(he jumps up and starts to exit)

And, don't you think so, either!



(he exits; lights down on ELOISE as she sits; lights up on SINGER and PIANIST)

SINGER                    WHEN THE U-BOAT BOYS GET YOU WITH THEIR TOYS,  
                                 THAT'S THE WAY OF IT. DON'T BOTHER TO COMPLAIN.  
                                 BLOW UP YOUR WATER WINGS. YOUR GUARDIAN ANGEL

SINGS,  
                                 "THAT'S THE WAY OF IT! YOU'RE IN THE SOUP AGAIN!"

                                 THAT'S THE WAY OF IT, BROTHER. THAT'S THE WAY OF IT.  
                                 YOU'LL LEARN THE BREAST STROKE YET,  
                                 'CAUSE YOUR FEET ARE GETTING WET.  
                                 THAT'S THE WAY OF IT, BROTHER. THAT'S THE WAY OF IT.  
                                 BROTHER, THAT'S THE WAY IT GOES.

(lights down on them; up on LARRY, on the porch)

LARRY                    Michael! Mike! Come on, soup's on! Where the hell are you?

                                 (MICHAEL comes on, with his hockey stick; he stays at  
                                 a distance)

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Hi.

MICHAEL                Hi.

(pause)

I'm glad you're back.

LARRY                    Mm.

(pause)

MICHAEL                Are you, uh, are you alright?

(he indicates the side of his face; LARRY touches the  
scar as if discovering it)

LARRY                    Yeah, I suppose so.

(pause)

I think, maybe, we better go in.

MICHAEL                Yeah.

(beat)

Wanna take a few shots?

(he stick-handles a bit)

LARRY No.

MICHAEL Come on. Your stick's under the porch. I didn't use it all the while you were gone. Come on!

(LARRY shrugs, comes down off the porch, reaches under it and pulls out a hockey-stick; it has obviously been prepared and maintained with loving care; he handles it a bit, getting the feel back)

LARRY Okay, kid, you asked for it! First goal wins! Come on!

(they play back and forth; finally, after some effort, MICHAEL gets past LARRY and scores; he throws up his arms)

MICHAEL And, number 5, Michael Pritchard, scores the winning goal for the Leafs to bring home the Stanley Cup! Yay!

LARRY All right! All right! I'm out of practice.

MICHAEL You gonna play hockey when get you out of the army, Larry?

LARRY I don't think so.

(MICHAEL circles LARRY as he stick-handles, ending up behind him)

MICHAEL How come?

LARRY I don't know. People change.

MICHAEL Guess it's not very exciting, after being in the war and all. I wish I was in the war.

LARRY No, you don't.

MICHAEL Did you ever kill anybody?

LARRY Yes.

MICHAEL Really?

LARRY Yes.

MICHAEL Like, close up? Somebody you could see?

LARRY Yes.

MICHAEL Tell me about it?

LARRY No.

MICHAEL What are Germans like?

LARRY People, I guess.

MICHAEL I saw this one movie about commandos, and there was this one guy, with a piece of wire, I forget what they called it, but he snuck up behind this German and jumped on him ... !  
(he jumps on LARRY, just rough-and-tumble stuff; LARRY throws him off and, when MICHAEL starts for him again, smacks him hard across the face)

LARRY Shutup! Just shutup! Just shutup!

(MICHAEL, very afraid, runs out; LARRY yells after him)

Mikey, I'm sorry! I'm sorry!

(he sits on the porch)

Mike? Oh, Jesus, am I sorry. Mikey! Mikey, I'll give you my hockey-stick!

(he stares at the ground for a moment or two)

Fuck!

(lights down on him; up on PIANIST and SINGER; they play a section of the boogie, then they walk off; lights down)

END OF ACT I

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RUTH                    Scared?

BOB                     Ruth!

CLAYTON                No. Sure, you're scared, but you're alive, too. Every minute.

BOB                     That's it! Alive!

CLAYTON                And, then, one day, you're not, anymore.

                              (silence)

RUTH                     What are you going to do, now that you're almost out?

CLAYTON                What's to do? Get my discharge, find some work. I need some time.

