

ONE

A Full-Length Play by

Joseph McDonough

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

EMILY, about thirty

KYLE/JAKE, late thirties

JILL, late thirties

For most of the play, the characters speak to no one in particular or to themselves, not especially aware of the presence of the audience nor speaking to anyone the audience cannot see.

SETTING

Various suggested locales in Tennessee, California and Ohio

TIME

Today

ONE

FIRST SCENE: *GOD'S CHOSEN ONE*

SECOND SCENE: *REUNION OF ONE*

THIRD SCENE: *THE HEART OF ONE*

The play should be performed without intermission.

ONE

By Joseph McDonough

FIRST SCENE: *GOD'S CHOSEN ONE*

AT RISE:

The moon shines over the stage.

Full light on EMILY. She is about 30 and wears a flannel shirt and baggy jeans.

After a few moments, she speaks to us with an innocent, almost child-like wonder.

A bell tolls.

EMILY

One . . . I can hear the clock tower bell . . . two . . . giving me chills again . . . three . . . ringing so mean to me in the black sky. Three in the a.m. I hear the call. The moon is still out, whispering down to me through the window. Rise and shine. Say your prayers. Be glad! God loves you! Give back this glorious day to him! Yes . . . but . . . I thought three o'clock was way, way too early to be waking up. I know everybody's got a job to do, but I was so awful tired. Theresa, Margaret and the others are early risers. Not me. But I couldn't tell them that. I was never what you would call a party-hardy girl. I wanted to stay good. But . . . goodness is a lifelong struggle. I always told myself I ought to just get crazy . . . and sexy . . . stay out all night and sleep till noon once in my life before I die. Everybody else does it once or twice. Or more. But me and my sisters, of

EMILY (Cont.)

course, had work to get up for. The same jobs every day. Mostly manual labor. Farm work. My hands were no longer soft.

(She looks at her hands.)

They were strong, sad, old looking hands. I tried not to complain about them, but I did sometimes. Silently to myself. But work keeps you from being idle. When you're idle, your mind gets too much time on its hands.

(She takes a deep breath.)

One day I had a different cure for idleness. I had earned myself a little time off. I decided I was gonna drive down to this brand new shopping mall, two hours away. To see Kyle O'Connell. Right near the Shiloh Battlefield Park where Captain Jake Anderson died in battle, April 6, 1862. Jake was Lorena Anne Wilkinson's very own soldier sweetheart. And Kyle was my very own . . .

Well, after Jake died he supposedly became a soldier ghost. Practically everybody here had seen Jake over the years. Or at least they claimed to. Except me. I always wanted to. I felt left out. I found myself dreaming more and more about Jake Anderson. Mysterious . . . brave . . . handsome. Then I'd think more and more about Kyle O'Connell. Surprising thoughts . . .

Well, that ghost has been hanging around, searching in vain for his long lost Lorena since 1862. Margaret thinks she saw Jake smelling roses in the garden once. Theresa found him scarfing down a bowl of cereal late at night and then he disappeared just like that. And Veronica swears to God himself she caught him peeking in on her while she took a shower.

(Beat.)

I wondered what would happen if I was . . .

(She strikes a seductive pose.)

I imagined that maybe he was out there . . . listening . . . hoping. Breathing fast on the other side of the flimsy shower curtain where he can almost see . . . with water slowly dripping off of me as I shave my legs with my razor . . .

I slide open that steamy curtain . . .

EMILY

But there is nobody there. No one. And I splash water all over the bathroom floor.

I never did tell anybody how the floor kept getting wet. They would've thought I was crazy. Margaret— she was outspoken in her faith— she had spent her hard-earned money to put up a big billboard near the highway. It said “Repent! The Time is Near! This Means You!” Margaret wouldn't care to hear about my naked fantasies. Neither would anybody else. Jesus Christ was the light and the way. Our one true savior. I'd known that since I was a little girl. I loved him with my whole heart. I feared him. But I had urges sometimes just the same. Urges. They're hard to get rid of. That's probably why I drove down to that mall to see Kyle O'Connell. He was making a publicity appearance down there. None of my sisters wanted to go with me. I was still the baby. I was always some sort of kid to them. I'd been a kid forever. Sisters or no, I would have to say they were downright mean. Hateful sometimes. Icy whisperings behind my back. Other times they'd just stare at me like they didn't know what to say. They didn't have words. Only looks. Like I was a freak. A monster. None of them were young— or young at heart— like me. Secretly, I was glad to go on that drive alone. I preferred it. I was just going out for a Saturday afternoon at a mall. There's nothing wrong with that. I'm sure God didn't have any problem with that.

(She smiles with excitement.)

I was free for the day! Alive! I was driving in the pickup truck we had for hauling vegetables. Bright, sunny interstate highway. Had the window down a bit. Didn't mind at all the invigorating breeze blowing all over me. Not too far from home I saw a bar by the side of the road. It was called the Flicker Inn. I'd driven by it many times. The sign had neon letters with the “l” and the “i” real close together that made it look like a bad word, except it wasn't. Sneaky, sneaky, I thought. Bad, bad, I blushed to myself. There was a Vince Gill song playing on WSM. Vince Gill is actually a fine looking man . . .

. . . but my mind was on Kyle O'Connell. My very own Jake. I was thinking about him in his clean blue uniform . . . and those blue, blue eyes . . . that always have a hint of his brave sadness . . . maybe because he lost his father when he was so young . . . and I suddenly felt . . . scared. I didn't know if I had the guts to introduce myself. I just wanted his autograph, that's all. But as I got closer to the Shiloh Mall, I was sweaty and sick to my stomach, just like in high school. For goodness sakes,

EMILY (Cont.)

Emily, I said to myself, it's not like you want to sleep with him or anything. You don't. You wouldn't. Unless . . .

And God certainly understands that everybody makes mistakes once in a while. Doesn't he?

(She pauses then hurriedly explains.)

I watched Kyle O'Connell every Thursday night. It gave me weekly excitement. Everybody in America watches him, but it was most ironical at our house because we'd basically been living off that T.V. series of his, *Heavenly Yankee*. Our farm is the one where they found all those old letters. From our romantic Captain Jake Anderson of the First Massachusetts Cavalry. The letters that went mysteriously unanswered by Miss Lorena Anne Wilkinson of Stantonville, Tennessee. I'd read each letter dozens and dozens of times. I knew what she must have thought when she read his words!

(JAKE appears in half light.

He wears a clean blue military uniform.)

JAKE

Why do you not answer these aching missives of my soul? Written with my own tears. I call for you each day . . .

EMILY

She must have lived her days with a broken heart . . . conflicted like mine.

JAKE

One must not die without knowing that one is loved.

EMILY

Apparently he never knew. So sad.

JAKE

I ask only the exquisite pleasure of loving you as you deserve to be loved.

EMILY

Civil War times were so much better than our times. Days and words were beautiful then.

