

ONE NATION UNDER

by
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Cast of Characters

Arlene Stanton 40s-50s. She can be Caucasian, African American, Latina, Asian, biracial, etc. If she's not white, she is highly assimilated.

Eric Stanton Near 25. Son of the Judge.

Darcee Washington 18-19. African American.

Wesley Hanna 40s-60s. Most likely he is white. But he could be something else highly assimilated.

Quinta Maxwell Late 20s. Judge Stanton's clerk. Biracial/African American.

Lilifrieda Day 20s. Darcee's sister. Mistaken for a man. African American.

Notes

Scenes must glide smoothly or smash cut into the next.

Time

Action starts in October of 2004.

Setting

Manhattan
Iraq
Bronx
Duck blind

ACT ONE

PRELUDE

FORT DIX, NEW JERSEY
OCTOBER 2004

At Rise: Sound of a toddler's laughter laced with an asthmatic wheeze. PRIVATE DARCEE WASHINGTON plays with her unseen son in a stroller.

DARCEE

This is the day, Chester, I was telling you about. My very first plane ride cause buses don't go where I'm being sent. That plane's going to fire up its engines. Two on the left, Two on the right.

DARCEE makes airplane sounds.

DARCEE (cont'd)

Big powerful engines, bigger than the man you're going to be. Big enough to lift your Moms off the ground. And take your Moms right over the ocean. Zooommmmm.

DARCEE gives the stroller a huge push. CHESTER giggles. DARCEE runs after it and grabs it.

DARCEE (cont'd)

Ain't that the stupidest machine you ever heard of. Cept, see, this plane going let me take care of you better over there than if I was here with you myself. Life funny that way sometimes. Hold on to that airplane, remember what I told you. Practice your breathing on them propellers. You make those propellers go till I fly back to you. There's the engine. Hear the engine? Your Moms got to go.

DARCEE gives the stroller one more push...and doesn't run after it. LILIFRIEDA catches it. She is easily mistaken for a young man (doo rag, cap just so, long t-shirt, extra baggie pants, timberlands.)

DARCEE (cont'd)

(To LILIFRIEDA)

I got to go.

The sisters look at each other. DARCEE grabs her duffle and leaves. LILIFRIEDA pushes the stroller off.

SCENE ONE
SPLIT SCENE
A RESTAURANT
JUDGE STANTON'S HOME
FEBRUARY 2005

Two strangers meet.

ARLENE watches WESLEY HANNA approach. He may be dressed for the hunt. In any case, his attire is confidently casual.

WESLEY

You're punctual. I like that in a woman.

ARLENE

I like that in anyone.

WESLEY

I have to say, Judge Stanton, you are much more attractive than your picture.

Whether or not Wesley is more attractive than his picture; his power is palpable. The handshake is felt by both of them surprising ARLENE.

ARLENE

I'll have to shoot another.

WESLEY

You got the other female judges beat.

ARLENE

Perhaps their pictures are also deficient.

WESLEY

I've met 'em all.

ARLENE

Saved me for last? That can't be a good sign.

WESLEY

I'm not often in New York is all; I hate it.

ARLENE

Then I'll have to thank you for coming.

QUINTA
No.

ERIC
You. Know. Everything. !

QUINTA
I have to finish.

ERIC
You always have to finish.

QUINTA
That's what work is.

ERIC
Got news for you, Quinta. You're never gonna finish. Until you leave her.

QUINTA
I'm never going to finish because I like what I do.

ERIC
I like what I do too.

QUINTA
You don't do anything.

ERIC
Now that's something that is finished. From now on, I'm going to be busy, very, very busy. Busier even than you.

QUINTA
She's meeting with Wesley Hanna.

ERIC
The Wesley Hanna.

QUINTA
Ya.

ERIC
As in. The digital voting lobbyist who secretly runs. Like. The planet?

QUINTA
If you know, probably not such a secret.

RESTAURANT

ARLENE

My clerk found an old Wall Street Journal article dubbing you the Slot Machine King.

WESLEY

I'm out of the gambling business for good. It's profitable, too profitable, but not honorable. I took a good long look at myself and a good long look at the world. I didn't like what I saw. So I set out to repair it and me. You found your calling early in life. You're lucky.

ARLENE

I set my sights. I always have. Is that when you turned to digital voting?

WESLEY

I'm a software man. Saw a problem, fixed it. Citizens must have confidence in the election process.

ARLENE

Essential.

WESLEY

Two thousand: Supreme Court do the right thing?

ARLENE

They had no choice, I'm afraid. There was no objective standard. The hanging chad!

WESLEY

But it's not just Florida. Those mechanical lever machines New York's relied on for fifty odd years. Rife with inefficiencies and failures. Why do you think the Democrats are fighting digital so hard?

ARLENE

I stay well out of politics and know next to nothing about computers. That's my son's arena.

WESLEY

Eric. I'm aware of his ability.

ARLENE

(Realizing he knows)

He was young...troubled.

WESLEY

Talented. Not every teen can hack into the College Board website.

ARLENE

So you've already...what? Investigated me?

WESLEY

Got a head start. Something tells me I'm going to enjoy field observation more.

JUDGE STANTON'S HOME

ERIC

He's vetting her for the Supreme Court? Oh, man, my mother must be shitting bricks.

QUINTA

She's prepared.

ERIC

But like. Whoa. Quin. Ta. You must be so torn. Cause like. If my Mother gets on the Court then. The world. As we know it. Will end. Except like too. If she gets to be a Supreme Court Justice. Then you get to be her clerk. So which do you choose? You? Or the World?

QUINTA

"The Constitution...is made for people of fundamentally

ERIC AND QUINTA

differing views."

QUINTA

The Judge puts the law first. She never decides a case on her personal beliefs. The world will be fine and I will be honored to serve her.

RESTAURANT

ARLENE

How can I facilitate your deliberation? I'm happy to prepare a package of my opinions.

WESLEY

Don't you dare. Let's get one thing straight. A litmus test turns red in acid solutions, and blue in alkaline. Doesn't work on a state...or a judge. You and I could go through every case decided by the court in the last 200 years and, still, I'd have no guarantee of what you'd do when you got there.

ARLENE

You'd have a pretty good idea.

WESLEY

You're an independent thinker, a renowned reader of the law.

ARLENE

Nonetheless I assume I'll be questioned in detail, as I've been in the past.

WESLEY

Do what you did. The rogues were out for blood and they didn't get any. They won't this time. Your record is pristine. You're not outspoken, you don't write articles, don't give speeches. Yet you have the intellectual rigor of a scholar.

ARLENE

I'd like to distinguish myself further from the crowd.

WESLEY

You're good at this. Cool.

ARLENE

I'm hardly cool. It's my veneer. Can't be helped.

WESLEY

That's what I'm saying. You do this well.

ARLENE

May I?

WESLEY

By all means.

ARLENE

Roe v. Wade.

WESLEY

Uh uh.

ARLENE

Blah, blah, blah.

WESLEY

Couldn't agree more. Precedence...how do you call that?

ARLENE

Stare decisis.

WESLEY

Stare...

WESLEY and ARLENE

Decisis.

ARLENE

Yes, that's right. Precedence does not require us to stand by bad law.

WESLEY

Dred Scott.

ARLENE

Certainly. As the President alluded. Now if you take the Commerce Clause, here's where judicial activism has made hay of our Founding Fathers' intent. If we start in 1937.

WESLEY

"The Switch in Time that Saved Nine?" I'm with you there.

ARLENE

FDR forced the Court to make the federal government king.

WESLEY

That's it.

ARLENE

The Justices hog-tied the New Deal to the Constitution and we've been sinking under a wave of federal regulation ever since.

WESLEY

Temporary challenges turn into bureaucratic wastelands.

ARLENE

Sometimes I get so incensed I'm ready to throw my own damn tea party.

WESLEY

I'll be right there with you.
(They share a laugh)
Arlene, I'm going to let you go.

ARLENE

Am I being dismissed?

WESLEY

Hardly. I have another meeting.

ARLENE

I do have decisions pending. These asylum cases are swamping the Second Circuit. I assume I'll be hearing from you? I'd appreciate knowing either way - along with the other female judges.

WESLEY

You're already at the head of the class. Bypassed a few of the fellows as well.

ARLENE

Good. What's next?

WESLEY

Same time tomorrow?

ARLENE

Certainly, Mr. Hanna.

They take hands.

WESLEY

Wesley, please or Wes or Lee or whatever doggone thing you want to call me.

ARLENE

Don't you have a preference?

WESLEY

I'm interested in yours.

Beat.

ARLENE

I like Lee.

WESLEY

Lee it is, Leni.

ARLENE

Leni? Nobody calls me- I haven't had a nickname since I punched Beth Scott in the third grade.

WESLEY

What'd she call you?

ARLENE

You don't want to know.

WESLEY

How's Lene? Can I call you that? Lene.

ARLENE

Alright. I'll give it a try.

WESLEY

Tomorrow.

ARLENE

Tomorrow.

SCENE TWO
JUDGE STANTON'S HOME

ERIC

Yea, no, but how does it really work? I mean. Hanna. Likes her. He. What? Calls up Bush and says: Arlene Stanton's the nominee?

(Quinta works)

Quin. Ta.

(Half Ass Rap)

You're so smart and I'm so dumb.

You get my mother's ear, I get her tongue.

You're the model heir even though you're just a girl.

I am the prodigal son. A waste of DNA, Andover, and Yale.

QUINTA

Wow.

*They hear ARLENE enter the apartment.
When ERIC doesn't, QUINTA goes to greet
her. ERIC waits.*

QUINTA (cont'd)

So?

ARLENE

It's what you thought. I'm on the list.

QUINTA

Of course you are-

*ARLENE sees ERIC looking so nice and
waiting for her. What a great day.*

ARLENE

Eric!

*ERIC unplugs his ears and gives her a radiant
smile.*

ARLENE (cont'd)

What, pray tell, has made you happy?

ERIC

I got a job.

ARLENE

Why, Eric. That's... I'm... That's terrific.

(Toward QUINTA)

Isn't that?

(QUINTA is equally surprised)

It's terrific, Eric.

QUINTA listens, but stays out of the conversation. Keeps working.

ERIC

Don't you want to know. What it is?

ARLENE

Of course I do.

ERIC

You jumped to: Terrific.

ARLENE

Give me a minute to catch up with the notion that you actually... What?

ERIC

Got out of bed?

ARLENE

I thought you'd given up looking. I was afraid to ask.

ERIC

You? Afraid? Seriously?

ARLENE

I was concerned, about you.

ERIC

That was nice of you. But I've told you a thousand times. Mom-me. My joblessness is not my fault. My joblessness is your fault.

ARLENE

Yes, I know, something about my having given birth to you...

ERIC

Landing me in the graduating class of 2001. In other words: Screwed.

ARLENE

You know I don't care for that kind of language in the living room. Especially when both of us are filled with such good news.

ERIC

You're always filled with good news, Mom-me, whether or not it's good for anyone else.

ARLENE

Ha.

ERIC

Ha. Ha.

QUINTA

Is this going to happen fast?

ARLENE

Who knows? The Chief Justice is ailing...he won't resign unless he has to. Stevens is the oldest and then Ginsburg. The President has four more years. There could be more than one. But timing...?

ERIC

I already am confirmed. Inducted. Mustered!

ARLENE slow reacts.

ERIC (cont'd)

'Member? Your son. With the job.

ARLENE

Is this another one of your get-rich quick schemes?

ERIC

Not exactly quick. But if all goes well: My ranch will follow.

ARLENE

Your glorious ranch.

ERIC

You told me to set my sights.

ARLENE

So I can stop preparing myself for you to say management training at Starbucks.

QUINTA

McDonald's.