RUTH                     What did you do before the war?

CLAYTON                Heavy equipment operator. Bulldozers. Graders.

BOB                     And, they put you in the infantry?

CLAYTON                Armour was full up that day, I guess.

BOB                     The army does things in mysterious ways.

CLAYTON                Well, they'd rather start from scratch than try to retrain somebody their way. Besides, it's a lot harder to duck in a tank.

RUTH                     You going to go back to it?

CLAYTON                Bulldozers? I doubt that the leg would take it.

BOB                     Maybe I could find you a job at the plant. You could stay here, for the time being.

CLAYTON                No ... thanks.

RUTH                     I'm sure Clayton has more exciting things to do than hang around a two-cow town like this.

CLAYTON                I've got a free ride as far as Regina, and an aunt there who'll put me up until I get a job.

(silence)

God, it's quiet here.

(they all listen to the quiet)

No crickets, even. Means somebody's out there.

RUTH           How so?

CLAYTON                   When the crickets shut up, you can bet Jerrie's got a patrol out, sneaking around your flank, trying to set up an enfilade.

RUTH           What's that?

CLAYTON                   Same kind of thing Larry got caught in, where they get from front and back.

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(CLAYTON is displaying a touch of nervousness, peering into the darkness)

Kinda makes me wish I had a .303 with me.

RUTH           What?

CLAYTON                   It'd just make me feel better. See? Our left flank's open and we should really have some sandbags, here, in the centre.

(RUTH and BOB stare)

Just joking. But, you find yourself thinking that way, even this far from it.

BOB           That film fellow got you going, talking about the war.

CLAYTON                   Probably. (he rubs his leg) I think I'll go up to bed, now, if you don't mind. It's been a long day.

RUTH           Of course it has. Here, I'll take you up.

CLAYTON                   No, I'll be fine, really. You stay here and relax. I'm all right.

RUTH           Well, goodnight, then. And, you sleep in as long as you like.

CLAYTON I don't sleep much. I've had nurses waking me up at six every morning, so I doubt if I could sleep in. But, I'll try. Goodnight.

BOB Goodnight, then.

RUTH Goodnight.

(CLAYTON starts to exit)

CLAYTON It sure is quiet, though.

(he goes; long silence)

BOB Long day.

RUTH Yes.

BOB Quite a trip into Toronto, there. I didn't think that old truck was going to make it.

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(silence)

Union Station's quite the place, too. All stone and pillars and a ceiling so high you can't hardly see it. Everything echoes, like a big church.

(silence)

What time's that ceremony?

RUTH Four o'clock.

BOB So, we should leave about two. Get us into the city in plenty of time. Well, we don't have to go right into the city, it's sort of north.

(silence)

That Eloise is a nice girl.

RUTH Yes, she is.

BOB Pretty. If I was just ten years younger ...

RUTH Bob.



(silence)

BOB It'll take some getting used to, having Larry back.

RUTH I don't think it'll be very long before he and Eloise start looking for a place. Soon as Larry gets settled, I guess.

BOB I guess that's it. He needs to settle. Like Clayton said, it takes time.

RUTH Did Clayton say that?

BOB Didn't he?

(silence)

Well, I think I'll head for bed. That was a long drive, today.

RUTH I'll wait for Michael.

BOB Is he still out? That's not like him. Maybe, I should go look for him.

RUTH No, go on up to bed. I'll be up in a minute.

BOB Alright. I'm off.

(he starts to exit)

RUTH Bob ...

(BOB stops, turns to her)

Nothing. Go on up to bed.

(he goes out; a long silence; RUTH looks out into the darkness)

Michael! Michael, is that you? Michael?

(nothing; she listens another moment, then goes in; lights down and up on LARRY, in the spot)

LARRY Taffy Slater got his legs burned off when a phosphorous shell landed in the hole he was in.

PIANIST           When was that?

LARRY               Sometime before Ortona, maybe November of '43. I remember it because he had been in the hole I was in, but he didn't like it, so I told him if he knew of a better hole, then go to it. So, he did, and he yelled at me to join him, but, just as I started to get up, a shell landed on top of him and knocked me back down and Taffy started to scream.