JAKE AND EMILY TOGETHER

You have made an intrusion upon my heart.

(JAKE is gone.)

EMILY

Heavenly. Just heavenly. In 1862, Lorena couldn't even dream what would happen. Generations later, the letters were found in our basement in an old valise. And those letters, combined with the legend of the ghost, ended up making us a not immodest but certainly welcome income-- in hardcover, paperback, and electronic media subsidiary rights. And thus, *Heavenly Yankee*, every Thursday at 8:00. That's 9:00 Eastern and Pacific time. We're on Central. I don't know when it's on Mountain time.

(JAKE appears again.)

JAKE

Emily . . . Emily . . .

(EMILY looks at him and gets flustered.)

He is quickly gone again.)

EMILY

Yes, I was definitely what they call conflicted. I was pulled hard in two opposite ways. I did consider that I might break from the pull. Every one of us is both body and soul. Soul and body. Spirit and blood. Faith in what you can't see and the appeal of what you can. That's our little cross to bear. I drove into the lot and parked the pickup by the J.C. Penney. There were all these women--girls a lot of them— streaming into the place like pilgrims on some mission.

They were all giggling and cooing and making actual fools of themselves in their way too tight *Heavenly Yankee* t-shirts. A lot of them had their pierced belly-buttons showing. As if that was attractive. As if. And don't get me started on their tattoos. The moral decline of American womanhood is a disgrace to our nation if what I saw at the Shiloh Mall is any kind of indication. I made my way through this fog of hairspray and slutty perfume, everybody rushing, gasping to the big gathering space by the food court. Except for the security guards slurping their coffee, there wasn't a man to be seen anywhere.

EMILY

I squeezed my way to about three deep from the rope line. I was in a sea of girls. It was an amazing, different, uncomfortable world. The air-conditioning wasn't working like it should. The giggling kids in front of me couldn't have been in junior high and I could see straight over them. I waited. And waited. And waited some more. The whole place started chanting "Kyle! Kyle! Kyle!" Except me. I was the only one. Silent. Respectful. Afraid. I was feeling light-headed and wasn't sure how much longer I could stand on my feet like this. He was supposed to be there at 4:00 and he is notoriously late, but it was 4:27 already and no Kyle. 4:38. No Kyle. 4:46. No Kyle. 4:52-- Where sweet Jesus was Kyle O'Connell?

I'm about to pass out from sheer panic, I witness coming toward me, what appears to be the gallant arrival of a decidedly male figure, suddenly alive within my presence.

(KYLE appears.)

The hot shrieks that let loose could burn a hole through the roof of that mall and go straight on up to pierce the ozone layer. The entire food court erupts. Except for me. I'm not gonna embarrass myself. I'm not gonna succumb to this wanton silliness. There . . . he . . . IS! Just a few feet in front of me! Not on T.V. Not behind glass. In . . . the . . . flesh. Nothing between me and him but a worthless rope line and a handful of sixth-graders I could trample in an instant. I've never seen eyes that blue. Endless, sad Crayola blue. Just like the ocean ought to look like if I'd ever seen an ocean.

(She takes a deep breath.)

I can see his breath heaving from what appears to be his tightly-rippled chest, in his half-buttoned shirt. With curly little chest hairs announcing their presence. The hair on his head is a little longer than I ever remember seeing it. All the more enthralling. I want to shout out "I understand you!" But my tongue won't work. I'm afloat in unexpected perspiration. My heart is shaken still in human uncertainty. I can't hardly move.

EMILY

Look my way. Look at me. See me, Kyle, I beg in my head. I'm right here. I'm connecting to you. Don't you see me?

And then he turns. Stops. Smiles. Oh . . . my . . . God! Is he looking at me? I can't tell. It's either me or some slut right behind me! He's

EMILY (Cont.)

grinning, uncontrollably. I can see the kindness in his eyes. I think it might be me. I think we've got eye contact. Now I'm smiling too and I'm blushing with abandon. I don't want to control it. It is me! Me! Emily! Kyle O'Connell is smiling right at me!

(KYLE moves.)

Wait— wait! He's moving across the stage. Oh-- there's a sudden, squealing line forming in front of the platform. Oh-- the mass of figures is leading right up to him like a communion line.

The women thrust things at him to sign. A young mother is holding her crying baby high up in the air so Kyle can reach it. The baby wails and wiggles uncomfortably like some imperfect presented for healing, surrounded in the smoke from the cigarette that dangles piously from his mother's lips. Kyle finishes engraving his beautiful KOC on a *Heavenly Yankee* baby bib, wrapped 'round the neck of the innocent. Kyle kindly bends down and anoints the child, kissing it softly, gently, tenderly on its precious forehead. The baby stops crying! The crowd coos and applauds. Kyle signs whatever the women will hand him or buy. He soothes them, gracefully sketching his initials with his left hand even though he golfs right-handed. And batted right-handed in high school, when he hit .382 and led his team to the Ohio state baseball finals. And he swirls his letters with the pen, and cleverly tilts his left ear to each fan, because he lost his hearing in his right ear. It was a special effects accident on the set of his romantic movie, *Weekend From Hell*. I saw it eleven times! I know you. I know you! I'm your Lorena! You're my Jake!

Then, I hear, an announcement overhead. Just a few more minutes. Kyle has another appearance in Atlanta. Finish your purchases. Just a few more minutes. A few more minutes? The words slapped me in the face. But he just got here! He was over fifty minutes late and now they're gonna yank him away so soon? That can't be! He was looking straight at me! We had eye contact. We smiled together uncontrollably. Look at me again. Please, look back at me! What's going on? Have I sinned?

Go on, sister. Go on! I shove those sixth graders out of my way. I get right in that autograph line! Not in the back of the line. I cut in and take my rightful place up front. The very next one in line! Nobody stops me. Nobody dares. They're not gonna run out of time on me! I'm the next one!

KYLE

Hey, I've had a great time here in Kentucky, but I— what? Oh, Tennessee. Sorry.

EMILY

In person, his words have a vulnerable, human quality that doesn't come across on television. He is a man loved by millions but understood by one.

KYLE

Well, I've had a great time here in Tennessee, but I've got a plane to catch to Alabama. Thank you! Good-bye!

EMILY

I don't think so! I leap up onto the platform and I smile without shame. I dare say I laugh with pleasure. I look deep into the oceans of his startled eyes . . . I grab him by his warm, stubbled cheeks . . . and I kiss him like a woman was meant to kiss a man . . .

(She kisses him.)

EMILY

He's afloat in unexpected perspiration. His heart is shaken still in human uncertainty. He can't hardly move. "I understand. We all know sadness. *Both* my parents died when I was young. I was sent away to strangers! We're all afraid!" Then I embrace him with my rough hands, and I kiss him a second time.

(She does so.)