ARLENE

Never.

ERIC

Is food service? Really? The worst thing you can think of?

ARLENE

Why don't you tell me and I'll let you know? And soon, darling, I have opinions to draft.

ERIC

You always have. Opinions.

ARLENE

And you, Eric, I always have you. Don't worry if you don't want to move to Washington, we'll see each other plenty.

ERIC

We can always text.

QUINTA

So what's the job?

ERIC

(He is actually nervous to tell her)

Shall we have a toast first? For Mom-me too?

ARLENE

That would be premature.

QUINTA

(Jinx)

Don't want to...you know...

ERIC

To me! Then.

ARLENE

Why not? Champagne? Port? Creme de menthe.

ERIC

I hate mint.

ARLENE

Your father hated mint.

ERIC

We've had this conversation. Do you hate mint? Quinta?

QUINTA

Love it.

ERIC

But you can't drink. Anymore. Can you? Not even on a special occasion such as this? When you're about to be the first: African-American-Polish-Cherokee. Supreme Court. Clerk?

ARLENE

Lakota.

ERIC

That's not even a tribe. And if it is. I bet you don't have any casinos. And if you do. I bet you don't have enough blood to get a cut.

QUINTA

Actually, I do. And I give it all to the "United Loser Fund" because pale skin is a terrible thing to waste.

ARLENE
Can we please focus?

QUINTA
Sorry.

ERIC
Single malt.

ARLENE
Glenlivet?

ERIC
Glenfiddich.

ARLENE
10 Year?

ERIC
Eighteen.

ARLENE
One-hundred fifty dollars?

ERIC
Two hundred twenty-five.

ARLENE
This job must be outstanding.

ERIC
It's what I've dreamed of.

ARLENE
Quinta take what you like.

QUINTA
Thank you.

Drinks poured.

ARLENE
Here's to my son.

ERIC
To Me.
And... (Zipping his lips regarding her future)

ARLENE
Shush.
Heaven. (Tasting)
(MORE)

ARLENE (cont'd)

(Seeing him)
Sip, darling. Sip.

ERIC

Man sized. Mom-me. That was a man-sized sip.

ARLENE

Opinions to draft. Dissents to deliver.

ERIC

Look at the time: Ready?

ARLENE

With baited breath. Literally. Let's have it.

ERIC

Halliburton.

ARLENE

Marvelous.

ERIC

I thought. You'd at least like that.

ARLENE

Houston?

ERIC

Falluja.

ARLENE

Ha.

ERIC

Ha. Ha.

ARLENE

Ha.

ERIC

I ship out at: Nine-teen Hundred.

ARLENE

So military.

ERIC

Contractor. Aye, Aye.

ARLENE

You're a Media Studies major.

ERIC

It's my network security skills they're after. Besides, there's training.

ARLENE

You can't follow instructions.

ERIC
I think I'll be motivated.

ARLENE
You're serious?

ERIC
I am.

ARLENE
Do you want to die?

ERIC
I want to escape.

ARLENE
Be maimed?

ERIC
Be headed?

ARLENE
Jesus.

ERIC
Horrors. The living room.

ARLENE
Screw the living room. You are not going.

ERIC
Oh. But. I am.

ARLENE
Eric.

ERIC
Mom-me

ARLENE
I don't understand.

ERIC
Shall I spell it out for you?

ARLENE
Yes...please. We need to have this out. I need to understand why you would even think-

ERIC
Easy: Sign-on bonus. Per diem. Ex-Pat salary. And you won't believe the tax "bennies."

ARLENE

So this is...about money?

ERIC

I'll finally get my ranch.

ARLENE

They can't be paying you that much.

ERIC

Hence the three year contract.

QUINTA

You signed a contract?

ERIC

The longer you stay alive. The larger your going-home bonus.
Three years equals one ranch.

ARLENE

Excuse us, Quinta.

ERIC

She can stay. She's stayed this long. I wouldn't want to be rude.

QUINTA

No problem.

ERIC

We won't be long. My transport is coming.

QUINTA heads out to another room.

ARLENE

Listen to me, Eric. Very, very carefully. I have been
patient - exceedingly - patient and now I am through.

ERIC

So am I.

ARLENE

This is what we are going to do.

Overlapping.

ERIC

There is nothing you can do.

ARLENE

Since you say you're ready to work, I will get you a job.

ERIC

I've already-

ARLENE

I don't know what the starting salary will be-

ERIC

Stop-

ARLENE

But if you prove yourself you'll earn enough to get your ranch, eventually.

ERIC

I told you told you told you. I have to do it: Myself.

ARLENE

You're incapable.

ERIC

Thank you.

ARLENE

I didn't mean that.

ERIC

You mean everything you say. It's one of your charms.

ARLENE

You understand, I've explained, your step father loved you very, very much - he gave you his name - but his feeling was, as I was such a young widow, and you were only a boy. He wanted to ensure I was provided for in the manner to which he had made me accustomed. And he wanted you to have the freedom, having come from such wealth he understood the value, as you say, of making something of yourself on your own.

ERIC

Like you.

ARLENE

Well, yes, certainly, I don't imagine I'm a poor model. Discipline, education, preparation.

ERIC

Divorce. So you could meet Clive Stanton. The Third. And his money.

ARLENE

I adored Clive.

ERIC

Yes.

ARLENE

Your father...

ERIC

I know. Mom-me. I know.

ARLENE

I know what, shall we? It's my fault for listening to you. If this Ranch is so important to you. Pick one out, I'll buy it and I'll hire you to manage it. What is it called foreman? Wrangler?

ERIC

A little late.

ARLENE

I would've done this months-

ERIC

Don't you mean years-

ARLENE

You've been so-

ERIC

Yes, and now I'm not.

ARLENE

Good, that's good, so I'll make a couple of calls. I'll sell some stock. Real estate is always a good investment.

ERIC

Why won't you understand?

ARLENE

I may not have the answer tonight.

ERIC

My transport will have arrived.

ARLENE

You'll send it away.

ERIC

No. Mom-me. No. Mom-me. No. Mom-me. No.

ARLENE

Eric, please... Okay, fine, then let me. If you are sure, then let me ask you to delay. The timing now with this insurgence. Things will improve after their Constitution is in place. In the meantime, we can find you a ranch or you can just continue to lay in bed. I don't care as long as you're safe.

ERIC

Safety's overrated.

ARLENE

Why are you punishing me? What have I ever done but provide for you?

ERIC

Nothing.

ARLENE

Then why are you doing this to me?

ERIC

I'm doing it to myself. I actually am a Completely. Different. Person. Not. You.

ARLENE

You're mine.

ERIC

It's too sticky. Don't you feel it? We're too sticky.

ARLENE

All we have is each other.

ERIC

Your nomination. It's coming. Mom-me. You must be ready. Mustn't be distracted.

ARLENE

How can I not be if you're - half way round? In danger.

ERIC

It's time. My transport's here.

ARLENE

Tell them you're not ready.

ERIC

But I am.

ARLENE

I'm not ready.

ERIC

You'll be fine. We'll both be.

He reaches out his hand to shake. What does he want to happen? Can she/will she hug him? She doesn't move. He lowers his hand, she grabs it. Grabs him. Neither can breathe. Sudden release - unclear who let go. ERIC is gone. QUINTA returns.

ARLENE

He's gone.

QUINTA

(Trying for levity)

Just when you thought he'd never leave. Sorry.

ARLENE

No.

QUINTA

I didn't mean.

*ARLENE pours herself another drink,
perhaps noticeably from a cheaper bottle.*

ARLENE

Shall we get back to work?

QUINTA

We don't have to.

ARLENE

My decision is due.

QUINTA

Why don't you...take it...(easy)? A hot bath, a-

ARLENE

I've never missed a filing.

QUINTA

I could finish it, have it for you in the morning.

ARLENE

Spare me your ambition tonight. If you want to write opinions, get yourself assigned to the bench.

QUINTA

I was only trying...

ARLENE

Yes, thank you.

Beat.

ARLENE (cont'd)

Your research is complete.

QUINTA

Of course.

ARLENE

(Maybe looking for it)
I've forgotten, did I have your outline?

QUINTA

Yesterday. Here...here's another copy.

ARLENE

(Reading it over)
Yes, oh, yes. Quite good. Thorough. Thank you.
(Apologizing)
I didn't mean.

QUINTA

I know.

ARLENE

I value your drive. You know that.

QUINTA

Yes.

Beat.

ARLENE

Eric's gone. There's nothing I can do. I have work to do, I have to get on with it. With your assistance.

QUINTA

Whatever I can do.

ARLENE

He's gone...
(Finding this reason)
to serve his country.

QUINTA

I heard the salary.

ARLENE

Do I want my son to go to war? No. But it is his choice. He's his own person. He has to live his own life. I can't live it for him. If I'd stayed at home...never given...

QUINTA

I was a latch key kid. Took the EL to my piano lessons and I turned out...fine, I mean...

ARLENE

He doesn't have your moxie. The least disappointment, the slightest defeat and he crumb... Maybe, maybe this will...make him the man he was meant to be.

QUINTA

(Iraq)
I don't know. It's...a meat grinder over there.

ARLENE

Then what? He's gone - what am I supposed to do?

QUINTA

Like you said. He's an adult. He made his decision.

ARLENE

(Coming to her conclusion)
Eric...has gone...to work for freedom. Our freedom. I am a patriot. My son is a patriot.

QUINTA fades as WESLEY takes over.

SCENE THREE
RESTAURANT

ARLENE

Am I frightened? Of course, naturally.

WESLEY

It's a dangerous place.

ARLENE

Yet, he. I'm strengthened by his willingness to step up.

WESLEY

But your own son.

ARLENE

My only son.

WESLEY

Must be tough.

ARLENE

I'm proud of him.

WESLEY

You don't have to cover for me.

ARLENE

You're kind to listen.

WESLEY

Let's go for a walk. You like to walk?

ARLENE

I'm fine, really. I'd like to tell you about a promising case I'm reviewing. Con Ed v. UGI Utilities. It may prove an opportunity to limit Superfund.

WESLEY

Super alright, the stranglehold it has on property owners.

ARLENE

That's why I'm so pleased to have this case. Particularly since the Supreme Court has Cooper v. Aviall on its docket this term. Between Con Ed and Cooper, the Courts may finally succeed in limiting this overreaching regulation.

WESLEY

Shall we have that walk?

ARLENE

Yes, I'm sorry, yes, yes... That's not much of a jacket in this wind. Won't you be cold?

WESLEY

I'm a duck hunter. You gotta love the cold.

ARLENE

Winter is my favorite season.

WESLEY

You'll have to join me on a hunt.

ARLENE

Alright. I think I'd like that.

WESLEY

(Surprised she said yes, delighted)
You would? Good, that's good.

ARLENE

I have absolutely no experience; I should warn you.

WESLEY

I'll teach you everything you need to know.

(Beat he controls)

Listen, Lene, you should understand, what Eric is doing, it's a critical function. Defense Department's got billions of dollars of technical savvy, but in the field...some of these battles our men have fought, it's like it's 1944 over there.

ARLENE

How's Eric going to-

WESLEY

I'm going to tell you. During Vietnam, I'm at Stanford - Army ROTC. Our boys are getting killed because the Viet Cong keep blowing up our switching stations. There was this idea floating around DOD to create some sort of digital network. I start writing code.

ARLENE

Did you go?

WESLEY

At the time, the technology was here, not there. I ...I knew guys, plenty of guys from back home who went... I was needed here.

ARLENE

Yet today the whole world is wired and my boy has to sit in the middle...

WESLEY

Lene, I still know people at Defense. I could make a call.

ARLENE

No. No, Lee, no special treatment.