PIANIST           What does phosphorous do?

LARRY               White phosphorous'll burn rocks to nothing. I don't know why it didn't kill him, maybe he got out of the hole. I just stuck to mine and Taffy kept screaming. He screamed most of the night. Then some ghurka's came through, on their way up to slit some throats. Well, they didn't like listening to him, I guess, 'cause he stopped real sudden. They're vicious bastards, anyway.

PIANIST           What happened to Taffy?

LARRY               Somebody said, later, both of his legs were burned right off. (a shrug) I never went looking.

(lights down on LARRY; up on the PIANIST, who plays a short bit of boogie; down on him and up on LARRY)

LARRY               Mikey! Mikey, I'll give you my hockey-stick! Mike?

(he stares at the ground for a moment or two)

Fuck!

(he reaches into his tunic for his flask, find that it is empty)

Fuck!

(he addresses the stars)

What does a soldier have to do to get a drink around here?

(he sees his hockey-stick, retrieves it, stick-handles)

God. (beat) Number nine ...

(he tries a shot)

Bang! (laughs) I don't know ... Leafs, maybe. Redwings.

(he stands still and looks at the sky; BOB enters)

BOB Michael!

LARRY Not out here.

(he has his back to BOB)

BOB Did you find him?

LARRY Yes. PERUSAL COPY ONLY  
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(beat)

BOB Where is he?

LARRY That way.

(beat)

BOB Well, at least this gives us a chance for a talk, doesn't it?

LARRY Man to man?

BOB Well, yes.

LARRY What about?

BOB Well, you and your plans, and such.

LARRY I haven't got any.

BOB What?

LARRY Plans. I haven't got any.

(beat)

BOB           What about Eloise?

LARRY        What about her?

BOB           Why don't you and Eloise take the truck. Go for a drive. A short one; it's rationed gas.

LARRY        I've hardly had a chance to talk to her.

BOB           She deserves to be let in on any plans you might make. Or not make.

LARRY        All right. Thanks.

(beat; BOB starts to exit)

Dad.

(BOB turns back)

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How do you feel about this? This medal thing.

BOB           Well, your mother and I ...

LARRY        No! You. Not mom. You.

BOB           I'm very proud, naturally.

LARRY        What else?

BOB           Well. (beat) Relieved, a bit, I guess. For your sake.

LARRY        How?

BOB           How am I relieved?

LARRY        How is it for my sake?

BOB           Well, because of ... uhm ...

LARRY        Because ... ?

(beat)

BOB                    Maybe we should go in.

LARRY                 Dad! Don't walk out on me!

(beat)

                          Because of ... what? Come on, say it.

BOB                    Because of ...

LARRY                 SAY IT!

BOB                    Because of that Stevens boy!

(beat)

LARRY                 What about Archie?

BOB                    Larry, I don't want to go into this.

LARRY                 What about Archie!

BOB                    When he killed himself like that, so soon after you left, there was talk.

LARRY                 Yeah, I bet there was.

BOB                    Because, people are like that, especially around here.

LARRY                 People are like that anywhere I've been.

BOB                    Well, that could be. But, they said, maybe the Stevens boy ...

LARRY                 Archie.

BOB                    Maybe, Archie did what he did because of something you'd said, something between the two of you. But, I told them. I said Archie just depended on you for too much. And, then, when you weren't there anymore ...

LARRY                 Yeah, when I wasn't there, anymore. Poor, stupid Archie.

BOB                    He wasn't stupid, Larry. He just wasn't a strong boy, not like you, son. He just didn't have the strength to stand on his own.

LARRY                 So, everybody thinks I had something to do with it?

BOB                   No! Not everybody. Not anybody who matters.

LARRY                Is that so? Well, sometimes, I think ...

BOB                   Well, don't. And, as to the rest, well, this medal-thing can change all that.

LARRY                                If I'm a hero, that'll set me up square with everybody, is that it?

BOB                   Yes. That's the way of it.