The women go absolutely wild. They holler. They whistle in their vicarious lust. Kyle is surprised because I'm wearing my habit. "It's O.K." I assure him. "God will understand." Then I go for my third kiss.

(KYLE moves back into the darkness.)

EMILY

But before our lips can touch again, Kyle is whisked away. As he moves out of my sight, he looks momentarily confused, shocked. Perhaps humiliated . . . Surprisingly small. So unlike Jake Anderson. So unlike himself.

(KYLE is gone.)

EMILY pauses in silence. She
looks around.)

EMILY

I'm as hot as I've ever been. Tears blur my eyes. I feel the urges building inside me. Stronger than they have before. Stop! I suddenly hear applause from the crowd. They urge me to run after Kyle.
Go on, sister, go on, sister . . .

They're mocking me. They don't understand . . .

Go, sister, go! Go, sister, go!

They're all laughing at me. Jeers, not cheers. They point at me. I run out of the mall. I find my truck and climb in. I slam the door shut . . . I hear nothing. The tears drip down off my cheeks and moisten the front of my habit. The urges won't go away. I know they're wrong. But I'm not sure if I can be strong. Go on, sister. Go on, sister, go. Part taunt, part challenge, part destiny. Everybody does it. Why was I chosen not to? Go, sister . . . I can't win this war.

I'm driving back toward Nashville. Up ahead is the Flicker Inn. I'm looking for it. The neon sign calls teasingly to me-- flicker. . . flicker! I exit the highway and find the parking lot. I open a duffel bag. I pull out some casual clothes I had packed in case of an emergency. Or so I had lied to myself. I change in the car. I fix my hair. I put on lipstick. I hide under my makeup. And I go inside. My head held high. My arms shaking. My heart shivering. Go on, sister . . . go on . . .

The barstool is cushioned. The beer is cold. The room is smokey. I sit there a long time. I am not pretty. I have beer and popcorn for supper. I am not pretty at all. A baseball game is on the T.V. over the bar. I stare at my ugly hands. A guy whose shirt says "Doug" talks smoke into my ear and buys me another round. I don't hear what he is saying. I only hear the whizzes and whirrs . . . the boings and bells of the video games crashing around in my head. Pretty enough.

The guy called Doug has a messy apartment. He takes off his shirt and throws it on the floor. I wonder if without his shirt on, I'll forget his name. He's not cute like Kyle, but he puts on a Vince Gill CD for me. I let him get rid of all his urges. And I get rid of mine. As best I can. The guy called Doug has passed out. My sacred vows are broken. I do not cry until I'm back in my pickup.

EMILY

I'm driving back to the farm and I feel ashamed. Lorena would be so ashamed of me too. The moon lights up my guilt through the window. I know that God is disappointed. Maybe angry. He expected more from me. Forgiveness and abandonment seem equally likely. I failed his call. I rejected my promise. Near the turn-off for the farm, I see the billboard. Repent: The Time is Near. This Means You. I can't take my eyes off the words. Clear. Precise. Bold. Yes, tonight, I know those words are meant for me.

I crawl up into my room at the convent. Lorena's old, solitary room.

(A bell tolls.)

One . . . two . . . three . . . Sunday morning. Rise and shine. I can't move. Veronica knocks and knocks on my door.

(Sound of knocks, increasing, louder and louder.)

I'm sick! I went to a doctor! He told me to stay in bed a while! I hear Veronica thinking in silence. Call me if you need me, she says disapprovingly. I hear her footsteps creak as she plods downstairs to those sacred morning prayers. I hear their whispers beneath me. Their chatter grows louder. They hurt me as they sneak into my ears. Then I hear their voices—blending as one—singing—their beautiful morning hymns—rising up to me—and past me. I can not go downstairs.

The alcohol is taking its toll. I stumble into the bathroom to be near the toilet. I lock the door.

(EMILY lies down on the stage.)

After a while, I lie down in the bathtub and curl up with my head on the cold white porcelain. I pull the shower curtain closed around me. I fall asleep and I dream of Jake. The way he smiled at me. Then I dream that God is smiling at me too. The very same way. The very same eyes. My one true savior. One . . . true . . . I am at rest . . .

(JAKE appears.)

He stares at her.)

EMILY

When my eyes open, the sun is burning bright streaks through the window.
I feel them on my face.

God slides back the shower curtain! I can see God staring at me! Oh--

(She is afraid.)

JAKE

Emily?

(She kneels up.)

EMILY

I'm right here . . . here . . .

JAKE

I still love you.

EMILY

I . . . am . . . so . . . happy . . .

JAKE

Stay with me . . .

(He reaches out his hand.)

I know you . . .

(She nods.)

JAKE

I understand you, Emily.

EMILY

I take my razor and I cut through my wrists. I cut and I cut—

JAKE

Come with me now.

(She stands.)

EMILY

I reach out my hands. Then I follow him.

(JAKE holds out his hand and
walks into the darkness.

She reaches high up into the air.)

EMILY

Go on, sister . . . go . . . go . . .

(The lights shift.

Silence.)

EMILY

At my funeral, all of my old sisters cried. They blamed themselves. But they shouldn't have. They didn't understand. I didn't either. There's so much not to see.

All those sisters. From Lorena down to me. They will all some day be gone. But the moon will still be there. And I'll be around. I'll still hear the bells in the morning.

(A bell tolls.)

One . . . two . . . three . . . rise and shine . . . It's so hard to answer that call . . .

FADEOUT

END OF FIRST SCENE

SECOND SCENE: REUNION OF ONE**AT RISE:**

The moon still hovers over the stage. Brighter.

Full light on KYLE. He is handsomely dressed.

He speaks openly, honestly and earnestly.

KYLE

One day . . . I wake up . . . and I'm the sexiest man alive. I'd felt it before. But *People* magazine confirms it. My baby blues on that slick cover. I really hate the way they combed my hair for that shoot. But I learn to live with it. It's still the cover of *People*. My hair in real life is even sexier.

I have a T.V. series where I play this ghost Jake Anderson-- a Civil War soldier and a great guy. Passions, emotions and mystery every episode. Wandering and searching for the love he can never have. Pretty deep. Top ten show almost every week, though we've slipped some the last two seasons. But I'm proud of my art. I don't want anybody thinking I'm just some beefcake star. I did a movie a few years ago where I stretched myself as an actor. I played a guy who all these girls fall for on the same crazy weekend. I had a scene at the end where I had to cry— real tears. I fucking nailed it. It was a breakthrough for me as an artist. Actual human tragedy all told in one close-up. I needed that. The movie flops but it's all because of the marketing. I'm not too discouraged. My agent's been looking for more movie deals. He told me he's gonna be choosy till he finds the right vehicle. But I'm antsy all the time now. I'm trying to turn my life around some. Become a deeper person.

