

After the Autumn
by
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Inspired by William Shakespeare's Macbeth

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CAST:

DOCTOR

CAPTAIN

SERGEANT / ACTOR 1

DAY NURSE / ACTOR 2

NIGHT NURSE / ACTOR 3

Blackout.

In darkness, through the hiss of what seems to be a poorly taped recording, the sounds of a violent struggle echo. Strange shouts from multiple voices, the thump of furniture being turned over. At its peak, the sounds cease in an instant, accompanied by the click of a tape recorder stopping play.

Single light on a man sitting in a comfortable arm chair in a small, window-lit room. He wears a long, terry-cloth bathrobe.

DOCTOR

I have...no words.

Four figures appear, illuminated at the edges of the stage. One steps forward.

ACTOR 1

Go back, please.

ACTOR 1 holds up a hand-held tape recorder and pushes the rewind button. ACTOR 2 comes forward to the man in the chair and has him remove the robe, placing it on the chair. She then escorts the man to a chair downstage, outside of the room. On the chair is a DOCTOR's coat. One of the figures, the CAPTAIN, takes the robe and puts it on, essentially taking the DOCTOR's place in front of the arm chair. ACTOR 2, dressed as the DAY NURSE walks toward another chair downstage right opposite of the DOCTOR, who tentatively puts on his coat. ACTOR 1 and 3 addresses the audience directly from center stage.

ACTOR 1

December 21st. Ascension Military Recovery Clinic malpractice hearing...

ACTOR 3

Malpractice hearing for Doctor (redacted).

ACTOR 1

Via video conference before the judge, Falls Church, Virginia. All names and classified events have been redacted in order to prevent the leaking of sensitive information.

ACTOR 3

Nurse.

ACTOR 1

Doctor.

ACTOR 3

Please, be seated.

The DAY NURSE sits. The DOCTOR hesitates.

ACTOR 3

Doctor.

The figures look at the DOCTOR, who finally sits. He looks to be in shock. Behind, the CAPTAIN mutters to himself.

CAPTAIN

Tomorrow, tomorrow and tomorrow...

The DOCTOR, in a daze, begins to echo the CAPTAIN.

DOCTOR

Tomorrow, tomorrow and tomorrow...

ACTOR 1

A testimony for medical evaluation. Doctor (redacted).

After a moment, the DOCTOR gasps. He sees those staring at him. He answers an unheard question.

*

DOCTOR

I have...*dreams* now. So many. Stretching across time. Pulling at me for days, weeks.

*

(beat)

I am suspended the air. Or space. Or nothing. It is still, silent. Cold.

*

Suddenly, *sound* pierces the quiet. Words. Unintelligible words. Words without meaning. Every syllable like a strand of silk, ties itself to my limbs. Winding, weaving themselves around my body. Hypnotizing me. Drawing me closer to...*something*. The words, they begin to feel rigid, like the branches of some giant tree planted deep within the ground. Sunken. It's gravity pulling me steadily toward the earth. I move faster and faster. There's nothing, no friction. Nothing to slow me. I don't want to be slowed. I keep my eyes trained forward and I can see it, now. I can see...*him*. It's a man. He looks through my eyes. He's saying something...I can almost make it out. I have to get closer. Just a little closer. Just as I'm close enough to hear what he's saying, suddenly his mouth open wide. Impossibly wide. He screams with many voices all at once. God, the noise. Loud. So loud. Cosmic noise. Louder than any screams, any explosions that have ever happened at any time before. I try to grab hold of him in the rumbling, screeching dark. His hand grasps my hand and pulls. His hand burns. I don't mind. My limbs give way. I give in. I give over. I can see him. Oh, God. I can really see him now. I see him now and I...am...*terrified*. (beat) Now the sound is gone, and I can see my own skin again...the flesh, aging as I fall, fall and fall.

The DOCTOR starts, seeing the others watching him.

DOCTOR

Why do you dress me in borrowed robes?

The DOCTOR finds a folder, aged letter in the pocket of his robe and gets lost in examining it.

ACTOR 3

First witness. Nurse (redacted). Employee, Ascension Military Recovery Clinic.