  (lights down on LARRY and BOB; up on ELOISE in the spot)

ELOISE                                ... well, according to the letter from Larry's colonel, Larry was part of a patrol that ran into a whole platoon of Germans, and apparently, everyone except Larry was killed or captured, but Larry kept fighting, even though he'd been wounded and he held them off and stopped their advance, all by himself. They thought he was dead, when they found him.

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PIANIST                How do you feel, now that he's home?

ELOISE                Relieved, of course. And, proud.

PIANIST                Do you love him?

ELOISE                Yes.

  (lights down on ELOISE; the PIANIST plays a chorus of "Save Your Love"; lights up on MICHAEL, as he stick-handles on; his face is very emotional and uncertain; he shoots and starts to run after it; RUTH puts her head out the door)

RUTH                   Michael! Michael, where have you been? Do you know what time it is? Your father will skin you alive! What have you been doing?

MICHAEL               Nothing.

RUTH                   What do you mean, "Nothing"? Where have you been?

MICHAEL               Not far.

RUTH                    You look at me when I'm talking to you!

(he turns to her, quickly)

What have you been up to?

MICHAEL                I said, "Nothing"! Now, will you leave me alone!

(MICHAEL runs out; RUTH stares after him, then up to the sky, then goes into the house; lights down on the porch; up on LARRY and ELOISE in the truck)

LARRY                    Did you know the stars are the same on the other side of the world as they are here?

ELOISE                 Mm-hm.

LARRY                    Do you see the three stars in a row? Close together, just there?

ELOISE                 Orion's Belt.

LARRY                    Whatever. I remember spending the night in a hole, we were pinned down by a tank. All I could see were those three stars, right above me. That was the night Taffy Slater got it. He kept screaming. I just laid there, looking at those stars and thinking, "Poor, bloody bastard." But, he kept screaming and screaming and it was like a nail or something, at the back of the brain, every time he screamed. It would drive in a little further, each time, until I started thinking, "Shutup, shutup, shutup, shutup", over and over until I finally jumped up and screamed at him, "Shutup! Just shutup and die, God damn you!"

(beat)

Then, I laid there for the rest of the night, watching those three stars and listening to Taffy scream. It was after four o'clock before ... he stopped.

(silence)

ELOISE                 I'm sorry.

LARRY                    For him or for me?

ELOISE For both of you. I'm sorry it had to happen to him; sorry you had to be there to listen to it.

LARRY Don't be.

(silence)

ELOISE What made you think of.. what was his name?

LARRY Who?

ELOISE The fellow who was ...

LARRY Screaming. Taffy.

ELOISE What made you think of Taffy?

LARRY I don't know.

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(beat)

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Yes, I do. That tree. the one that grew so much, is where they found Archie, after he ...

(silence)

ELOISE God.

LARRY See, maybe, Taffy wouldn't have been killed if I hadn't ... I don't know, done something. Or, maybe, if I had.

ELOISE Archie Stevens didn't kill himself because of anything you did.

LARRY Or didn't do?

ELOISE Or didn't do?

(pause)

Archie Stevens was a very a ... a very ... confused boy.

LARRY He was two years older than you.

ELOISE And, a boy! And, what he did showed that he was ... unstable.



LARRY All right.

ELOISE So, you had nothing to do with Archie's ... death. And, that ... Taffy's was war, that's all.

LARRY All right!

(silence)

ELOISE Larry, do you still feel the same as you did, before you went overseas?

LARRY How do you mean?

ELOISE Do you still feel the same about wanting to ...

LARRY Say it.

ELOISE You know. What you wanted to ... and, I wouldn't ... and you got angry?

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(LARRY looks at her, but is silent)

Because, if you do ... still want to, I mean ... I'll let you ...

(she has had her head turned away; slowly she brings it around to meet LARRY's gaze)

LARRY Jesus.

(he turns suddenly and gets out of the truck, walking out of the light)

ELOISE Larry! Larry, I'm sorry!

(she gets out and follows him; lights down on the truck; up on the PIANIST and SINGER)

PIANIST SEEING YOU IN STARLIGHT  
COULD MAKE THE WORLD GO 'WAY.  
NO SUN, NO MOON, NO CANDLES,  
JUST STARS AND YOU, ALL DAY.