I've done a lot of stupid stuff that I'm getting more and more ashamed about when I think back on it. I'm not a kid anymore, I guess. I'm not

KYLE (Cont.)

half the guy that I play on T.V. every week. Jake is quick, brave, decent-- you name it. And me . . .

One day this envelope comes in the mail.

From my old high school back in Cincinnati. It was originally sent to my mom down in Florida, but she sends it to me out in L.A. High school reunion. Twenty fucking years since Catholic school. Wow. It can't be twenty. It doesn't seem like a full twenty years worth. Jill . . . Jill gets the same invitation.

I'm wondering whether she will go. I think about it a lot. The smart people always go to those things. I'm gonna blow it off. What do they want to talk to me about? The girls I date? All the sex I have? Which I guess is true. But I'm sort of modest about stuff like that now. It's not as cool as it used to be. A guy in my position needs discretion. Yeah. I mean once a few years ago I'm flying to New York or somewhere and I stop at the Denny's out by LAX because I've got some time to kill. This spunky blonde waitress comes up to my table and I'm about to order a grand slam breakfast when she recognizes me. Then she gives me that sudden smile— the startled grin— I call it the electric blush. It's like a red, uncontrollable flash in the face— the sparkle in the eyes that a girl gets when I make unexpected eye contact. And her face betrays her. She can't help but instantly let on that she's overwhelmed by her tingling attraction to me. So I order, she brings me my grand slam. Later, I go into the john. I feel warmth or breath. I turn around and there she is in the men's room grinning her eyes out with the electric blush. Nobody in the history of the universe ever got laid at Denny's. Except . . . But I don't go telling that story on the *Tonight Show*. They all start to run together anyway. I never tell that stuff to anybody. Problem is, that's all they'd want to hear about at the reunion. Like I'm gonna talk about sex in the bathroom at Denny's if Jill's listening? But what the hell can I talk to her about? I'm not a good talker on the spot. I need to have my lines memorized. No. I can't do it. Jake Anderson never went to a damn reunion. Quit thinking about her. She'll be there with her husband anyway. Some guy who loves her. Probably married a scientist. Or maybe she's one. They're both scientists. Living in France or one of those educated countries. They've got kids and stuff. She's happy. Good for her.

(KYLE paces about for a beat, restless and anxious.)

KYLE

Another week goes by. Nobody hears from me. People are dying to know if I'm gonna show at the reunion. The big star. The fucking drawing card. Mitch Hertlemann sends me a letter through my mom. Mitch and his wife are going. He's on the reunion committee and he's begging me to come. I haven't seen Mitch since I since I flunked out of college and went to L.A. to try advertising. Modeling really. And I lost track of Jill.

Well, Mitch was a short, fat guy. Pimples everywhere. Even on his ass—I saw because he was the back-up catcher on our ball team, and you see things in the shower you don't wanna see. Everybody made fun of him. But he lived down the street from me and he was like my best friend or something. The amazing thing was, he never got depressed about anything. Never let stuff bother him. Senior year, Mitch, he walks boldly up to Vickie Marvano—the consensus hottest babe in school. Beautiful face, big hair, perfect boobs and butt—he goes up to Vickie Marvano in the cafeteria. He asks if he could have the exquisite pleasure of taking her to prom. My jaw almost drops off and I actually feel scared for him. Vickie just stares at Mitch, smiles, and says “You can not have the exquisite pleasure.” Just like that. Then she laughs in his face. Little Mitch walks away, sits down and eats his lunch. Lots of snickers and remarks fly around. Mitch just acts like he doesn't hear them laughing. I tell everybody to shut the fuck up. And they do. I felt good about that. Mitch should've been proud. Goddamn proud. He was brave. I wasn't. I wanted to ask Jill to prom. She wasn't really beautiful. No, but she was-- Jill. I sat behind her in senior English class.

(JILL appears in half light.)

Her long hair blew back to me when the window was open. I could almost touch it.

It looked so soft-- I always wanted to run my fingers through it. Maybe I could cheer her up if she ever got bummed out about stuff. I could feel her all warm against me— lying in the grass somewhere, where I could listen to her breathing and telling me what she knew all about. She had plenty to say. She read a report once on some dead poet. Her eyes just sparkled. They danced. I danced with them. I was in her world. But I couldn't get myself to go up to her. Couldn't even talk to her. So I go to the prom. And I spend the whole damn night dancing with Vickie, looking over Vickie's shoulder to see who Jill Obermann's there with. And Jill doesn't show. Nobody asked her. Goddamn was I stupid.

(JILL is gone.)

KYLE

The RSVP date goes by. The invitation's still sitting on my dresser. I'm going to blow it off. I'm not gonna embarrass myself. So I'm out on a ridiculous old-fashioned publicity tour the network dreamed up. Playing Jake Anderson. I'm in some stinky mall in Tennessee. I'm signing autographs and thinking about the reunion.

When— of all people— this ugly little nun— she comes up and grabs me. Gives me a big ol' kiss right on the lips. She does it again. And again. I am totally freaked out. A nun. The security guys get me the hell out of there.

(EMILY appears in half light.)

But the picture stays in my mind. A nun! She was so . . . unafraid. The greatest act of bravery I'd seen since little Mitch.

(EMILY is gone.)

That nun puts me to shame. I don't know how to risk anything. I only take the things that come to me. I don't deserve to even play Jake.

(JILL appears in half light with EMILY.

KYLE stares at them.)

KYLE

No more.

(EMILY and JILL are gone.)

No more shame. No more farting around with my life! I decide to change. I will be brave! I decide right there and then to take charge! I will be Jake! I'm going to that goddamn reunion. I'm gonna march right in. And I'm gonna make Jill fall in love with me.

When I get home, another envelope from Mom is waiting. It's a list and addresses of everybody who's signed up so far. There's only a month to go and they want to entice all the stragglers. Basically, me. I scan down

KYLE (Cont.)

the list and there I see it: Jill Obermann. Same last name. No spouse or significant other listed. She's not married? Perfect! Then I see the address— it's the same old place where she used to live, but it has a notation "Recently moved back home." What the hell does that mean? Why would you move back to your parents' house? At our age? I think it over and I think it over some more. Something happened to her. Bankrupt? A divorce? I feel like it's something sad in her life. I get a definite sense that there's a problem. Maybe something serious. I've gotta help her! She needs me. It's some sort of freaky sign of fate. Just like Jake and his Lorena! Oh christ--

I hurry up and fax my RSVP. I consider sending a copy to everybody on the list so she knows I'm coming. But I relax and figure word will get out anyway. I've got to play this right. I'm just a regular guy.

I send in a \$25,000 check to the reunion committee. To defray some expenses. I want them to do it up nice with tasteful style. I also decide to give the attendees a gift at the door. I consider sending autographed copies of my headshot, but Jill might think that's too focused on me. Jake would never send in his own headshots. I settle on autographed paperbacks of the *Letters of Captain Jake Anderson*. Actually, it does have my picture on the cover. But it seems more educational. Jill will like that. She reads books. I get the copies sent in.