WESLEY

I appreciate your position. I'd like to make an inquiry, I'd like to insure he's getting proper protection.

ARLENE

Isn't that Halliburton's responsibility?

WESLEY

Let me...alright. As a friend. Nothing wrong with asking. Shoot, they might say no.

ARLENE

I would expect they should.

WESLEY

You think you're the only one with an errant son?

ARLENE

No. Of course not.

WESLEY

People understand.

ARLENE

What people?

WESLEY

The ones that matter. Everyone's garbage stinks. Everyone needs a place to dump it.

ARLENE

I never have.

WESLEY

Come on.

ARLENE

I don't - forgive me - I don't curry favors. That is not how I've gotten here.

WESLEY

Sure it is.

ARLENE

I adhere strictly to the Judicial Code of Conduct. I avoid even the appearance of impropriety. I have no political affiliations.

WESLEY

I was teasing, Lene, teasing.

ARLENE

Each man has his own compass without which he is lost.

WESLEY

Is that a quote?

ARLENE

It is my firmest belief.

WESLEY

We're talking about your son.

ARLENE

Who you've explained is in a position to use his expertise to save soldiers' lives.

WESLEY

Yes. Yes. All of which reflects well on you.

ARLENE

I thought my qualifications were sufficient.

WESLEY

Your son like your dead beat ex-husband, make you human. Or at least appear to be - I know you're not.

ARLENE

I feel I've taken us off track.

WESLEY

Lene, you didn't ask me. This is something I want to do for you. For your boy. What I tell you? I see a problem; I fix it. I make this call. It's done.

ARLENE

How bout that walk?

WESLEY

Good.

SCENE FOUR
FALLUJA

Two strangers meet.

*ERIC types like a fiend. His music
blasts. The power blows again.*

ERIC

NOOOooooooooo! Fuck me.

DARCEE arrives, drops a box. ERIC jumps a mile.

ERIC (cont'd)

Holy shit!

DARCEE

Eric Stanton?

ERIC

Fuck, yes. Sorry.

(Taking her in)

Hey. Sorry. I'm not used to this. You scared me. I've
been all alone...with like a...bologna sandwich.

DARCEE

Are you Eric Stanton?

ERIC

Yeah. Ah, who are you, though?

DARCEE

Private Washington, Sir.

ERIC

Your name is. Private?

DARCEE

Private Darcee Washington, Sir.

ERIC

Darcee. Eric. You're my first soldier. I mean that I've
actually talked to. I've seen plenty of soldiers, but mostly
they've kept me here in this room trying to. I'm not really
supposed to talk about what I'm doing. Which hasn't been a
problem because I've had no one to talk to. Except the
freaken circuit breaker. The power went out again.

DARCEE

Yes, sir.

ERIC

Do you know when it's coming on?

DARCEE

Based on past experience, sir, it's hard to say, sir.

ERIC

I can't. Do what I'm supposed to be doing without power. Without power, I'm going to just start sitting around. If I'm going to sit around idle. I could've just stayed home. Except I'm getting paid to be idle here. So I guess that's an improvement. Okay, no power, no work. What do you want to do? Can you do something? Or are you supposed to be working?

DARCEE

I'm your protection detail, sir.

ERIC

Whoa! Is something like up? I mean, besides. You know. The war?

DARCEE

Occasional fire, sir, nothing unusual.

ERIC

So why are you...?

DARCEE opens the box.

The first object is given.

DARCEE

The army has issued you this Kevlar vest. I will instruct you in its operation.

ERIC

Fucking heavy. I have to wear this?

DARCEE

Yes, Sir.

ERIC

How come you don't have to wear one?

DARCEE

The army issues equipment as required, sir.

ERIC

You get to wear a t-shirt.

DARCEE

Arms through the holes there.

ERIC

I know how to put on a vest.

DARCEE

(Ceramic inserts in vest)

Keep it upright.

ERIC

No, I'm just asking. I mean. I don't totally get all this army...stuff. Like why I have to wear the vest if you don't have to. So I'm just asking. If you know why. Or if. Like your manager? What the fuck do you call it? Captain. Sergeant. Lieutenant. Your superior officer. That's what it's called. Right? If your Superior officer knows why. Oh. Shit. Did my mother call you?

DARCEE

I wouldn't have access to that information, sir.

ERIC

I bet on her not calling anyone. There's no way she called. And yet all evidence to the contrary. Is that she did call. But that's beautiful. That is awesome. She's trapped. All she can do is send me this phony vest.

DARCEE

This gear is the best the army has to offer, sir.

ERIC

Then why aren't you wearing it?

DARCEE

It is issued as needed, sir.

ERIC

Yeah, but. Okay. How're you going to protect me if. I don't know. We're attacked. And you're dead. And I'm alone. In the vest?

DARCEE

I'm trained for these situations.

ERIC

I'll have to throw you down and jump on top of you.

DARCEE

I'll do everything in my power to keep that from being necessary.

ERIC

Yeah. But somehow. I wasn't scared till you got here. That didn't come out right. I wasn't thinking about it. I wasn't thinking about it. Till you got here.

DARCEE

Velcro at the waist, sir.

ERIC

Can you drop the fucking sir? Sorry: The sir. Can you please drop the sir? And call me something...like...Eric?

DARCEE

Work the straps up, Eric.

DARCEE turns to go.

ERIC

Where're you going?

DARCEE

I'll be outside.

ERIC

Can I. Come?

DARCEE

Whatever is your regular business.

ERIC

There's no power.

DARCEE

Tighten that side tab.

ERIC

If my mother did send you. I'll have to write. And thank her.

ERIC pulls out a blackberry.

DARCEE

What's that?

ERIC

Blackberry.

DARCEE

You write your mother on that?

ERIC

Text message. Email. Why?

DARCEE

If my sister has a number or something, could I write her?

ERIC

Sure.

Hands it to her.

DARCEE

I got to get her current one. She changes.

Where is she?
ERIC

New York City.
DARCEE

That's where I'm from. 72nd and Park.
ERIC

155th and Elton.
DARCEE

Where's that?
ERIC

South Bronx.
DARCEE

Like the Yankees?
ERIC

East of there.
DARCEE

You can write on this. And I can get someone to get it to her.
ERIC

Yeah?
DARCEE

Sure.
ERIC

Goes to hand her the BLACKBERRY. She doesn't take it.

I can't type like that.
DARCEE

Like what? Oh. It's all I do. You should see me with an eclipse controller.
ERIC

(He does video game sound effects)
Here. Let me show you.

She won't take it.

If I gave you a letter, you could type it?
DARCEE

Sure.
ERIC

*DARCEE pulls a wad of paper out of her
fatigues. Looks through them. Lifts off
two for ERIC to type.*

DARCEE

It's part to Chester, he's my son, and then this part is to
Lilifrieda. She's my sister. I can save the rest.

ERIC

I don't mind. Really.

DARCEE

Then here.

ERIC

Did you like enlist?

DARCEE

Army Reserve. I got called up.

ERIC

No, I'm just curious. Like if you know why. Cause see one
day. I'm lying in my bed. Like I'm going to lie there
forever. And the next: I'm like. Here. So that's why I was
wondering. If you knew why you were here? With your kid
being there? And everything?

DARCEE

Chester's got needs. Army Reserve got benefits.

ERIC

And like it's just you? Taking care of him?

DARCEE

My sister helps.

ERIC

Yeah, but? It's: You? I know you haven't given me letters
to anyone else.

DARCEE

No one else getting any letters from me.

ERIC

Oh. Okay. Cool.

SCENE FIVE
JUDGE STANTON'S CHAMBERS

ARLENE and QUINTA mid-analysis.

ARLENE

Where are Con Ed's claims against UGI?

QUINTA

General recovery of cleanup costs.

ARLENE

Con Ed accepted responsibility, incurred the expense of remedy. Why is this a federal matter at all?

QUINTA

Superfund allows private parties to recover costs from other responsible-

ARLENE

And tie up the courts.

QUINTA

If UGI accepted its responsibility.

ARLENE

As Con Ed has. Clearly UGI feels no obligation as an intermediary owner of the sites.

QUINTA

So Con Ed should pay all the costs?

ARLENE

This concept - ppr...prp...what is it?

QUINTA

PRP. Potentially Responsible Parties.

ARLENE

Under Superfund anybody's conceivably responsible.

QUINTA

The point is to encourage owners to do the right thing.

ARLENE

It's the Environmental Protection Agency that stands in the way. Treble damages. Daily fines. All in the name of the shortnosed sturgeon or the yellow billed cuckoo. It's extortion and a clear violation of fifth amendment due process.

QUINTA

The constitution specifically allows for collective action to protect the public good.

Eric makes bombing sound effects.

ARLENE

Mom-me. Mom-me's here.

ERIC

Nice vest.

ARLENE

He got it. It's supposed to be the very best the army has.

ERIC

Like the soldier better. Like the soldier a lot.

ARLENE

Is he strong-, no, of course he's strong...is he skilled?

ERIC

She is.

ARLENE

Lee sent a girl?

QUINTA

(Realizing)

Wesley Hanna?

ERIC

You probably ordered G.I. Joe.

ARLENE

Is she a marine?

ERIC

She's an army reservist. Got activated.

ARLENE

That's all?

QUINTA

What did Hanna promise you?

ARLENE

What's Eric saying?

QUINTA

(Reading what Eric typed)

Darcee's a single mother. Son has severe asthma. Nearly died waiting in an emergency room. That's why she signed up.

ARLENE

This woman sounds distracted.

ERIC

Here's where you come in. You sent her to protect me.
Now I'm sending you. To protect her son.

ARLENE

How am I supposed to? Where is he? Appalachia. Some coal
mining town.

QUINTA

South Bronx.

ERIC

He lives with Darcee's sister.

ARLENE

What can I do?

ERIC

Help him.

ARLENE

Help how?

QUINTA

I've read the Bronx has the highest incidence of asthma in the
City.

ARLENE

We breathe the same air.

QUINTA

No, we don't.

ARLENE

You go.

QUINTA

What am I supposed to do?

ARLENE

Tell him. Eric... Type.

QUINTA types.

ARLENE (cont'd)

Eric, I'm sending Quinta right away. She has some knowledge
of these situations.

QUINTA

(Far from the ghetto)

I'm from Hyde Park.

ARLENE

In the meanwhile, let me ask you this. If I can do something for this boy, will you come home?

ERIC

No.

ARLENE

Be reasonable.

ERIC

If you help Chester?

ARLENE

It's done. Quinta's on her way.

ERIC

And you bring Darcee home too.

ARLENE

I can't interfere with a soldier. Let me help the boy, bring you home...

ERIC

Only if you bring Darcee too.

ARLENE

Is he in love with her?

QUINTA

(Typing)

Are you involved-

ARLENE

Don't ask.

ERIC

I'm not leaving without her.

ARLENE

He is in love. Type.

QUINTA does.

ARLENE (cont'd)

Does she share your regard?

ERIC

None of your business.

ARLENE

It's embarrassing this thing Eric has for.....assuming she's...

QUINTA

Dark.

ARLENE

I'm saying this automatic response to...

QUINTA

Skin.

ERIC

Hey. Quinta. Open this attachment. Darcee sent something to Chester. Please take it to him. I'm going to be sending a lot of these. She writes a lot. Okay. And send another vest for Darcee. She's in: A. Fucking. T. Shirt.

ARLENE

Eric...

QUINTA

He signed off.

ARLENE

This is impossible. He is impossible. He didn't need to go to Iraq. He could've taken the D train to the Bronx and picked one out.

QUINTA

Cause "they're" all pretty interchangeable.

ARLENE

That's not what I meant. So what if I did. I could kill him. When does it end?

ARLENE pours herself a drink. QUINTA waits.