SINGER TO BE WITH YOU AT MIDNIGHT,  
AND KISS THE NIGHT AWAY.

TO WAKE AGAIN IN EVENING  
AND NEVER SEE THE DAY.

BOTH           COME ON, STARLIGHT.  
I'VE SEEN THE SUN TOO LONG.  
COME ON, STARLIGHT,  
AND KEEP AWAY THE DAWN.

SEEING YOU IN STARLIGHT  
COULD MAKE THE WORLD GO 'WAY.  
NO SUN, NO MOON, NO CANDLES,  
JUST STARS AND YOU ALL DAY.

(lights down on them; up on CLAYTON; he stands,  
looking into the darkness; with an intake of breath, as if  
waking, he stirs himself and looks around; he sees a  
hockey-stick, lying where it was dropped; he picks it up  
and stick- handles, not expertly; MICHAEL slowly  
walks into the light, but not very far)

CLAYTON       Are you Michael?

MICHAEL       Yeah.

CLAYTON       Your parents are looking for you. Where've you been?

MICHAEL       Nowhere. Around. That's my stick.

CLAYTON       You want it?

MICHAEL       Naw. You can use it.

CLAYTON       Thanks. I'm Clayton.

MICHAEL       I know. I saw you when you got here. This aft.

(beat)

CLAYTON       You gonna stay out here all night?

(MICHAEL looks at the sky, at the house)

MICHAEL       Could be.

(pause)

You ever hear of a guy named Archie Stevens?

CLAYTON No. Should I have?

MICHAEL I don't know.

(beat; a shrug)

I don't know.

(silence; ELOISE sticks her head out the door)

ELOISE Michael? Is that you?

(she comes out onto the porch)

Your father will kill you.

(MICHAEL glares at her and runs out)

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Michael!

(silence; CLAYTON stick-handles a bit)

Where's your cane?

(lights down on ELOISE and CLAYTON; up on the  
PIANIST who plays a phrase of the boogie beat; lights  
up on CLAYTON)

CLAYTON Larry, I don't know, but I think it was me that killed them.

(lights down on CLAYTON; another phrase; up on  
ELOISE)

ELOISE ... and his skates would make a sound, like hurt through your teeth ... I  
don't think he noticed me, then.

(down on ELOISE; another phrase; the harmonies are  
getting weird; up on BOB)

BOB ... it was a hell of a long time for him to wait. Can I say hell?

(down on BOB; another phrase, weirder; up on RUTH)

RUTH ... a few minutes. But, I want you in before your father gets back.

(down on RUTH; another phrase, with harmonies shot to hell; up on LARRY)

LARRY ... you see those three stars in a row? Close together, just there?

(down on LARRY; another phrase, all over the keyboard; up on MICHAEL)

MICHAEL Mom! Eloise is here! You can go in, Eloise.

(down on MICHAEL; another phrase, which falls from the top of the keyboard; up on ELOISE)

ELOISE A long time later, he told me that going fast can make you clean, inside.

(down on ELOISE; a final phrase, which pulls itself together and caps itself neatly; up on LARRY and CLAYTON)

CLAYTON Larry, I don't know, but I think it was me that killed them.

(beat)

LARRY Who?

CLAYTON Our section! Brumby, Wilson, DeHaver, Lieutenant France, a couple of new kids. Not DeHaver, he was killed early on, I remember that.

(silence)

LARRY What makes you think ... ?

CLAYTON I mean, when they're dead, they're dead and how do you tell with all of the stuff flying around out there? I mean who could tell? A bunch more corpses to wrap in their white blankets – Thank God, none of them are too messed up, this time – and, one still alive to patch up and pin a medal on. I don't know that I did it, Larry, but I don't know that I didn't either.

LARRY           How could you not know?

CLAYTON        We ...