At last I fly to Cincinnati and check into my hotel. It's late Friday night. Less than 24 hours until the reunion. The cute desk clerk gives me the electric blush and can't believe it's me. If there's anything I need . . . she'd be glad to take care of me. I thank her, sign her an autograph, and get the hell up to my room. I need to concentrate. I'm lying on my bed trying to plan-- to think up a conversation to have with Jill. I come up with nothing. I'm fucking hopeless. There's a knock on my door. It's the desk clerk in full blush. She's put on new lipstick and makeup and crap. She's unbuttoned a couple buttons on her blouse. She wants to know if I'll be needing turndown service tonight. I tell her thanks but I don't. I close the door. I've got my mind on Jill. I'm focused.

(A bell tolls.)

KYLE

I wake up about three. I'm sweating. Wide awake. I look out the window and I see the moon. The moon! I go to my suitcase and find my copy of *The Letters of Captain Jake Anderson*. One time on the show I was quoting something cool that Jake says in the book about the moon.

(JAKE'S VOICE is heard.)

JAKE'S VOICE

Oh, Lorena— the moon stares down at me tonight!

KYLE

I've thought about it lots of times. It's something about how the moon understands what we're afraid of.

JAKE'S VOICE

Nations have risen and fallen under its glow. Every pair of eyes that's ever lived has looked up at this same moon.

KYLE

The moon has witnessed the suffering of every human heart.

JAKE'S VOICE

The moon understands the mysteries--

KYLE

-- why our lives play out like they do.

JAKE'S VOICE

Certainly the fear of one lonely soul is of minor consequence . . . and yet--

KYLE

-- and yet--

JAKE'S VOICE

Muster down a whisper--

BOTH TOGETHER

-- of your voice to me tonight. Send your soothing breath of wisdom . . . of understanding . . . of joy . . .

KYLE

I can do it! I won't have to bullshit. I can slide right into that conversation. And Jill can add her thoughts to it. She can improve it. We can illuminate each other! I'll make her happy. Make her eyes sparkle again.

When I wake up, the sun is shining and I feel terrific. In the shower I use my prescription shampoo. I still lose a few hairs into the drain, but it

KYLE (Cont.)

doesn't bother me like it usually does. Today's the day I get to know Jill. I can't wait. I go outside. I drive my rental car out to where Jill lives. Maybe I'll catch a glimpse of her. The trees on her street are taller and fuller than I remember. No cars in the driveway. Garage door is closed. I drive around the block and come back again. This time I see an old lady watering her rose garden. It's Jill's mom. God she looks old. Jill's mom goes back inside. Still no sign of Jill. I park and wait awhile. Where is she? She's probably out buying a new dress for tonight. Or she's at the library. I'm getting more and more nervous. I wait some more. I wonder if she's inside. Maybe she's upstairs getting ready. Shit, I need to get ready!

I get a good, close shave. I try on three different shirts until I find one that makes me look taller. I decide on a tie and a sport coat. When I'm dressed, I comb my hair just right in the mirror. Not like on the *People* cover. I need to hide the receding hairline. I change my mind and put on a different shirt. Then I splash on my lucky cologne. The same stuff I wore to my first good L.A. audition. The casting director said it smelled great on me. She liked to sniff my neck and nibble my ears.

I'm ready.

The reunion starts at 6:00. It's in a ballroom downstairs at my hotel. I stroll in at 6:25 to make an entrance. Lots of people are already there. Everybody stops and stares at me when I walk in. They all grin at me. Big grins. But nobody says anything. I'm hoping they might applaud or something, but they don't. The only one I recognize is Vickie Marvano.

She shrieks and runs up to me. She gives me a big tight hug. I'm looking over Vickie's shoulder to see if I see Jill. Everybody looks so old and bald and fat. I think I make out some of the guys from my baseball team. And against the wall are some of the nuns and priests who used to teach us. They haven't aged a day. They were always old. But I don't think I see Jill anywhere. Mitch Hertlemann comes up to me. He hasn't changed too much-- well, let's face it, when you're fat and bald in high school, you've already bottomed out. He shakes my hand and thanks me for coming. I hear how he's a manager at Wal-Mart. I meet his wife— real nice girl— and I see pictures of their cute chubby twins. “So, who all's here?” I ask casually. “You probably just care about the girls, Kyle” he laughs and smacks me on the back. “Of course!” I laugh back. He takes me over to the registration table. Everybody gets a reunion program, a nametag and an autographed copy of the book I sent. “As if you need this nametag,” Vickie Marvano tells me and she pins it on my chest even though I don't

KYLE (Cont.)

want her to. I'm looking over Vickie's shoulder and I see Jill's nametag. "You didn't bring a significant other, Kyle?" Vickie asks. Mitch smacks me on the back again. "He couldn't pick just one." Mitch laughs and gives me a beer. I scan through the program and I see "Obermann, Jill" listed right next to "O'Connell, Kyle." It's fate. In the space next to her name where you're supposed to put what the fuck you've been doing for the last twenty years, it's completely blank. Nothing. No hint of her problem. No hint of her life.

I spend four miserable hours shooting the breeze and drinking, just like in high school. I face the door the whole time. I never for even a second let that door out of my sight. I watch everyone who comes in. A crowd of people is gathered around me. I'm looking at no one and I'm telling half-true Hollywood stories. I'm dropping names of all the famous people I've met and some that I haven't. Everybody's eating it up and I don't even know what I'm saying. Jill's nametag is still lying all by itself on the table. I'm starting to panic. 10:31. No Jill. 10:38. No Jill. 10:47—where in the hell is Jill Obermann?

(JILL appears on the opposite side of the stage.
Her hair is now shorter.)

KYLE

A woman walks into the ballroom. Oh . . . oh . . . she's got shorter hair than I remember but, I think, maybe— my chest is pounding, my stomach tightens— she's got the same pretty face— I'm feeling light-headed and I'm starting to sweat— it's her— she picks up her nametag. It is her! Jill. I think she's beautiful. She's alone. I quickly fix my hair.

The DJ suddenly puts on a slow song and Vickie Marvano pulls me out onto the dance floor. She damn near yanks my fucking arm off. I'm slow dancing with Vickie and I'm pushing her big hair out of my face so I can see Jill. Jill picks up her program and my book and walks across the floor.

(JILL circles around the stage.)

Jill walks all over the ballroom. She seems restless. Uncomfortable. Nobody really talks to her. She doesn't seem to know anybody. Vickie's squeezing me tight and nuzzling her nose into my shoulder for some damn reason and I feel like I'm gonna pass out. Jill stops over by the bar. She looks around at the people and the lights in the room, at nobody in

KYLE (Cont.)

particular. She's in her own world. I want to be there too. At last, the longest goddamn slow song in history ends and I detach myself from Vickie who heads for the bathroom. I know this is my chance. I'm alone. Jill's alone too. Standing by herself waiting for somebody to talk to her. Move feet. Move feet, move! She's waiting for you. She needs you. Brighten her life! Make her eyes sparkle again . . . Jake Anderson would be over there by now!