DAY NURSE

I can....I can tell you what I know. AMRC is...well...it's where they send the "ghosts," as I call 'em. I've been working there for ten years, and I've seen so many wander the grounds. Forgotten. Damaged. No visitors...no family. Sometimes I wonder if the place even exists. (beat) They came in around September. First the Captain, then the Doc. Nothing I haven't seen before. Captain fit right in. Got his own room. But the Doc...first odd thing I remember was...I don't know...how much the *Doc* seemed to fit in....like he had always been there...sounds like he didn't have much of a choice.

She pauses, hearing a question.

DAY NURSE

Yes. I knew about the drugs. I guess that's why he was assigned here, right? I mean...I can't imagine anyone coming here by choice.

ACTOR 1

Go back. Further. The beginning.

The figure holds up the tape recorder, he rewinds. The DAY NURSE stands, walks over to the DOCTOR and helps him up. She walks him upstage to what seems to be a small, makeshift office. A chair. A desk. She begins to hand him various items: a note pad, tape recorder and pen. There is also a box of files. The DOCTOR seems to recognize the items. Lights dim on the DOCTOR.

ACTOR 1

A report.

ACTOR 3

A report. Patient 2914. Psychological evaluation of Doctor (redacted). August 5th. *

ACTOR 1

Patient 4192. Psychological history of Captain (redacted). August 10th. *

ACTOR 3

Doctor has been reluctant to communicate, and refuses to take any of the counseling sessions prescribed seriously.

Lights up on the DOCTOR. He sits, very still at his desk.

ACTOR 1

Treatment for claimant's disorder through counseling and other medical intervention wholly unsuccessful, due to complete lack of verbal communication.

Lights up on the worn arm chair. It sits in the center of a dimly lit room. Cold light streams slightly in through the blinds of a single window. The man, an ex-CAPTAIN of the armed forces, remains seated in the chair wearing an open terry cloth bath robe with worn fatigues peeking through. He holds a folded piece of paper securely in one hand. A single, small television set flickers in front of him. The sounds of late-night infomercials plays continuously. The report continues.

ACTOR 3

Symptoms include--

ACTOR 1

But are not limited to--

ACTOR 3

Insomnia, lasting depression--

ACTOR 1

Insomnia, disturbing nightmares--

ACTOR 3

Nightmares, difficulty in social settings--

ACTOR 1

Disturbing nightmares, difficulty in social settings and anger management issues.

The DAY NURSE walks into the CAPTAIN's room with a tray, administering medication...pills in a paper cup. In the next room, the DOCTOR rummages through one of the boxes. He finds a bottle of prescription medication. He opens the bottle, and quickly slams a few pills. He sits back in his chair and puts his head back. Next door, the DAY NURSE turns off the television. After a moment, she exits. The CAPTAIN slowly reaches for the remote, and turns the television back on.

ACTOR 3

After the allotted evaluation period, it is my professional opinion that the doctor should be temporarily suspended from working in any public health facility until he is able to reduce his dependency on sleeping aids and painkillers. At the very minimum, low-risk, probationary assignments should be recommended in the hopes to further counsel and monitor his progress.

The DOCTOR shakes off the effects of the medication, and picks up a file on his desk. He opens and reads along with ACTOR 1, eventually joining in aloud. ACTOR 1 stops reading as soon as the DOCTOR speaks aloud.

*
*

ACTOR 1

The claimant's VA medical record clearly illustrates that he could not maintain a job of any

DOCTOR

The claimant's VA medical record clearly illustrates that he could not maintain a job of any kind.

*

DOCTOR

The rest of the record has been redacted, due to sensitive military information.

*

He notes missing information, and aggressively begins to dig through the files.

ACTOR 3

A phone call. September 1st. Ascension Military Recovery Clinic.

*

During the phone call, the CAPTAIN and DOCTOR begin what seems to be a ritual of sorts. They settle themselves in their new surroundings. The CAPTAIN meticulously sets up his local environment. The DOCTOR haphazardly gets settled in.

DAY NURSE

Yes. The room's all ready for him. Correct. Oh, I think we can handle the Captain. Seems sweet enough...so quiet. He has no other items? Okay. Well, if we need anything we'll give a call. Thanks so much. Bye now.

ACTOR 1

Evidence. A voice recording. Time stamp: March 4th.

The DOCTOR picks up his voice recorder, speaks into it.

DOCTOR

Day 1. Arrived late last night. This place is....the day nurse kept pointing out how beautiful the grounds are...the colored leaves blanketing the clinic. I didn't notice.

*

He rubs his eyes, walks back to his desk and sits. He sets the recorder down, still recording.