(a long silence)

We were holding a hill, the Germans were, maybe, a hundred and fifty yards away. We were both dug in. We were dead tired, been going for, I don't know how long, most of it under fire. Jesus, Larry, they had tanks set in concrete with open fields of fire for two thousand yards and wire that sent you right into them. They tore us up. We lost one kid, new one, you wouldn't have known him, just getting into position. He just disappeared and nobody every saw him again. Then, we hadn't been on the hill for an hour, DeHaver pops his head up to ask for a light, he wasn't a foot from me, and the whole side of his face disappeared. He just stayed there, sort of propped up, and he was still grinning on the other side of his face. I dove down into the bottom of my hole and stayed there half the night, it seemed. Then, after midnight, I think, it got real quiet. I started to think we had pulled out and I'd been left, so I looked out, real careful and I couldn't see anybody, so, I jumped up and started to yell something, and I heard an '88 coming in right overhead and everything exploded.

(LARRY moves away)

See, Larry, it was so noisy! Everybody was yelling and shooting and shells were exploding ... and I couldn't think! And, I knew I have to because DeHaver wanted a light and I couldn't remember where I put my matches and he was looking at me ... just grinning away! I just wanted them to be quiet, so I could think, so I yelled at them all to "Shutup!", but they kept shooting and making noise and DeHaver kept grinning and I grabbed the Bren gun and I blew him away! I know I did that, but was already dead. After that, I kept firing and firing and stuffing magazines in and firing, until I was out of ammunition and the gun was so hot my hands were blistered. But, what ... or who I was shooting at, I don't know. All I know is, afterwards, it was so quiet, and, next day, they were all dead.

(he stops; silence; ELOISE enters)

LARRY           Jesus, Clay.

CLAYTON        Larry ...

LARRY           You don't know? You don't know!

CLAYTON I don't know.

LARRY How?

CLAYTON I was ...

LARRY Scared?

CLAYTON Yeah!

LARRY We all were. Christ, we all are!

CLAYTON Right.

LARRY Jesus-god, I get so scared, I can't spit!

CLAYTON Right.

LARRY So, why the hell tell me?

CLAYTON I thought I could.

LARRY Well, you thought wrong!

CLAYTON Larry!

CLAYTON I don't want to know, Clay!

(CLAYTON starts to speak)

I don't want to know!

(he turns to the house and sees ELOISE; beat; ELOISE goes back into the house; lights down on them; up on the PIANIST, who plays a chorus of the boogie beat; lights down on him; up on LARRY, coming into the light, followed by ELOISE)

ELOISE Larry! Larry, I'm sorry!

LARRY Go to hell!

ELOISE I'm sorry! It's just that ...

LARRY Just what?

ELOISE Just ...

LARRY What?

(silence)

It doesn't change anything. It doesn't make up for anything. He'd still be dead.

(he sits; long silence as ELOISE sits beside him)

ELOISE I thought it would help.

LARRY Who?

ELOISE You. Us. You.

LARRY What's that mean?

ELOISE What you said to Clayton. You said you were scared ...  
are scared. I thought it would help.

LARRY There's some kinds of scared where nothing helps.  
Archie was scared. Nothing helped.

ELOISE Archie didn't ...

LARRY Alone and scared and I wasn't there! I'm a hero and  
poor, stupid Archie ...

ELOISE Archy didn't ...

LARRY I know! But, I wasn't there, either.

(silence)

ELOISE I'm sorry.

LARRY Yeah.

ELOISE No. I mean, I'm very sorry.

(slowly, carefully, she leans to him and reaches forward  
to kiss his scar; LARRY pulls his head back in fright;  
beat; ELOISE begins to unbutton her dress)

LARRY                   What are you doing?

ELOISE                                   The whole town's just a half a mile down that hill, but, here, we're as private as we'll ever be. What better place?

(she pushes him onto his back, kissing him; lights down on them; up on the PIANIST)

PIANIST                   SAVE YOUR LOVE FOR ME, FOR ME,  
JUST FOR ME AND ME ALONE.  
IT'S NOT TOO LATE FOR YOU TO SEE,  
TO SEE JUST HOW MUCH MY LOVE HAS GROWN.

AND, EVEN THOUGH IT'S HARD FOR YOU,  
BABY, IT'S HARD FOR ME, TOO.  
THOUGH TEMPTATION COMES MY WAY,  
I'M SAVING IT ALL FOR YOU.