I do it. Captain Kyle O'Connell makes his charge. I stroll up to the bar like I'm getting a drink.

(He speaks to her.)

Oh, hi. How are you?

JILL

I'm fine. How are you?

KYLE

We smile. We look into each other's eyes. It seems like forever. I'm . . . happy. I'm giving her the electric blush. Then . . . she looks down . . . at . . . my . . . nametag.

JILL

Kyle . . . O'Connell?

(Silence.)

KYLE

Uh, yeah.

JILL

I'm sorry. I'm terrible with faces. And names.

KYLE

You're Jill Obermann?

JILL

Yes--

KYLE

Didn't I sit behind you in senior English class?

JILL

Did you?

KYLE

Pretty sure I did.

JILL

Probably so. I'm sorry. I don't mean to sound vacuous. I barely remember anything or anybody from high school. That was a lifetime ago.

KYLE

Yeah. Twenty years.

JILL

Right. I wasn't particularly involved.

KYLE

Yeah.

JILL

I'm putting in an appearance, I guess.

KYLE

Me too. Just stopped in from L.A. Then I'm flying back.

(Silence.)

KYLE

She has no idea who I am. Never seen me. Never heard of me. How the hell can that be? Her eyes glance in another direction. The conversation's on the verge of ending.

JILL

It was a pleasure to meet you, Kyle. Good luck to you in L.A.

KYLE

She looks away again. She's about to move. I've got to go for it!

(To JILL)

Uh, Jill?

JILL

Yes?

KYLE

The moon . . .

JILL

The moon?

KYLE

Yeah, the moon— it's always up there— it sees all our troubles— you ever wonder what the moon would say if it could talk?

(He stops.)

She's startled. Puzzled. Momentarily confused. She thinks it over. Considers it. I want to puke. But then she smiles right back at me. The music has gotten pretty loud and she lightly puts her hand on my shoulder. She breathes something soft into my ear. But I'm deaf on that side. I can't hear a word she tells me! What did she say? What the hell did she say to me?

I feel Mitch smacking me on the back again and handing me another beer. Jill walks away. My old teammates want to take pictures of all the guys from our state runners up baseball team. I let them pull me the other way.

The flashes hang in my eyes, but I watch Jill circle the room one more time. They keep taking more shots. Now a funny one. Now everybody look serious. Jill goes through the door without talking to anybody.

(JILL is gone.)

KYLE

I stare down at my nametag . . . I let her go.

Mitch and his wife grab me and say goodbye. He's got an early shift at Wal-Mart tomorrow. Mitch tells me not to be a stranger then he gives me a little hug. I tell everybody I left my car unlocked and I go outside. Jill's not there. And I don't look for her. At a distance, I see Mitch and his wife walking to their van. They're holding hands, laughing and talking to each other. Tears are welling up in my eyes. I wave at Mitch as they drive away. I cry— real tears— in the dark where nobody can see me.

(KYLE pauses. Silence.)

Vickie comes up to my room. For old times sake. Afterwards, we're sitting naked on the edge of the bed. I'm watching her. She's telling me

KYLE (Cont.)

about her two bastard ex-husbands. She still has a great body. Gorgeous. I look into her eyes. I can see myself staring in them. She's got deep lines around her eyes. She's hiding under her makeup. She's not a kid anymore. She looks . . . sad. She's gotta get going because her kids are with a babysitter. She tells me she needs a change in her life. She's thinking of moving. To California. She asks for my number in L.A. so she can hook up with me. I give her my number— at my management service where they screen my calls. She writes her number down on a hotel napkin. I kiss her good-bye at the door, and when it's shut, I throw the napkin away. Jake Anderson would be ashamed of me. I am too.

(A bell tolls.)

At 3 A.M., I'm parked across the street from Jill's house. I can't sleep.

(JILL appears in half light.)

The light is on in her old bedroom. The blinds are closed. I sit there for a long time. The moon shines over her house. Captain Jake Anderson would've stormed inside and told her what he had to say. He had all the words back then. I have no words. I'm only an actor with no lines of my own. Hiding in the dark. What is she thinking about? Why is she still awake? What's bothering her? I'll never know. I can't help her. I'll never run my fingers through her hair. We won't talk together. I won't make her eyes sparkle. And I'll never know what it's like inside her world. She didn't even know who I was. God, that bothers me and I can't stop it.

(JILL is gone.)

I drive back to my hotel and crash. I was gonna leave Monday but I check out early and catch a plane Sunday night. I cash in the first class ticket I'd bought for Jill. I get into LAX late and I'm hungry, so I stop at the Denny's. The place is empty and I'm sitting at a booth looking out the window. I can see the moon lighting up the dark sky by the Denny's sign. A tall redhead comes up to take my order. She recognizes me right away and smiles a big grin. I motion for her to sit down, then I ask her, "If the moon could talk, what do you think it would help us understand?" She lights up . . . her eyes really sparkle at me with the electric blush . . . and for just a minute . . . I feel like I'm not alone . . .

FADEOUT

END OF SECOND SCENE

THIRD SCENE: *THE HEART OF ONE*

AT RISE: JILL stands alone under the bright full moon.

JILL

(Reciting to herself)

One and One— are One—
Two— be finished using—
Well enough for Schools—
But for Minor Choosing—

Life— just— Or Death—
Or the Everlasting—
More— would be too vast
For the Soul's Comprising—

That's Emily— contemplating the timeless mysteries again. I know she's been dead over a hundred years, but I consider Emily Dickinson to be the sister I never knew I had. She feels the same way, I'm sure. We've become very close. She not just another long-dead American poet. I find sweet comfort in listening to Emily sing. So clear, so precise, so bold:

A Word that breathes distinctly
Has not the power to die

(She thinks it over.)

I was in desperate need of words. Even Emily's words were gone. Gone. I was alone.

(She thinks again for a beat.)