ARLENE (cont'd)

You'll go up there and see this soldier's son.

QUINTA

Just see him.

ARLENE

Figure out what he needs.

QUINTA

And.

ARLENE

Provide it.

QUINTA

I'm your clerk.

ARLENE

Are you questioning?

QUINTA

I'm trying to...I'm baffled...I'm sorry...I am...

ARLENE

Eric said he'd come home.

QUINTA

Can Hanna bring the soldier home? Cause that's what Eric said.

ARLENE

I don't want you to misconstrue. Mr. Hanna was concerned, kindly, for Eric knowing the situation over there. He worked on similar technical problems during the Vietnam war. The man practically invented the Internet.

QUINTA

I thought that was Al Gore.

ARLENE

This soldier. What Eric is asking - I wouldn't impose on Lee.

QUINTA

Why stop now? Judge, how is this not a conflict of interest?

ARLENE

He has no case before the Second Circuit.

QUINTA

He's vetting you for the Supreme Court.

ARLENE

Let me be very clear. There is no quid pro quo. Mr. Hanna has asked nothing of me, nor will he.

QUINTA

But would you ask him?

ARLENE

To bring this soldier home? No.

QUINTA

Isn't there at least the appearance of impropriety which I know you have always-

ARLENE

Mr. Hanna has done all he is going to do.

QUINTA

Then what good does it do to send me to the Bronx? If Eric...

ARLENE

I am asking you, please, as a personal favor to me. Go see this child. Meet the sister.

QUINTA

I don't know the first thing.

ARLENE

You know about the asthma.

QUINTA

I know what I read in the New York Times. That is all.

ARLENE

Make an assessment and let me know what's involved. I should not even have to say this, but I will pay all the expenses personally. I'll reimburse the court for your time. Just please... I can rely on you, Quinta. You know what that means to me.

QUINTA

Of course.

ARLENE

You make your own decision. You do what you think best.

SCENE SIX

FALLUJA

DARCEE patrols.

DARCEE

(To CHESTER)

Time's a funny thing. Like here where I am now. Time just sits. Like time's the real thing in charge cause nothing's going to move till time does. You could take any hour here, put it somewhere else, and nothing would be different, nothing changed. Except you. And your lungs. You blowing like I told you to? Blowing on that propeller. That's what I picture when I can't sleep here at night. I picture that air coming in to your lungs flowing like the doctor said, like branches of the tree. I picture each branch pink and strong ready for the air to come through open, not clogged, smooth, not sore. Free. Time for you, see, time for you is all about change now. Each month that passes, each day, you growing bigger and stronger. That's what your muscles want to do, your bones. Just got to get your lungs to let em and they will. You'll climb out of that stroller. Propel on you own two. Time do that. Time do a lot of things 'cept where I am.

ERIC typing.

DARCEE (cont'd)

Where I am it's always just time to be here.

SCENE SEVEN
LILIFRIEDA'S APARTMENT

Two strangers meet.

*LILIFRIEDA keeps QUINTA at the door.
QUINTA is rattled by the heat of this
butch. LILIFRIEDA reads her.*

LILIFRIEDA

Who you saying you are?

QUINTA

Judge Arlene Stanton, U.S. Court of Appeals, Second Circuit-

LILIFRIEDA

I settled that out of court.

QUINTA

Settled what?

LILIFRIEDA

She admitted she took the stud out. Never mind didn't follow my hygiene instructions. I had nothing do to with how her belly button turned out.

QUINTA

Are you talking about piercing?

LILIFRIEDA

What you talking about?

QUINTA

Judge Stanton, I'm her clerk.

LILIFRIEDA

That like secretary?

QUINTA

No. I assist her.

LILIFRIEDA

Like that makes a difference calling yourself "assistant."

QUINTA

I'm Judge Stanton's law clerk. I do research, draft briefs, file opinions.

LILIFRIEDA

Uh huh.

QUINTA

The Judge sent me. I'm here about, Chester.

LILIFRIEDA

Who?

QUINTA

Chester Washington. Your nephew.

LILIFRIEDA

(Thinking Darcee's ex filed for custody)

You tell that Negro he can't have him.

QUINTA

No. It's nothing like- Could you please just listen?

LILIFRIEDA

I've been listening. Why don't you make yourself a little clearer?

QUINTA

The Judge-

LILIFRIEDA

You got a sentence doesn't start "The Judge?"

QUINTA

Darcee.

LILIFRIEDA

What about her?

(Worried this is the knock on the door)

She's not-

QUINTA

(Getting it)

No. No. She's been assigned to protect the Judge's son. He's a contractor with the military. In Falluja.

LILIFRIEDA

He the one text-ing?

QUINTA

Yes, probably. I have some letters for you too and for Chester.

LILIFRIEDA

That what you're doing here? Delivering the mail.

QUINTA

No, Eric asked the Judge to help you, help Chester, for Darcee.

LILIFRIEDA
What kind of help?

QUINTA
What do you need?

LILIFRIEDA
We're fine.

QUINTA
Not from the look of this place.

LILIFRIEDA
What's wrong with it you can see from there?

QUINTA
I'm no expert. But from what I read about asthma on the way up here, those leaky pipes are a problem. Not to mention the rat traps in the stairwell.

LILIFRIEDA
(Nothing new)
Phish!

QUINTA
(Pulling out her pad)
Let me look around. I'm going to file a report with the Housing-

LILIFRIEDA
You better not put my name down there.

QUINTA
I'm trying to help. That's all.

LILIFRIEDA
What do you think you can do? Besides write on some paper.

QUINTA
I'm not sure yet.

LILIFRIEDA
From the look of your shoes, seems like you need me more than I need you.

QUINTA
What's wrong with my shoes?

LILIFRIEDA
If you need to ask?

QUINTA
They're comfortable.

LILIFRIEDA

Those are the dumbest looking shoes I ever saw.

QUINTA

I have bad feet.

LILIFRIEDA

Word, see when we're talking feet. I got a plan.

LILIFRIEDA whips out an old fashion foot measure. Takes QUINTA's foot. QUINTA pulls it back.

QUINTA

What are you doing?

LILIFRIEDA

Checking your size.

QUINTA

I'm a nine.

LILIFRIEDA

You going to let me do my job.

LILIFRIEDA takes QUINTA's foot again.

QUINTA

Okay.

LILIFRIEDA measures QUINTA's feet. Her hands, oh...

QUINTA((cont'd)

Your landlord's in violation of the building code. You should stop paying rent immediately.

LILIFRIEDA

(She hasn't exactly been regular)

Not a problem. That is no problem.

QUINTA

I pronate.

LILIFRIEDA

That's not all.

QUINTA

What?

LILIFRIEDA

Bad feet my specialty. I'll fix you up.

QUINTA

I don't want a... I just thought I'd menti... the shoes okay maybe but I don't want...a...piercing.

LILIFRIEDA

You're not the type.

QUINTA

How do you know?

LILIFRIEDA

Tattoo maybe. Little butterfly somewhere.

QUINTA

A snake. I have a snake.

The second object is given.

*After an elaborate fitting process,
adding lifts, arches, etc.*

LILIFRIEDA

These here have a heel stabilizer. Cause with feet like yours... You're going to like it. Alright, let's see you walk. Go on now.

QUINTA

Oh, ohhhhhh. These are- Oh. These are amazing. They feel like... OH.

LILIFRIEDA

Cash or credit?

(Off QUINTA's surprise)

I'm running a business.

QUINTA

I don't know how much I have...

LILIFRIEDA

Cash, I give a discount.

QUINTA

(Counting)

Forty...

(Realizing game)

How much are they?

LILIFRIEDA

How much you got?

A bit of a stand-off.

QUINTA

I wish you'd just tell me.

LILIFRIEDA

That'll do.

(Taking bills from Quinta)

There, you helped.

QUINTA

I'm going to get this report filed.

LILIFRIEDA

I told you I don't need any trouble right about now.

QUINTA

I won't do anything to hurt you.

LILIFRIEDA

You're not the first female ever tell me that.

Beat.

QUINTA

I'm going to get your pipes fixed, get the place sanitized - nothing you're doing wrong. There's probably mold from the drips, rat droppings, get it painted...

LILIFRIEDA

That's a long list you're making for yourself, Clerk.

QUINTA

Quinta.

LILIFRIEDA

What's that mean? Quinta?

QUINTA

My name? Nothing. Fifth is all. Sounds like it ought to mean more, but no. What's- What's Lilifrieda mean?

LILIFRIEDA

My Pops put it together. Means consecrated to God in peace. Or some shit like that. I go by Fried.

QUINTA

I like Lilifrieda. Is it just you and Chester living here?

LILIFRIEDA

Just me and Chester.

QUINTA

Me too. I live alone, too. I mean I have a roommate. Getting too old for roommates, but that's what I get for public service. Since my girlfriend dumped me. That was a long time ago. I'm over her. The bitch.

LILIFRIEDA

This place is the best I can do for now. When I get my degree, I'll be able to do better.

QUINTA

You're in school too?

LILIFRIEDA

College.

QUINTA

What're you studying?

LILIFRIEDA

Medical records. That's my next home business. Just need a cable. You can add that to your list. High speed cable.

QUINTA

How do you do..everything?

(CHESTER wakes up with a crying wheeze)

Is that?

LILIFRIEDA

Chester. He's waking up.

QUINTA

I will help. I promise.

LILIFRIEDA

Time, Quinta. Going to tell me.

QUINTA

Thanks for the boots-

QUINTA offers her hand. LILIFRIEDA graces it with a Bronx handshake. Unaccustomed, QUINTA gives up in the middle and is off with a wave.

SCENE EIGHT

FALLUJA

DARCEE patrols.

DARCEE

(To CHESTER)

I lose the smell of you here. If you think the Bronx stinks, try Iraq. I remember the smell of that powder we spank on your butt, that dusty tang. But it's hard to bring up that sweet you, when I pull you from the bath and wrap you soft and press my nose against your cheek and just smell.

(MORE)

DARCEE (cont'd)

I can't wait, though, for you to smell like sweat, like dirt when you get strong, like blood even caked, from going blam on the concrete, cause everyone goes blam on the concrete, blam and up again if you want to get strong. Can't wait for you to run to me, I'll clean you up and send you out again and watch from the stands as you - let's face it you're going to need to play soccer. No one's going to be letting you make shots at the kind of height they got in your father's family. Doesn't matter if I can't smell you here. You being there is like a part of me being there. Not here. Don't pay attention to life, that's what my Great Grand would tell me. Pay attention to yourself, life take care of itself. That's what I'm trying to remember. You remember that too.

SCENE NINE

JUDGE STANTON'S LIVING ROOM

ARLENE sits with WESLEY, engaged.

ARLENE

Quinta was hands down the brightest.

WESLEY

(Flattering)

She'd have to be.

ARLENE

Thank you. I was going to say... I hired her for the same reason she took the job-

WESLEY

Know thy enemy?

ARLENE

Exactly. I'd put it that we, she and I, study each other. I'm her preparation and she is mine.

WESLEY

I like how you think.

QUINTA interrupts.

QUINTA

Oh...Sorry. I.

ARLENE

Come in. Wesley Hanna. This is Quinta Maxwell.

WESLEY

Glad to see you got back from the Bronx safe and sound.

ARLENE

I was just telling Mr. Hanna about Eric's request. How're things progressing?

QUINTA

I'm only beginning to educate myself.

ARLENE

You don't need to study the whole -

(To Wesley)

see what I was saying about her curiosity -

(To QUINTA)

you just need to improve the situation adequately.

QUINTA

From my initial assessment, the apartment he lives in is full of irritants and pollutants

ARLENE

Where did you get those boots?

QUINTA

Thes-

ARLENE

Those are terrific. Exactly what I need, wouldn't you say, Lee.