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SO, PERUSAL COPY ONLY  
SAVE YOUR LOVE FOR ME, FOR ME,  
JUST FOR ME AND ME ALONE (OH, YEAH)  
JUST FOR ME AND ME ALONE!

(lights down on the PIANIST; up on LARRY and ELOISE; they are apart, putting themselves back in order; long silence)

ARRY                                   God, I need a drink. Know anyplace I can get one at this hour?

(ELOISE shakes her head)

No, I suppose you wouldn't. That's one thing about Europe, you can always get a drink when you want one. Except in England. I don't know why that is. I remember, Clayton and me were in a pub, there, in Aldershot, and we were the only two Canadians in this bar full of British soldiers, and the landlord calls out, "Time, gentlemen, please!" and one of them yells, "They're not gentlemen; they're bloody Canadians!", and the two of us just put our backs together and hit anything that came near, then, after about five minutes, we dove out the back as the Provosts came in the front. Next day, there's all these Brits with black eyes and busted glasses walking around the camp, and me and Clay without a scratch.

(beat)



I sure could use a drink, right now, though.

(beat)

What do you want from me? Three years ago, when I'm maybe going off to get my ass shot off, you turn me down cold! "No, Larry. Wait 'till we're married, Larry. When you get back, Larry." Jesus, it might have been my balls and not my ass, and a lot of good waiting would have done then! So, now I'm back, and I've still got all my parts, though I did pick up this ...

(he touches his scar)

... and, because of this, I'm supposed to some sort of hero! Is that it? Get me so mad I can't think, and then jump on me before I can figure out what the hell is going on and then get mad because I can't ...

(silence)

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Look, I don't know what you expect. Christ, I don't even know what you want! I don't know what I want. And, I certainly don't know what to expect. It's all different. It looks the same – your father's still got the same display in his window; Fay Merrit still wears that same hat, I saw her today; Old Man Fischer and those god-awful lawn ornaments, out watering his lawn every night. It looks the same, but, it's all different. Some way I can't see. Some way I can't grab hold of. And, it's ... scary, sort of, you know?

(silence)

I don't know, Eloise. It just seems to me that the war is less crazy than civvie street. You understand what I'm saying?

(beat)

ELOISE That's not the way it used to be.

LARRY (raging) Well, it's not like that anymore! You know?

(beat)

Things change, I guess. I don't know. They sure as hell never get simpler.

ELOISE            So, what do you expect?

LARRY            I don't expect anything! I'd just like a little warning, that's all. If I can see it, I can handle it. If it just sort of sneaks up ... Christ. If I can see it ...

(he holds out a hand to her)

Come on. Let's go back.

(she looks at his hand, at his face, stands without touching him and moves away; lights down on them; up on CLAYTON, with his duffle-bag; he stands for a moment, then starts to walk out of the yard; RUTH enters)

RUTH            It's you.

CLAYTON        Yeah.

RUTH            I thought, maybe, Michael ...

CLAYTON        Haven't seen him.

RUTH            You're leaving.

CLAYTON        Yeah.

RUTH            This time of night?

CLAYTON        I don't sleep much.

RUTH            I don't think I understand.

CLAYTON        No. Thanks for the supper and all.

RUTH            Where do you go from here?

CLAYTON        That way.

RUTH            You're something of a loner, aren't you, Mr. Wystan?

CLAYTON        I guess so. Tell Larry something for me?

RUTH               Certainly.

CLAYTON            Tell him — you either move on or you let go.

RUTH               Of what?

CLAYTON            Of whatever.

RUTH               And, you're moving on?

CLAYTON                               This time. Next time, who knows? But, at least, I can still move.

(CLAYTON exits; RUTH stands at the door; lights down on her; up on the PIANIST, who plays "You And Starlight" over the boogie bass; lights down on him and up on the truck; LARRY is at one side, ELOISE at the other)

LARRY               God, I wish I had a drink.

ELOISE                               Once, when your father was picking up some hardware at the store, I saw him reach under the seat of the truck and pull out a bottle.

LARRY               My father?