JILL

My lover— boyfriend, soulmate, best friend— Jonathon— Jonathon had died several months before. He was a beautiful man. Loving. Generous. But human. We'd been together nine years. Nine mostly joyous years. I never felt isolated with him. He had a sparkle of assurance in his eyes when I needed it. Jonathon understood me like no one ever could. I never told him that. I should have. Then one selfish act can . . . One night we argued. I wasn't myself. Not the usual Jill. Well, maybe I was. I was never a particularly giving person. It was one of those tired nights when your body's numb and your mind aches, and arguing-- especially when you know you're right-- it feels like justified recreation. Jonathon wanted to stay in and watch T.V. Again. But I detest television. I'd just end up reading a book in the other room like I always do. No, it was definitely my turn to decide, and I needed to get out, enjoy some Chinese food, and experience this new film from Germany. "I don't want to go out," he whimpered. But I'd had a torturous week grading exams, plus working on my Emily Dickinson book— in addition to his earlier promise— yes, he had used that word— his promise to go out on Saturday night. "But the roads are slippery." "If you loved me, Jonathon, the weather wouldn't prohibit you from fulfilling your promise! But, if you can't drive in a little snow, then I will!" As usual, he said "I understand, I understand, I understand." And he gave in. A little. Jonathon would play the martyr. He would drive out into the dreaded Chicago winter. Stop off at the video store and get a comedy for him and something with subtitles for me. Carry out my egg rolls and Kung Pao chicken. Then fight his way back through the blinding snow to our warm, cozy abode. "That's just superb— don't forget the goddamn fortune cookie!" And I slammed the door behind him.

Well, there was ice on the streets that night. On the little hill, and the curve, on the road home from the Chinese restaurant. Jonathon's fortune changed. Ended. And for days— weeks— afterward, I had no words that would let me feel human again.

I was a wreck. To put it mildly. I missed him so much— I had difficulty . . . focusing. As if people I saw and voices I heard didn't fit together anymore. I'd never learned how to miss someone. A loved one who could never return. I suppose that's a discipline— a skill— that can't be taught. Especially when I was . . . at fault. Well, I couldn't stay in our condo. I couldn't live in Chicago. I couldn't live— anywhere. Living to me did not seem a possibility.

JILL

My mom insisted I move back home to Ohio and be with her for a while. To escape there. To be alone there. I rarely went out. I stayed mostly upstairs in my old room. Just thinking. Thinking. Hiding. From what I wasn't sure. I spoke to no one. Mom had no words for me. She was worried. Confused. She thought I should talk to a priest sometime.

One night I was supposed to attend my high school reunion. I didn't want to go. I had nothing to say. I certainly didn't want to talk about Jonathon, or my life. I wasn't the least bit interested in hearing about anyone else. But my mom had signed me up without even asking me. She was pushing me to get out and take my mind off "things." "What 'things'?" My selfishness having killed someone I love, perhaps?" To try to comfort me, she suggested that seeing my old Catholic school friends would be good for my soul. Whatever. I finally agreed to put in an appearance at the last minute. To appease her. I wasn't feeling social. I just walked around the ballroom. I hardly spoke to any one. Their names and faces all blurred together and in and out of one another. They sounded like they'd been drinking a lot. They were having fun. Good for them. After a short while I went home. Nobody missed me.

I was getting ready to go to sleep when I looked through the things they handed out at the reunion. There was this book— a collection of letters— written by a Civil War soldier. I think I'd heard of it somewhere. There must have been some connection to the reunion. Somebody had scribbled some initials on the inside cover. The handwriting was so bad, it meant nothing to me. But that didn't matter. My mind was ready for words. The words in that book oddly spoke to me.

(JAKE appears in a clean uniform.

JILL does not see or hear him.

He composes letters aloud.)

JAKE

Dearest Lorena Anne, why do you not answer these aching missives of my soul? Written with my own tears. I call for you each day. I would gladly die a thousand agonizing deaths to speak with you but once again.

JILL

He did suffer from unchecked hyperbole. But he was engaging. Strangely

JILL (Cont.)

endearing. I stayed up half the night, getting lost in the world of Captain Jake Anderson.

JAKE

I desperately need your comfort.

JILL

I could understand that.

JAKE

I ask only the exquisite pleasure of loving you as you deserve to be loved.

JILL

Quite the gentleman. He was from Amherst. Emily lived there too. At the same time. I liked that.

JAKE

Do not hate me for writing you so often, Lorena Anne. Every day. Sometimes twice a day. But I entertain no other thoughts as I sit in the smoke by the campfire. Upon my honor, I shall go bankrupt paying the local boys to courier these letters to you. And still I wait. For six months now. Will I see your bright eyes again? Will I ever wind my undeserving fingers through your golden tresses? I do love you. But what are the sentiments of your heart? Were the evenings we spent together— protected by darkness and moonlight-- when we were joyous, safe and one— did I merely imagine them? Please answer me with haste! One must not die without knowing that one is loved!

JILL

He was quite emotional. Nineteenth century lovesick. But sweet.

(She thinks about him for a beat.)

Over two hundred letters were found in a trunk many years after Lorena's death— at a rare Southern convent— where Lorena had become a nun sometime in 1862. She never answered a single letter. But she kept every one of them. For 61 years. Until her death in 1923.

(The moon begins to shine more brightly on JAKE as he goes on. JILL still does see or actually hear him.)

JAKE

I must lead the charge for my men— boys, many of them. We will all run to our solitary graves, side by side, yet always alone, accompanied only by death. A man who dies alone bleeds unloved. Oh, Lorena-- the moon stares down at me tonight! And I back up at its glow. The moon understands the mysteries-- why our lives play out like they do. Certainly the fear of one lonely soul is of minor consequence . . . and yet . . . and yet somehow I feel that the moon is a passive observer to all our suffering. I am not a religious man. But I pray to this great celestial god, that it muster down a whisper of your voice to me tonight. And may it blow to you, dear Lorena Anne, a soothing breath of wisdom, of understanding, of joy as you live on in the days and years of your journey here. And whenever you gaze up at the glorious night sky, be reminded that there was one who thought only of you, as he beheld that same moon. And he did love you so.

JILL

A sad, gentle, determined man.

JAKE

For me, I shall not rest without you.

(JAKE is gone.)

JILL

I'm not sure if I slept. I suppose I did. But I couldn't get Jake out of my mind. The words spun around and around in the dark of my room. I swear I could almost hear him.

(JILL hears JAKE'S VOICE but does not see him.)

JAKE'S VOICE

Help me.

JILL

He sounded desperate.

JAKE'S VOICE

Lorena?

JILL

Me?

JAKE'S VOICE

Do you love me?

JILL

What?

JAKE'S VOICE

Where are you?

(JILL looks around but sees no one.
She tries to answer the voice.)

JILL

I . . .

JAKE'S VOICE

Help me, please!

JILL

The next morning when the sun shone in on me, the book was lying open on my bed. But I knew I had closed it. The corner of a page was turned down. I never crease the pages. The page contained a passage where he alludes to being spurned in his affections once before. By his first love. By a lawyer's daughter back home.

JAKE'S VOICE

She dealt her pretty words like blades. And every one unbared a nerve.

JILL

Emily was a lawyer's daughter! She died a spinster. But she had one love that quickly soured:

Love is done when Love's begun.

Maybe it was him. Sister, you broke his heart. Poor, dear Jake.

JAKE'S VOICE

I saw love die! Please! I cannot bear it twice. Don't disappoint me, Lorena! I am frightened and alone. I shall die soon. The distant strains of triumph burst agonized and clear!