WESLEY

Sure, those would do.

ARLENE

(To WESLEY)

And I was afraid I'd have nothing.

(To QUINTA)

You'll have to tell me where.

WESLEY

What's the fix?

ARLENE

In the Bronx.

QUINTA

The apartment needs to be cleaned, painted, pipes fixed, mold removed.

ARLENE

Fine.

WESLEY

Easy.

QUINTA (cont'd)

It's only a band-aid. I'm filing a report with the Housing Authority. The whole building should probably be condemned.

ARLENE

(To WESLEY)

Rent Stabilization. If this city allowed rents to be set by the market, the landlord would have adequate funds to maintain his property.

WESLEY

And build more. Regulation, every time, gets the opposite result.

ARLENE

Never fails.

(To QUINTA)

Take care of the apartment first. Then I'll review your report on the building.

QUINTA

The landlord is liable. Those tenants pay rent. The City's not subsidizing him or them.

WESLEY

This boy's not on welfare?

QUINTA

His mother is serving in Iraq. His aunt is taking care of him, running a home business, and doing everything she can to make ends meet. Going to college.

WESLEY

Folks are always surprised to learn I'm the only college graduate in my family.

ARLENE

I would never have guessed it.

WESLEY

I'm talking grandparents, parents, brothers, uncles, cousins. It's hard work to move up, but it can be done.

ARLENE

I wasn't born on Park Avenue; I made my way here.

WESLEY

And we're glad you did.

Half a beat.

ARLENE

Send a quick note to Eric, would you, Quinta. Knowing my son he won't agree to a thing until the apartment is finished. I want Eric completely confident that we are doing our part. And then that'll be that.

QUINTA

No, I think... We can make a difference for them.

ARLENE

Good.

(Dismissing her)

Thank you, Quinta.

QUINTA

(Reaching into her briefcase)

I have the Con Ed references.

ARLENE

I'll take those in the office tomorrow. And the boots. I need those boots.

Excused, QUINTA departs.

SCENE TEN

FALLUJA

DARCEE finishes reading a print-out.

DARCEE

Who's Quinta?

ERIC

She's my mother's clerk.

DARCEE

That like secretary?

ERIC

She's the one helping Chester.

DARCEE

Fried said.

ERIC

Since you're...taking care of: Me.

DARCEE

You go into one of these clinics with a wheezing boy the first thing they ask you is do you smoke? Cars clogging the Grand Concourse, diesels flying down the Bruckner Expressway, the hole in the Ozone layer right over head and they think my boy's wheezing cause maybe I smoke.

ERIC

That's. Like.

DARCEE

(This is her thanks)

Getting the place fixed up, though. That'll be better for Chester.

SCENE ELEVEN

JUDGE STANTON'S HOME

*Lilifrieda is working her fitting magic
on the JUDGE.*

ARLENE

Ugly as sin - aren't they? Do they come in other colors?

LILIFRIEDA

Navy, grey, baby blue, pink, you like designer? I got Louis Vuitton, Coach, Rockafella...

ARLENE

Maybe I'll stick to the tan.

QUINTA

How'd you even get everything here?

LILIFRIEDA

I have a gypsy I keep in Tims.

QUINTA

A gypsy? What's a gypsy?

LILIFRIEDA

You don't know what a gypsy is?

ARLENE

It's a car service.

LILIFRIEDA

Where you from?

QUINTA

Chicago.

LILIFRIEDA

People don't ride gypsies in Chicago?

QUINTA

We take the EL. The train.

LILIFRIEDA

(To ARLENE)

I like door to door. That's what I like. Pick me up where I am, drop me off where I'm going.

ARLENE

I'm with you.

The third object is given.

LILIFRIEDA

Take a few steps. See how they feel.

ARLENE

These are...genius.

QUINTA

Told you.

ARLENE

Oh, my.

ARLENE walks around enjoying the feel.

QUINTA

I can't get over how well Chester's breathing here.
Yesterday, scared me to death.

LILIFRIEDA

You should've seen him before we got the zezer.

QUINTA

That's his nebulizer. Before with medicaid, he had next to nothing. With the Army Reserve health insurance. I'm just saying...It's true.

LILIFRIEDA

He's alright. Chester's good.

ARLENE

How do they look? Awful.

QUINTA

You're just going hunting.

ARLENE

I know.

LILIFRIEDA

You be stylin for real.

ARLENE

They're so comfortable...

ARLENE considers boots.

LILIFRIEDA

We're going over to the Kmart next. I want to see those Martha Stewart curtains for the kitchen they have.

(MORE)

LILIFRIEDA (cont'd)

I like that Martha Stewart. Even though her product the one thing I can not source; I have to go to the Kmart. I don't know why they had to throw her in jail. That was just. To throw the woman in jail for what?

QUINTA

She committed securities fraud.

LILIFRIEDA

Let me understand this. Somebody tells you something going to save you money, or make you money, right? They give you the 411 in time for you to do something about it. You use it.

QUINTA

But no one else had the information. So it wasn't fair.

LILIFRIEDA

That is their problem. She supposed to lose money cause she knows something someone else doesn't know? She knows lots of things other folks don't know. Not her fault. She's Martha Stewart.

ARLENE

How much do I owe you?

LILIFRIEDA

One twenty five.

ARLENE

Is that all? They are worth every penny.

LILIFRIEDA

You know what? I forgot to add the arch supports.

ARLENE

Those are terrific. All the difference.

LILIFRIEDA

So the total comes to One fifty-seven. With the tax. Got to pay taxes.

ARLENE

Don't get me started. New York is practically socialist the amount of income we all give to the state. Quinta, do you have change for a twenty?

QUINTA

No.

ARLENE

Oh, take the one-sixty. You did come all the way down here.

LILIFRIEDA

Not a problem.

ARLENE

It's awfully nice to meet you, Chester. Even though that is a very big name for such a very small boy.

LILIFRIEDA

You all have a good day.

QUINTA

Bye. I'll, a. See you, I guess. Call if you need anything. Okay? Any time. Bye.

QUINTA more confidently shares a Bronx handshake with the departing LILIFRIEDA.

ARLENE

So that's done, then, the Bronx. They are situated.

QUINTA

I still think the landlord-

ARLENE

The apartment is livable; I know you want to return to your work.

QUINTA

I'll get back to Con Ed and wait for you to review my report to the Housing Authority.

ARLENE

Now if I can just get Eric home. Send him a complete report. Tell him I saw the boy and everything. Well, I do believe I am ready "for the hunt." Can you imagine? I mean honestly. I can only hope this means...Mr. Hanna's nomination list is getting shorter. All the attention he's paying me...

QUINTA

Do you know when a decision...?

ARLENE

I'm sure he'll let me know as soon as he is able. In the meanwhile...

QUINTA

You hunt.

SCENE TWELVE

FALLUJA

Gun fire. DARCEE pushes ERIC into a confined area. Pitch black. Mortar barrage.

END OF ACT ONE.

ACT TWO

SCENE TWELVE
SPLIT SCENE
DUCK BLIND
WAITING - IRAQ
JUDGE STANTON'S HOME

WAITING - IRAQ

ERIC and DARCEE wait. It is freezing cold at night in the desert. The space they are in is restricted keeping them near each other.

ERIC

Two thousand. The new millennium. I had everything all lined up. All junior year. These dot.com firms were fighting over me. Cause, see: I was like this famous hacker. The youngest ever convicted. I couldn't touch a computer for five years. Right? But like as soon as my probation ended I was in demand. Cause security - Y2K and shit, sorry - and I'm an expert. Getting flown First Class to Silicon Valley. Silicon Alley. Silicon Whereverthefu- I'm not even graduating for a year and I've got this Internet consultant on the hook. They're sending me sh- like Plasma TV. In my dorm room. It's ridiculous. I keep 'em hanging. There is nobody to hire. I mean every single person on the planet had a job. Boom time. Right?

DARCEE

Must've missed the Bronx.

DUCK BLIND

WESLEY puts a duck call in ARLENE's mouth. She starts to blow.

WESLEY

Whoa there. Wait a minute. You need to take a minute think about what kind of duck you are.

ARLENE

What kind of duck?

WESLEY

Look when you call, what are you trying to accomplish?

ARLENE

Get a duck's attention?

WESLEY

You're trying to bring birds to the gun. What'd we do here?
We set out five decoys. How many ducks we need to sound like?

ARLENE

Five.

WESLEY

Five. That's right. Now the thing you got to remember. Not all ducks sound alike. They got personalities. Like you, like me, well... Let's take the dainty hen. She's going to keep her throat closed, like a lady's knees.

(Blows into a call)

Now the lazy hen's going to be all over the place. Not paying attention when she stops or starts.

(Calls)

Then you have the springin' hen. The springin' hen give you a few in a row. And then springs down to the bottom of her range and up.

WESLEY does the springin' hen. ARLENE tries one of the calls.

WESLEY (cont'd)

That's it.

ARLENE calls some more. WESLEY joins in.

JUDGE STANTON'S HOME

LILIFRIEDA has CHESTER in his stroller and a suitcase. QUINTA runs in.

QUINTA

What happened?

LILIFRIEDA

Chester's sperm donor of a father heard about the apartment getting fixed up. Took it in his head to take it back.

QUINTA

Is it his?

LILIFRIEDA

It's mine and Darcee's.

QUINTA

Is his name on the lease?

LILIFRIEDA

I'm the last one paid the rent. He said I was welcome to leave Chester and find my own place. But I am not leaving this boy with him, no way. Where's the Judge at? That maid wouldn't tell me.

QUINTA

She's out of town.

LILIFRIEDA

Should've known it was too good.

QUINTA

I've got a friend in Housing, let me call...

LILIFRIEDA

Your friend going to be able to help?

QUINTA

I don't know. If Chester's father is on the lease. I should've checked.

LILIFRIEDA

It's him and Darcee. For the half a minute he acted like a husband.

QUINTA

(Picking up phone)

Let me see what my friend says.

WAITING - IRAQ

ERIC

Then the bubble burst. Before I could cash in. I had plans. Big plans. My entire life. I'd work for five years, pocket \$50 million, then retire to my ranch. Now look at me. I gotta freeze in a desert for three years to make enough.

DARCEE

You getting paid \$50 million to be here?

ERIC

Not fifty. No. Nowhere close. Just enough to get a ranch.

DARCEE

How much are these ranches?

ERIC

I don't know. Yet.

DARCEE

You must know something you're risking your one life to get it.

ERIC

Yeah. But I got to last. Three years.

DARCEE

Only way I'm getting out of here set for life is if I'm dead and even that won't last my son but a year.

DUCK BLIND

WESLEY lifts his hand to signal ARLENE to stop calling.

ARLENE
What do we do now?

WESLEY
Wait for ducks.

ARLENE
Do we have to whisper?

WESLEY
Ha! No, but keep your voice low.

ARLENE
You could do anything...I mean in life.
So why do you...do what you do?

WESLEY
Lobby?

ARLENE
If that's what you call it.

WESLEY
It'll do. But that's not what you're asking me.

ARLENE
It's not?

WESLEY
Let me turn it around. Why do you do what you do?

ARLENE
Protect the constitution.

WESLEY
Works for me.

ARLENE
But you must admit that my...approach is a bit more conventional. Whereas you...

WESLEY
Made myself. Made my position. I'm not that special. There are a dozen guys like me.

ARLENE
One dozen, not more, not less?

WESLEY

There are plenty of other wannabes and a few has-beens.

ARLENE

Have you never wanted to run for office?

WESLEY

No. No. Don't like people well enough.

ARLENE

Or asked for an appointment.

WESLEY

What? Ambassador to Dubai?

ARLENE

Why not?

WESLEY

Too much attention. Too much ceremony.