(ELOISE says nothing; LARRY fishes under the seat and comes up with a mickey)

Son of a gun.

(he takes a pull)

That's better.

(another pull; silence)

ELOISE               So, what now?

LARRY               What?

ELOISE               Like you said, things change.

(beat)

LARRY Did I, Eloise? Did I say that? I must have been lying, Eloise. I lied. Nothing changes. Nothing ever changes. It's more the same than it's ever been. Sometimes things can grab hold of you and they don't let go. Sometimes, they grab on and get their fingers 'round your throat and choke the life out of you as surely as if you'd been dead and buried! And, when that happens ... ! ... when that happens ... !

ELOISE Larry, you're frightening me.

LARRY Am I frightening you? Huh? Am I?

(he grabs her as if he might choke her)

You don't know what frightened is!

(he is shaking her, without hurting her)

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Frightened is lying in the dark and listening to your buddies dying, one by one, all around you and knowing, if you move an inch, you're next! Frightened is coming around a corner, and being face to face with two of them and knowing you've got one bullet in your clip!

ELOISE Larry!

(he releases her, but the fury remains)

LARRY Frightened is laying in a hole and listening to Taffy Slater scream and knowing, if you could, you'd kill the bastard, just so he'd shut up! And, knowing you're too scared to get up and help him.

(beat)

But, frightened's easy, Eloise. Frightened you can deal with. That's not what kills you. What keeps you running as fast and as far as you can and what's there every time you stop and turn around! Pointing! And, that's what kills you!

(long silence)

ELOISE When I saw you for the first time, I thought you were the strongest person I knew. Inside, I mean. I thought you

could take the world and hold it and protect it, and be able to laugh all the while. Where did it go? Hm? Where did it go?

(beat)

Larry, how can we have anything, anything together, if you can't tell me something so important?

LARRY Eloise, don't you see? Sometimes, you go so far that you don't dare to turn around. So far, that you lose track of how far you've really come and the only thing left to do is keep going just as fast as you can and hope to Jesus that somehow you end up somewhere! And, if anything else can ever change, I know that won't.

ELOISE Larry ...

LARRY Nothing!

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(long silence)

ELOISE Archie Stevens once told me that some people have to run as hard as they can, just to stay ahead of themselves. That was just a week before he died.

LARRY Get out! Get out! Get out!

(he pushes her out of the truck; lights down on them; up on MICHAEL, as he stick-handles on; his face is very emotional and uncertain; he shoots and starts to run after it; RUTH puts her head out the door)

RUTH Michael! Michael, where have you been? Do you know what time it is? Your father will skin you alive! What have you been doing?

MICHAEL Nothing.

RUTH What do you mean, "Nothing"? Where have you been?

MICHAEL Not far.

RUTH You look at me when I'm talking to you!

(he turns to her, quickly)

What have you been up to?

MICHAEL I said, "Nothing"! Now, will you leave me alone!

(MICHAEL runs out; RUTH stares after him, then up to the sky, then goes into the house; lights

ELOISE The first time I saw Larry, he was playing hockey. He was eighteen at the time, I was sixteen. I don't think he noticed me, then. I thought he was so good. He'd amaze me, the way he'd flash past, and the sound of his skates would be a sharp sound, cutting the air, like the cold in the morning. And, when he shot, it was so fast you couldn't see it. Suddenly, the puck would be in the net. The first goal I saw him score, I laughed and yelled, and he saw me laughing and stopped and looked at me and I stopped laughing, I don't know why.

Then, I saw him, a long time later, at the rink, and, he was skating as fast as he could, around and around and around, faster each time and his skates made a sound, like a nerve exposed to the air, and he was all by himself, skating as fast as he could. Suddenly, he stopped, hard, and the ice crystals sparkled around his legs and flashed in the spotlights, because it was night. He stood still for a long time, then skated off and walked away.

A long time later, he told me that going fast can make you clean, inside.

(lights fade on ELOISE, as they come up on the PIANIST and the SINGER, who play a slow version of "You And Starlight"; at the end, he offers his arm to the SINGER and they walk off; lights fade to the gobo of Orion, then to black)

END OF PLAY