JILL

I felt a bizarre sensation. Just in my mind? He was invisible to me yet perceptible.

(JAKE appears in half light but JILL does not see him.)

My sister understood.

I like a look of Agony—
Because I know it's true—

JAKE

I feel my life with both my hands. To see if it is there.

JILL

I know that He exists.
Somewhere—

JAKE

Do you love me?

JILL

Me?

JAKE

Do you?

I see thee better — in the Dark—
I do not need a Light—
The Love of Thee— a Prism be—
Excelling Violet—

JILL

Maybe I could.

We dream—

BOTH TOGETHER

it is good we are dreaming—
It would hurt us— were we awake—

JILL

He was quoting Emily. I was pulled in!

JAKE

We learned the Whole of Love—
Lorena Anne . . . ?

JILL

I closed the book again!

(JAKE is gone.)

I was scared.

I didn't believe in ghosts. Did I? I was an academic. I researched everything I could about Jake. I did Internet searches. Read through Civil War periodicals. Dug through Union archives. And I waited. I wanted to hear his voice again . . . I waited weeks . . . nothing . . . nothing.

One day I had taken a break from reading. And thinking. Fresh air in Mom's rose garden. Bright pinks and reds and whites. Full bloom. Sweet aroma. I felt a hand rest gently, warmly on my shoulder. I turned, but no one was there.

But I could hear him breathing in, very deeply. Inhaling the luscious scent of the flowers. Yes . . . I was at rest—for the first time in months. I stood there for what seemed like hours. I was ready—ready. For what I don't know. I just didn't want to open my eyes. So I didn't. Not even when Mom came out to gingerly ask if something was wrong. I kept my eyes closed and said to her:

If all the griefs I am to have
Would only come today
I am so happy I believe
They'd laugh and run away

(A bell tolls.)

JILL

It's three and I was wide awake. My body had no intention of sleeping. So I got up. And I went downstairs for some breakfast. I wanted cereal. All we had was some Captain Crunch that Mom had bought for me— I

JILL (Cont.)

guess because I liked it when I was eight years old— and I was eating when I felt a distinct breath whisper into my ear.

JAKE'S VOICE

Lorena Anne . . .

JILL

(To the VOICE)

Where are you?

JAKE'S VOICE

Is the battle over?

JILL

I don't know--

JAKE'S VOICE

I don't hear the cannons--

JILL

Then the fighting has stopped, Jake--

JAKE'S VOICE

Come home with me.

JILL

I . . . I can't . . .

JAKE'S VOICE

Walk with me now . . . I'm anxious . . . I'm frightened . . .

JILL

I don't see you!

JAKE'S VOICE

I'm ready . . . come now . . .

JILL

Where can I find you, Jake?

JAKE'S VOICE

I don't know where I am. It's all darkness. Help me!

JILL

Yes . . .

JAKE'S VOICE

Find me! Please, find me!

(The lights come up very bright.)

JILL

I woke up under the kitchen table. My mom blocked out the sunlight as she clutched her rosary. I smiled up at her. She struggled for words. At last she asked me if I'd been to confession in a while. Confession . . . forgiveness. . . I wasn't worthy. But I could help Jake. That much I could do. I would do. A partial penance. Jake needed me somehow. He had asked me. I had to find him.

I left later that morning for Tennessee. I explained nothing. Mom thought I was nuts. I had to see Jake— or some semblance of him— with my own eyes. I decided to visit the haunted convent where Lorena Anne Wilkinson had lived. It was about a five hour drive. I passed the time in the car considering ghosts, the fragile nature of life, and the tangibility of the human spirit.

But when I got to the convent grounds, it was a construction sight. There was a Wal-Mart going up. I couldn't believe it. The little farm was being plowed over for a parking lot. I got out of my car and looked around. They said the last few nuns had gone to a nursing home. Where would I find him? I couldn't abandon him!

I closed my eyes to rest for a moment. I heard a faint voice in my ear— maybe the wind— then, deep in the distance in my head. "Shiloh." The word means "place of peace." "Shiloh." So I drive another couple hours.

(The reflections of trees and other shadows
dance about the stage.)

JILL

I'm too nervous to eat. Can't stop. Maybe I am crazy. I finally arrive at Shiloh. I get a map at the visitors center. It feels right to be here. I walk

JILL (Cont.)

through the grassy fields sheltered by woods— where thousands of unfulfilled lives ended together— it's really quite eerie. I feel light-headed. But I keep on. It's starting to get dark but I have to find Duncan Field. Jake died in the bloody mud of that field. Over there? More trees and thick leaves. My head feels like it's spinning. I'm having difficulty seeing. I finally find a stone monument marker. It points me in the direction of Duncan Field. I go on. Is he there? Will he come to me? He needs his mind to be put at peace. His mind? His heart. Jake? Are you here? My face feels flush as I push back the branches and I make my way to the clearing up ahead.

I step into the field. I step some more. And some more. I listen.

I can not hear him. Jake? I'm here to help you! I hear no one. The moon lights the field in spots. I'm afraid to be alone. What am I doing at this ridiculous battlefield anyway? What was that? Is someone over there? Jake? Jake! Is that you?

(JAKE appears.

He is wearing a tattered uniform, and is now bloody from his wounds.

He moves cautiously toward her.)

JILL

There's a figure coming toward me. He's frightening . . . and frightened--

(They stare at each other for a beat.

She speaks to him.)

JILL

Jake? Jake--

(He stops.)

I came to see you.

(He stares at her.)

JILL

I've heard you calling me. I want to . . . assist you. Help you . . . find peace. Is that what you're looking for?

(He doesn't answer.)

Don't be scared. No. I won't either--

JAKE

Do you . . . love me?

(JILL stands still, then slowly and apprehensively walks toward him.

He is anxious as he watches her.

She cautiously reaches out and puts her arms around him.

She gradually hugs him. He is overwhelmed and does not respond at first.

He embraces her as well.

They are silent for several moments.

JILL closes her eyes and continues to hold him.)

JILL

You can rest now . . . rest . . . I love you . . . I do . . . yes . . .

(They now both hold each other tightly in the embrace.

She stares at him for several moments. Then she becomes overwhelmed herself.

She struggles for words, but slowly
speaks to him.)

JILL

I . . . I . . . am so sorry . . .

(They embrace again.

He caresses her and softly runs
his fingers through her hair.)

JILL

I'm sorry! I miss you . . . I miss you so much . . .

(He holds her for several beats.)

JAKE

I love you too.

(After a moment, he reaches into his
pocket and takes out a small
object.

He takes her hand and places the object
in her palm.)

JAKE

This is for you, Jill.

(He kisses her hand.)

I understand.

**[THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER. IN ORDER TO PROTECT
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**SCRIPT OF THIS PLAY PLEASE CONTACT MY
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