ARLENE

I'm a judge. Ceremony is my life.

WESLEY

It suits you. Me. I want to come and go as I please. Fix what I want to fix and let the rest go to hell. Can't win the war on all fronts. I pick my targets. Win what I see fit to win.

(He sees something move.)

Hang on. Here we go.

JUDGE STANTON'S HOME

QUINTA

I left a message. It's probably going to be too late today before he can do anything... Do you have a place you can stay? Family? Just until...

LILIFRIEDA

The rest of our relations is dead, thin or useless.

QUINTA

It might take a few days, I don't know...

LILIFRIEDA

I'm not taking Chester to a shelter.

QUINTA

No, I know...

LILIFRIEDA

I'm not leaving him.

QUINTA

My place is too small with my roommate. I'd offer.

LILIFRIEDA

I don't expect you.

QUINTA

(Deciding)

Stay here, at least for tonight. It'll be all right. It'll have to be. Right? What's the judge going to say?

(Deciding)

I'll stay too.

LILIFRIEDA

You're going to stay?

QUINTA

Yeah, I mean...

LILIFRIEDA

Cause that maid.

QUINTA

I'll stay with you.

LILIFRIEDA

The Judge got some milk?

WAITING - IRAQ

ERIC

My Dad took me when I was a kid. My real dad. Before he left. It was like the last thing I ever did with him. I'm like 10. I'd never even been on a horse. But the saddle. The animal under me. The first day. Oh, man. I had on this cowboy hat. Dad had bought me. And they get me on the horse. I'm all scared. Like happy feeling. The reins in my hands. And I'm like smiling. And the horse takes off. This horse is gone. And the hat falls down in front of my eyes. Not off. It stays there covering my eyes. So I can't see a thing. And the horse is running. And my Dad's yelling. The hands are scrambling after us. No one can catch us.

DARCEE

What happened?

ERIC

The horse stopped. At the door of the barn. They hadn't realized he'd gone barn sour. He was scared to be outside the barn.

DARCEE

Fobbit.

ERIC

What's that?

DARCEE

What you call a soldier at Forward Operating Base. That's what I used to be before I was assigned to you.

ERIC

Yea?

DARCEE

When I got here all I did was count cans in the mess. Order more when we needed. Never left base once till they put me with you.

ERIC

They wanted me on another horse. But I only wanted Smoky. I stopped wearing my hat. By the end of the week we were riding out over the prairie.

DUCK BLIND

WESLEY and ARLENE hold up a ridiculous number of dead ducks.

WESLEY

Holy Moly, Sister.

ARLENE

Which ones are mine, which ones are mine.

WESLEY

All of them, I think.

ARLENE

HA!

JUDGE STANTON'S HOME

LILIFRIEDA and Chester's stuff has taken over the living room. QUINTA alone trying to straighten up. LILIFRIEDA comes back.

QUINTA

Chester okay?

LILIFRIEDA

Chester fine. He'll be down for four hours, at least.

QUINTA

You?

I'm fine. You? LILIFRIEDA

Fine. QUINTA

Beat.

You going to show me that snake now, or do I got to go looking for it? LILIFRIEDA

WAITING - IRAQ

Do you like ranches? You ever been? ERIC

No, I haven't. DARCEE

What about a horse? You've probably never been on a horse. ERIC

I've been on a horse. DARCEE

Yeah. When? Where? Tell me. ERIC

Beat.

Come on. I tell you all kinds of crap. You never tell me anything. Except FOBBIT. And what I read in your letters. ERIC (cont'd)

You read my letters? DARCEE

Course I read them. ERIC

Those are to Chester and my sister. DARCEE

You asked me to type them. ERIC

I didn't ask you to read them. DARCEE

How am I supposed to type without reading? ERIC

No. Tell me. How? (DARCEE knows how)

DARCEE

Tch.

ERIC

Come on tell me. Tell me something. Anything.

Beat.

ERIC (cont'd)

Nothing's happening. I mean. I'm freezing. Waiting for like...what? Death by bologna. We don't know when we're getting out of here. At least if I could: Picture you on a horse.

DARCEE

You best not be picturing me anywhere except for exactly where I am.

DUCK BLIND

There is some impediment that ARLENE's boots can't handle. WESLEY has to lift her over. It's a Clark Gable/Claudette Colbert moment. Except WESLEY talks...

WESLEY

I've waited a life time to meet you.

ARLENE

Put me down. Put me. Down. Put. Me.

WESLEY does. He waits. ARLENE relaxes. Embrace.

JUDGE STANTON'S HOME

QUINTA and LILIFRIEDA asleep, wrapped together on the couch. LILIFRIEDA stirs. Disentangles. Looks at QUINTA, long. Goes out to check on CHESTER. Returns. Climbs back in with QUINTA who snuggles her, then jumps up.

QUINTA

(Worried it's late)

I got to-

LILIFRIEDA

What do you got to?

QUINTA

What time is it?
(Finding time)
Shit. Shit shit shit.

LILIFRIEDA

Get back over here with that mouth of yours.

QUINTA

This is the living room.

LILIFRIEDA

Uh huh.

QUINTA

Nothing ever happens in the living room.

LILIFRIEDA

(Last night)
Times change.

QUINTA is not having it.

QUINTA

The Judge is coming home. Can you get up?

LILIFRIEDA

I hope the Judge can straighten this whole thing out.

QUINTA

I'll talk to her.

LILIFRIEDA

I can talk to her.

QUINTA

Let's just get ready now.

LILIFRIEDA

I'm getting ready.

QUINTA

You're just sitting there.

LILIFRIEDA

I'm getting myself ready to move.

QUINTA picks up clothing, couch pillows...

QUINTA

Put these on.

LILIFRIEDA

Where's the shower at?

Just get dressed. QUINTA

I wore that. LILIFRIEDA

So. QUINTA

I'm not putting on yesterday's clothes. I need a shower. LILIFRIEDA

Fine. Take a right down the hall, take a left, and then another right. QUINTA

I do all that I'm still in this apartment? LILIFRIEDA

Go. Go go go. QUINTA

Come with me. LILIFRIEDA

Look at this place. QUINTA

You think I'm the only one needs a shower before the Judge gets home? LILIFRIEDA

QUINTA and LILIFRIEDA go.

WAITING - IRAQ

Yeah. But see my ranch. Out west. I've been doing research. It says the air is really dry. So it's good for people with asthma. Kids. ERIC

What you talking about? DARCEE

I just thought maybe you and Chester. Could come live on the ranch. With me. ERIC

Why would we do that? DARCEE

Well. You know. If you wanted. To. ERIC

DARCEE

This here is a professional situation. I am doing my job.

ERIC

I can change your life.

DARCEE

You listen to me. Only one person going to change my life and that's me.

*An explosion. Darcee covers Eric.
Darkness.*

SCENE THIRTEEN

SPLIT SCENE

JUDGE STANTON'S HOME

IN HIDING - IRAQ

UNDISCLOSED LOCATION

JUDGE STANTON'S HOME

*QUINTA desperately searching. LILIFRIEDA wheels in
Chester's stroller.*

LILIFRIEDA

You already looked under that cushion.

QUINTA

Help me.

LILIFRIEDA

I'm not the one lost your brassiere.

QUINTA

I'm going to die.

LILIFRIEDA

(Finding it)

This it?

QUINTA

Give it to me. Give it. Lilifrieda.

*Grab, giggle, hug, heat. Sound of door
opening. ARLENE is in doorway. Caught.*

QUINTA (cont'd)

Judge.

ARLENE

Good morning.

QUINTA

I...Lilifrieda -

ARLENE

I see.

LILIFRIEDA

How'd those boots work out?

ARLENE

Perfection.

LILIFRIEDA

Chester's father heard about the apartment getting fixed up. Moved himself back in.

QUINTA

I didn't realize his name was on the lease.

LILIFRIEDA

I'm the last one paid the rent.

QUINTA

Even though Lilifrieda's been paying the rent. I didn't know what to do it all happened so fast.

LILIFRIEDA

I took Chester to the park; the man had the locks changed by the time I came back.

QUINTA

It was too late to find out their rights...my place is too small...I didn't know what to do and Chester breathes so easy here.

ARLENE

A hotel, perhaps?

QUINTA

Of course, sure. I didn't think of that.

ARLENE

There's no need to tell Eric this latest.

QUINTA

I'll check if he sent anything.

ARLENE

That can wait.

LILIFRIEDA

Can you get him evicted?

ARLENE

Quinta's going to handle it.

QUINTA

(Re: text-message)

I missed a message.

LILIFRIEDA

Isn't there something you can do? Being a Judge and all.

QUINTA

"Survived explosion. Hiding now."

QUINTA AND ERIC

Blackberry dying."

ERIC

No kerosene, cold. Darcee says five days water. Two days food. Darcee sends Chester. Darcee Chester

QUINTA

That's it. It cut off.

ARLENE

When did this come in?

ARLENE grabs the phone, dials.

QUINTA

I can't tell.

ARLENE

(To QUINTA, re: LILIFRIEDA and Chester)

Just get them-

(on the phone)

Arlene Stanton. Is he in?

(To QUINTA)

Go.

LILIFRIEDA is looking under the couch.

QUINTA

What're you doing?

LILIFRIEDA

Chester's airplane.

ARLENE

(On phone)

Judge Arlene Stanton. Yes.

QUINTA

I'll find it later.

LILIFRIEDA

It's from Darcee.

ARLENE

Yes. He does. Where is he?

QUINTA

I'll bring it to you.

LILIFRIEDA

Darcee told him to practice his blowing on the propellers.

ARLENE

I'll try his cell- It is very important.

LILIFRIEDA finds the airplane.

QUINTA

You have to go.

LILIFRIEDA

I'm going.

ARLENE

An emergency. He would want to know.

QUINTA

Please.

LILIFRIEDA

I heard you.

QUINTA

I'm going to get you a hotel and then I'll work on the apartment.

ARLENE

Can you reach him?

LILIFRIEDA

(on cell listening to rings)

Come on.

QUINTA

I can get you a cab.

ARLENE

Are you able to reach him?

LILIFRIEDA

(On cell)

Jacki. Shareen. You sound just like your Moms. Your Moms there.

QUINTA

There're plenty of cabs.

LILIFRIEDA
Where she go? Who else is there? Who?

QUINTA
I've got money.

LILIFRIEDA
Put him on.

ARLENE
He's not answering? Where is he?

LILIFRIEDA
Lionel. Fried. I need a pick up. Yes, now. Park and 72nd.

QUINTA
Let me take you.

ARLENE
He has the number.

LILIFRIEDA
I'll be on the curb.

QUINTA
Don't.

ARLENE
S-T-A-N-T-O-N.

QUINTA follows LILIFRIEDA out.

QUINTA
Lilifrieda.

LILIFRIEDA
Before you knocked on my door - we had a home, this boy had a mother, I had a sister. Some motherfucking help you been.

LILIFRIEDA leaves followed by QUINTA.

LIVING ROOM

ARLENE sits stock still alone. The phone doesn't ring. No one checks on her. Time passes.

IN HIDING - IRAQ

DARCEE wraps a bandage around ERIC's hand.

LIVING ROOM

*Phone rings. ARLENE jumps a mile.
Answers.*

ARLENE

Hel- Lee. Lee. He's. Yes. Something terrible. Find him, Lee.
You have to find him.

Sound of men laughing.

UNDISCLOSED LOCATION

*WESLEY smoking a cigar. Steps away from
laughing men.*

WESLEY

What do you know? Uh huh.

(Listening)

It's alright, Lene. Leni. I'll find out. I said I'll find
out. You leave it to me. Arlene... No. Leave it to me.

LIVING ROOM

*ARLENE hanging up. She waits. Walks
over to liquor bottles. Considers.
Decides no. Returns to her seat. Sits.
Waits. A vacuum starts in a distant
room.*

IN HIDING - IRAQ

*Darcee takes out the last of their food -
a square of chocolate. She divides it
and gives it to Eric.*

ERIC

Actually, I don't even like chocolate.

He eats it anyway. They have nothing left.

DARCEE

My great grandfather told me the way he made it through his
war. He told me just cause we liked talking. Not cause he
ever expected lil' Darcee be in the middle of a war. Great
Grand told me: "Don't look around thinking where you are is
temporary. Look around and decide it's home."

UNDISCLOSED LOCATION

WESLEY picks up his ringing phone.

WESLEY

Chuck. How you...fine, just fine. You find me a unit can handle the job? Do me a favor - get your hands on a chopper that's not rusted out...I know...I know Air Force needs new craft. Is that a fact?...We'll find the money...money's not the problem. What's that? Ha! You bring this boy back here to his mother.

SCENE FOURTEEN
JUDGE STANTON'S CHAMBERS

ARLENE is alone, seething. QUINTA enters. ARLENE is ice.

ARLENE

I believe I was clear.

QUINTA

(Misunderstanding, hurrying to
pull out papers)

Cooper v. Aviall.

ARLENE

With regard to the Housing Authority.

QUINTA

They're back in the apartment.

ARLENE

You were asked not to file your report.

QUINTA

I didn't.

ARLENE

Are you lying to me?

QUINTA

No.

ARLENE

I don't believe you ever have.

QUINTA

I haven't. I wouldn't. I don't lie.

ARLENE

Then why was the Circuit Executive in my office this morning. Not in my in-box, not on the telephone, in my office, with her little notebook asking why I requested housing services for the Washington family?

QUINTA

I called.

ARLENE

That's what I asked you.

QUINTA

No, I misunderstood. I didn't file my report, but when Lilifrieda got locked out-

ARLENE

When you slept with her.

QUINTA

Yes. Before.

ARLENE

On my couch.

QUINTA

I should have taken them to a hotel. I wasn't thinking. I was so shocked. They had no place to go.

ARLENE

This sexual interest I assume was driving you from the beginning.

QUINTA

No... I never expected

ARLENE

Just to be clear.

QUINTA

(Fried's heat)

I felt. But no. I never expected.

ARLENE

Yet...

QUINTA

I called my friend. For assistance in getting them back in to the apartment.

ARLENE

And what did you say, to your friend?

QUINTA

I explained-

ARLENE

What? What exactly did you explain?

QUINTA

That Lilifrieda was locked out, that Darcee's ex husband-

ARLENE

Darcee's ex-husband. Suddenly, I'm the metro section.

QUINTA

I told him that Eric had met Darcee in Iraq. I did not say she was assigned to him. I did not mention Wesley Hanna or your involvement.

ARLENE

I see.

QUINTA

Did the Circuit Executive? With her little notebook?

Beat.

ARLENE

I am unaccustomed to my present position.

QUINTA

Cooper v. Aviall. In his opinion, Thomas finds that private parties are allowed to recover costs only if they themselves have been sued. In her dissent, Ginsburg argues that if a party is responsible, it is responsible.

WESLEY appears wearing a suit for the first time. ARLENE reaches for WESLEY. QUINTA leaves.

ARLENE

Where is my boy?

WESLEY

Shush, now. I am doing everything I can. We just have to wait.

ARLENE

I'm not brave. I'm not brave at all.

WESLEY

You are. You have to be.

ARLENE

Where is he?

WESLEY

Patience.

ARLENE

He has no food.

WESLEY

Your spoiled boy.

ARLENE

You told me you'd protect him. I didn't even want you to...

WESLEY

I've made a call. That's all I can say.

ARLENE

Can they find him?

WESLEY

I asked you to trust me, Lene. Do you trust me?

ARLENE

Yes, yes. Of course. Yes. Of course, I trust you, I must.

WESLEY

I brought you something.

(WESLEY pulls out a box.)

I think you're going to like it.

ARLENE

Tell me there's a chance...

WESLEY

Of course there is...

ARLENE

You have to admit the strongest chance, the most likely...is...I will never see him aga-

WESLEY

Stop it, stop that right now-

ARLENE

Don't promise me-

WESLEY

Lene-

ARLENE

Don't promise me he's coming home.

WESLEY

All right.

ARLENE

I'm sorry.

WESLEY

Come on, now. I've been looking forward to seeing your face when you open it.

ARLENE

You didn't need to-

The fourth object is given.

WESLEY helps ARLENE open the box. It's a fountain pen.

WESLEY

A woman who makes historic decisions needs a pen worthy of the enterprise. A pen that has fulfilled such a calling before.

ARLENE

My...

ARLENE takes it. WESLEY pulls out ink from another pocket.

WESLEY

Wait you need the exact ink that was used by Oliver Wendell Holmes to sign his dissent in Lochner....The "constitution is not intended to embody a particular economic theory, whether of paternalism or of laissez faire." I practiced.

ARLENE

(Continuing the quote)

The Constitution "is made for people of fundamentally differing views."

WESLEY

I know how much you like to know your enemy.

ARLENE

I do, that I do. This is...very special of you. Very...

WESLEY

We're going to go with someone else.

(ARLENE listens)

The nomination. We're going with someone else.

ARLENE

Ah.

WESLEY

You placed very highly. Sparked a tremendous amount of interest.

ARLENE

Is it my son?

WESLEY

Not a factor.

ARLENE

The way I've handled.

WESLEY

I said no.

ARLENE

Yes.

WESLEY

The work we have to do. There's a progression. An order to what can be accomplished and when. This is the first, not the last nomination. The President's got the best timing since Nixon put on three. This nomination's just the beginning. You are well thought of, highly valued.

ARLENE

Here I've overly involved you...

WESLEY

My choice...Lene. I hope to spend a lot of time together. The revolution is just beginning. You are a key part. There's much we can accomplish in your current position.

ARLENE

We...I don't unde-

WESLEY

You can play a strong role from the Second Circuit. We need you here. That's what it came down to.

ARLENE

Yes, fine, I see.

WESLEY

We're good together.

ARLENE

You've been most kind.

WESLEY

Not too shabby?

ARLENE

Generous beyond measure.

WESLEY

Leni, I'm asking you.

ARLENE

Whatever I can do, of course. You know I'm committed.

WESLEY

I'm asking you to be my wife.

Beat.

ARLENE

I want to be a Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. I don't want to be a wife.

WESLEY

Not a wife, myyyy-

ARLENE

I have been a wife. Twice. I am a far better judge.

WESLEY

I've been a husband two times. Still haven't gotten it right.

ARLENE

Then why are you?

WESLEY

With you, I'd like to try.

ARLENE

Is that? Are you trying to soften the blow?

WESLEY

No, Lene, I want you to marry-

ARLENE

You didn't...? You didn't choose- Over my nomination.

WESLEY

No. Certainly. Of course not. Lene, you anchor me.

ARLENE

My son. This all right now. My son.

WESLEY

We're going to find him.

ARLENE

I told you not to promise.

WESLEY

Then I won't. I won't promise.

ARLENE

I can't think. This day. I can't think.

WESLEY

Marry me. Lene. I want you to marry me.

ARLENE

I want my boy.

WESLEY

I'm doing everything I can. Are you with me? I need to know you are with me.

*ARLENE is not sure she can marry Wesley.
She hugs him not wanting to answer.*

ARLENE

Lee.

WESLEY

Is that a yes?

(She hugs harder)

Are you saying yes? To me.

*(She goes to kiss him. He
holds her off)*

Say it.

ARLENE

"A moment's insight is sometimes worth a lifetime's experience." Holmes, again. That's Holmes.

SCENE FIFTEEN

ST. MARY'S PARK, MOTT HAVEN, BRONX

UNDISCLOSED LOCATION

IN HIDING - IRAQ

JUDGE STANTON'S CHAMBERS

ST. MARY'S PARK MOTT HAVEN, BRONX

*Sound of asthmatic wheeze. Chester is
having a fit. Lilifrieda juggles to get
nebulizer, calm him down.*

IN HIDING - IRAQ

DARCEE on watch. ERIC sleeps.

JUDGE STANTON'S CHAMBERS

ARLENE and QUINTA work. ARLENE stops.

ARLENE

When he was a little boy, as soon as he learned to write his name, Eric would write it on every one of his things. He'd pick something up and say "is this mine?" "Yes, Eric." And he'd start to write. All the letters backwards. He graduated to one of those label makers. The label maker had a label on it saying "This is Eric's." An only child and he had to have his name...he needed to know what was his apart from what was mine. His father's. He'd correct me too.

(MORE)

ARLENE (cont'd)

"That's Dad's hat, Mom-me. That's Dad's." A champion of private property, my son. He instinctively embraced our founding father's wisdom "The Right of property is the guardian of every other Right." That's his compass.

IN HIDING - IRAQ

Sound of chopper departing. No one is there.

JUDGE STANTON'S CHAMBERS

ARLENE and QUINTA work. QUINTA stops.

QUINTA

It's important to me to tell you

ARLENE

Yes.

QUINTA

Going to the Bronx..the first time...I went because you asked me.

ARLENE

Yes, yes, I understand.

QUINTA

I went even though I was going against myself.

ARLENE

I know, I know that.

QUINTA

But once I got there...and it's not because she knocks me off my feet. It's because I can see now how my laws, the laws I believed in...left Lilifrieda and Chester and Darcee out. I mean Eric was in Iraq by choice, Darcee by conscription.

ARLENE

That's not true.

QUINTA

In all but name it is. Lilifrieda sells stolen goods.

ARLENE realizes she means the boots she bought.

QUINTA (cont'd)

Uh huh. She barterers all over town does whatever she has to do to take care of herself and that boy. You talk about how we each have our own compass. Lilifrieda has hers.

(MORE)

QUINTA (cont'd)

True north despite everything thrown at her. She lives outside the law not by her choice, but because the law leaves her out.

They work. Silence. Phone rings.

ARLENE

Lee.

ST. MARY'S PARK MOTT HAVEN, BRONX

Sound of a toddler's laughter laced with an asthmatic wheeze. LILIFRIEDA playing with Chester.

LILIFRIEDA

You ready? Blow like your Moms taught you. Blow. There you go. Ready? The airplane's firing up its engines. Two on the left, two on the right.

LILIFRIEDA makes airplane sounds. She gives the stroller a huge push. CHESTER giggles. LILIFRIEDA runs after it and grabs it.

LILIFRIEDA (cont'd)

Big powerful engines, big enough to lift your Moms off the ground and take your Moms right over the ocean back to you. Zooommmmm.

LILIFRIEDA keeps pushing him away and grabbing him back just in time.

LILIFRIEDA (cont'd)

There's the engine. Hear the engine? Is it your Moms?

LILIFRIEDA gives the stroller one more push...QUINTA catches it.

LILIFRIEDA (cont'd)

Lookie see...it's our little helper.

QUINTA

There's word. They found them. I don't have any details. The Judge asked me to have you come...to her place. I don't know anything, just the Judge wanted you to come.

UNDISCLOSED LOCATION

WESLEY picks up ringing phone.

WESLEY

Chuck. Good, good. Uh, huh.
(Getting news about Darcee)
(MORE)

WESLEY (cont'd)

I see. Okay. Good job, Chuck. Much appreciated. I won't forget it.

SCENE SIXTEEN
JUDGE STANTON'S HOME

ARLENE, QUINTA, LILIFRIEDA with Chester in his stroller. Socially awkward moment after greetings, settling in, offering of drinks.

ARLENE

They should be here any time.

LILIFRIEDA

I just got in a new shipment you might like. Low rise black with a Channel logo.

ARLENE

The tan are so sturdy, I'm sure they'll last a life time.

QUINTA

Chester's breathing so well.

LILIFRIEDA

(Re: Chester)

What're you smiling at, silly? You'd think he knows his Moms is coming.

Sound of the door opening.

WESLEY (O.S)

Welcome home, son.

ARLENE runs as ERIC comes in, his hand bandaged, but that's the worst of it. Tumble overlapping greeting.

ARLENE

Eric. Eric. Eric.

ARLENE grabs him. Hug of death. Hurting his hand. ERIC pulls away. ARLENE goes to WESLEY.

ARLENE (cont'd)

Thank you, Lee. Thank you.

ERIC

Wait. I don't-

ARLENE

You're hurt.

WESLEY
He's fine.

ERIC
Is this Chester?

QUINTA
Where's Darcee?

ARLENE
(To WESLEY)
Did I misunderstand?

ERIC
(To ARLENE)
You don't know?

WESLEY
This the family?

LILIFRIEDA
We're Darcee's family.

WESLEY
According to the Pentagon, Private Washington was in transit to forward operating base when her vehicle encountered an I.E.D.

ARLENE
You'll have to explain.

WESLEY
It's an improvised explosive-

ERIC
Road side bomb.

QUINTA
Where is she now?

ARLENE
She's...

WESLEY
Private Washington-

ERIC
She's dead. She died. I didn't know. He just told me.

QUINTA
Then how did you?

ERIC
They threw me on a chopper. I thought I was being kidnapped.

ARLENE

You're safe now.

QUINTA

Why wasn't Darcee?

ERIC

They left her.

ARLENE

This is all a terrible- I thought she was...I'm terribly sorry...Wesley...how...

WESLEY

Private Washington was a soldier fallen in the line of duty.

QUINTA

But Eric's right here. She could've been-

ERIC

They took me and they left her there.

WESLEY

I can assure you proper army procedure was followed.

QUINTA

Was procedure being followed when you got Darcee assigned to Eric?

ERIC

If you'd sent another fucking vest.

WESLEY

Watch your mouth.

ARLENE

He's upset. We're all...

ERIC

I had mine. I didn't even think to throw it to her. She had nothing lying there. A t-shirt.

LILIFRIEDA

(To WESLEY)

Are you who I see about her body?

WESLEY

You'll have to check with her outfit, I imagine, I don't...

ARLENE

We can...

QUINTA

I'll find out.

ERIC

I'll do whatever.

LILIFRIEDA

All I need to know is where to tell the funeral home to pick her up.

QUINTA

I'll help-

LILIFRIEDA

That's all I need to know.

ARLENE

Certainly. I'm sorry, I'm terribly...

ERIC

You know what Darcee was doing before you got her assigned to me? Counting cans in the mess. She'd never been off base.

ARLENE

(To WESLEY)

I see.

LILIFRIEDA

(Still to WESLEY)

This boy still have his benefits. Darcee told me before she left anything happened to her a check would come.

ERIC

She told me too.

QUINTA

He doesn't know, he's not army.

ERIC

It's not enough. I'll give you everything I have.

LILIFRIEDA

I just want what's coming to Chester.

ERIC is on Chester.

ARLENE

Of course, Quinta. Eric...come over here.

LILIFRIEDA starts to gather her and Chester's things. QUINTA helps. ERIC is glued.

ERIC

I have more letters. She never stopped writing.

QUINTA

Eric.

ARLENE

Let them go.

*ERIC digs for letters. LILIFRIEDA turns
the stroller to go.*

QUINTA

(To LILIFRIEDA)

I thought she'd be here.

ARLENE

We all thought.

WESLEY

Simple misunderstanding. That's all.

ARLENE

(Quietly to WESLEY)

You should've told me.

WESLEY

I never expected.

*ERIC hands LILIFRIEDA wads of letters in
DARCEE's handwriting.*

ERIC

(To LILIFRIEDA)

You know how in life you end up spending so much time. With people you don't choose. And how like way short the time you get with the people you love. Well. Darcee. Darcee's one of those people I didn't have anywhere near enough time with. Except. See. I know, I know. Darcee: She had way too much time with me.

ARLENE

I'm sure that's not-

ERIC

Shut the fuck up. You don't know.

WESLEY

He's a prince your boy.

ARLENE

He's upset.

ERIC

Darcee was the one the world needed. Not me.

LILIFRIEDA

(To QUINTA)

You'll let me know where I can get my sister.

QUINTA

I'll come with you.

LILIFRIEDA

You got your people here.

QUINTA

No.

LILIFRIEDA leaves.

ARLENE

Eric, you're exhausted.

ARLENE goes to ERIC, he pulls away.

ERIC

Off me.

QUINTA

You had me bring them.

ERIC

Oh. God.

QUINTA

This family. These people. What did we do? What did I do?

ARLENE

Don't blame yourself.

WESLEY

(Comforting ARLENE)

It's over now.

QUINTA

Nothing's over. For them.

WESLEY

Quinta, is it?

ARLENE

Yes-

QUINTA

She was just a little girl. Eric can tell you. All the pull you have the best you could do was send a little girl?

Overlapping.

WESLEY

I'm not going to listen-

ARLENE

Quinta, that does us no-

QUINTA

No, no, I get it. You to go war with the army you have. You leave the mess you make.

WESLEY

I beg your-

ARLENE

Please, we're all upset. We will help them. You are going to do everything you can to help them now.

QUINTA

Help. Help. Like Lilifrieda said: Some motherfucking help we've been.

WESLEY

You dare speak to the Judge like that, girl.

QUINTA nonverbal response to "girl."

ARLENE

Lee.

ERIC

Who does this guy think he is?

WESLEY

I'm your mother's fiance.

The news ricochets.

ERIC

Sweet. So like, fuck...

ARLENE

No, wait a minute.

ERIC

He did it for you?

ARLENE

No.

ERIC

Her death, my save? It was all for you?

ARLENE

Not her death, no. How can you?

ERIC

I'm like your wedding present.

ARLENE

No.

ERIC

Fuck me. Fuck you. Fuck.

WESLEY

Get a hold of yourself, son.

ERIC

I'm my father's son. A'ight.

ARLENE

(Holding WESLEY off)

Lee.

(To ERIC)

Eric, if you'd let me-

ERIC

What? What fucking what?

ARLENE

None of this would've happened.

ERIC

If you'd left me alone. You never could.

ARLENE

You put yourself in danger. You asked me to help her son.

ERIC

I told you I wouldn't come home without her. You should've left me there.

ARLENE

No, Eric. Don't you understand? I begged. I begged for you to be saved.

WESLEY

What any mother-

ARLENE

If only you'd never gone.

ERIC

If you'd never. Whatever you've been doing with him.

ARLENE

Whatever I've been - I made it to the top of his list for the Supreme Court. I placed very highly. Sparked a tremendous amount of interest. I won't get the first nomination, but there are more coming.

WESLEY

That's right, Lene.

ERIC

(So gross)

Lene.

WESLEY

(To QUINTA)

If you'd excuse us.

Overlapped.

ARLENE

No, Quinta.

WESLEY

(To ERIC)

Why don't you take your stuff to your room?

ARLENE

Stay, Eric.

WESLEY

Lene, I'll pour you a drink.

ARLENE

I don't want a drink. I'm sorry. I.

WESLEY

Easy, now.

ARLENE

I can only live with the law. I can't live above it.

WESLEY

Let's all just-

ARLENE

We are corruptible, but the law. The law protects us from ourselves.

WESLEY

What does that have to do with?

ARLENE

It is our compliance that sets us free.

WESLEY

You think you've done something wrong?

ARLENE

I have violated everything I stand for.

WESLEY

For your son.

ARLENE

No...it was my hunger, my fear, my...ambition.

WESLEY

I'm going to get you that drink.

ARLENE

No, I'm sorry, Lee.

WESLEY

What're you sorry about?

ARLENE

I can't marry you.

WESLEY

Can't? What?

ARLENE

I'm sorry, I can't.

WESLEY

Lene.

ARLENE

No, please, I want you to leave.

WESLEY

You want me to leave?

ARLENE

I'm asking you, yes.

WESLEY

After everything I've-

ARLENE

Each man has his own compass without which he is lost.

WESLEY

That's enough now, Lene, Leni.

ARLENE

I need-

WESLEY

You need me, Leni. You need me to calm you down.

ERIC

My mother asked you to leave.

WESLEY
Stay out of this, boy.

ERIC
Get out.

ARLENE
Please-

WESLEY
What're you going to do? Eh? Like I'm gonna let you.

ARLENE
I beg your-

WESLEY
I put your name in play.

ARLENE
With all due respect-

WESLEY
I made you.

ARLENE
You may have found me, vetted me, wooed me.

WESLEY
All I wanted-

ARLENE
But in no way, shape or form have you made me.

WESLEY
Arlene.

ARLENE
It's over.

WESLEY
You're my anchor.

ARLENE
No.

ERIC
You heard my mother.

WESLEY
I expected more of you. I must say: I am sorely disappointed.

ARLENE

Yes, yes, I imagine you are. Don't bother making any more threats. I will resign myself.

WESLEY

Resign? From the Federal Bench? Ridiculous.

ARLENE scribbles a letter of resignation.

ARLENE

(Writing)

Yes.

WESLEY

And what?

ARLENE

I don't know. I don't know.

WESLEY

Well, that's just...

ARLENE

Yes. Now, please...please.

The fourth object is returned.

ARLENE hands him the fountain pen.

WESLEY

I felt your need, Arlene. I felt it. Who you going to give that to? No one.

WESLEY finally goes.

QUINTA

I'm going to see about her body.

ERIC

And Darcee's benefits.

QUINTA

There's probably endless paperwork. I'll take care...

ERIC

I'll do whatever.

QUINTA

I don't need you. I can take- Care. Listen to that word. I'll...how did Lilifrieda put it...I'll make sure Chester gets what's coming to him.

ARLENE

You have served me well, Quinta. I led you astray. I'm sorry, so sorry for that. I will write you a stellar letter of recommendation. None of this will reflect on you.

QUINTA

How can it not reflect? I don't want it to not reflect.

QUINTA exits.

ERIC

Look, I...

ARLENE

I want to be who I was before any of this. No, no...that's the same selfish same. I want to be the person I might have been if I had stayed true to my compass. Allowed you your decision. If I'd...somehow... given you what you needed so you never left.

ERIC

No, Mom. Look. This is...like it. What you did. What I did.

ARLENE

Yes. You're right.

ERIC

And, like, I have to. I have to live with it.

ARLENE

We do. We do.

ERIC

Not we. I have to.

ARLENE

I'm saying. Yes. I understand. I do. I do too. I have broken-

ERIC

So, like, look. I'm going to go.

ARLENE

Go? You don't need to go.

ERIC

I do.

ARLENE

Where? Where are you?

ERIC

I don't know.

ARLENE

You don't know? Eric.

ERIC

I just. I need to go.

ERIC hugs his Mom. Leaves her.

ARLENE remains while DARCEE reads her last letter to CHESTER.

EPILOGUE

DARCEE

They say your life flashes before your eyes but it's your life I saw, Chester, baby. Starting way back when you were lying wet and tiny on my chest, dark and shiny, red pink, all your fingers all your toes. I see you, I see you opening up those eyes and lifting your head, flipping your body crawling backwards. You always crawled backwards. I thought back then I would never ever keep up with you. Who knew that stroller become your prison. But then see I see you running. Running like you got my lungs inside and you're coming right towards me right now and each step you're getting taller and wider and smarter and I know, I know, my Chester, you aren't my baby. You're a man. You are your own man. It's your life flashing before my eyes. It's you.

CURTAIN