DOCTOR

How the hell did I get here?

He pulls out his bottle of prescription medication. He takes a few pills. He leans back.

ACTOR 3

Another phone call. Placed August 12th to Doctor (redacted) from Johns Hopkins Medical Center.

*

ACTOR 1

Hello, Doctor? Hi. Do you have a minute? Good. I'll keep this brief. The Medical Licensing Board has requested that I inform you of their decision. Yes. Despite your recent...challenges, the board has decided not to suspend your license permanently, but instead give you a probationary assignment at the Ascension Military Recovery Clinic. Effective immediately. Your new patient has been moved to AMRC and his files should be on their way. What's that? (beat) Oh, of course...very simple: The patient has a had a long history of failed treatment...night terrors, violence...that kind of thing. Most importantly, he has been unable to verbally communicate for almost five years now. AMRC needs you to quickly and *efficiently* evaluate whether or not further resources should be spent on individual psychotherapy or if the recommendation should be made for his permanent admittance to Ward F in December. Right. And, doctor? Off the record? I think this is the last time the board is going to be so gracious. AMRC just needs you to fill out the paperwork and move on. I'm sure if you keep this simple, AMRC will be happy to report back positively to the licensing board. I just...I hope you take this opportunity to... (pause). Okay. I understand. Good luck.

The DOCTOR is now floating. He is only partially lucid, responding to the phone call as though he just received it.

DOCTOR

A message...from beyond. Little voices via phone lines, ready to rip away my livelihood with the careless stroke of a pen. I know them. They know me. I'm their...wasteland wanderer, pulling over for every lost soul with their thumb raised to the sky standing on the side of the road.

He picks up a file folder, smiles.

DOCTOR

The Captain. Extreme insomnia, coupled with hallucinations and dementia. Complete lack of verbal communication. Lovely. (beat)

He picks the tape recorder up again. Speaks into it.

DOCTOR

AMRC has given me twenty-one days to write this guy off and get out. Why do I need three weeks? Get in. Get out. (beat) Will attempt first session tomorrow... *

*

He clicks off the tape. In the next room, the CAPTAIN echoes the DOCTOR's words, over and over again.

CAPTAIN

Tomorrow, tomorrow and tomorrow...to....

The DOCTOR begins a nighttime ritual of rubbing his eyes, reading files, taking off his lab coat and folding it neatly on the back of his chair. After a moment, the lights dim on the DOCTOR, leaving only the CAPTAIN, bathed in the light of the television. He has just finished his own nightly ritual--similar to the DOCTOR's and sits in his chair. Both the CAPTAIN and DOCTOR begin to nod off, but as the DOCTOR finally succumbs, the CAPTAIN continually fights the impulse of impending sleep. He uses the words to stay awake, but eventually gives over to exhaustion.

CAPTAIN

Tomorrow, tomorrow and....

He suddenly starts, as though awoken from a dream. He stiffens in his chair, knocking a nearby tray to the floor with a crash. The sound propels him further.

CAPTAIN

They have tied me to a stake! I cannot fly, but bear-like, I must fight the course.

The CAPTAIN stands slowly to attention. A piercing sound begins to take the place of the television sounds. The CAPTAIN raises his hand in a 'hold fire' gesture. He tries to stay physically still, but finally gives in to the noise and covers his ears. The sound consumes him. The flicker from the television seems to be projecting outward into the room. Scenes of war and violence are thrown across the small room illuminating a figure standing in the corner of the room.

The sound physically cripples the CAPTAIN as the figure moves closer and reaches out in aid. Suddenly and without warning, the CAPTAIN executes a violent defensive maneuver, bringing ACTOR 3 to his knees. The figure struggles, but the CAPTAIN manipulates his victim's body into a submissive position.

CAPTAIN

Let not light see my black and deep desires.

The CAPTAIN begins to tense, closing off the ACTOR's airway, causing him to gasp for breath.

NIGHT NURSE

Nurse! Someone!

The CAPTAIN puts more pressure on. His victim's struggle begins to wane. In an instant, light pours across the room as the DAY NURSE flips on the lights and scrambles toward her co-worker. The CAPTAIN, confused, releases the now-visible NIGHT NURSE, an orderly at AMRC. The NIGHT NURSE scrambles to safety.

DAY NURSE

God damn it, anyway!

She rushes to the side of her wounded colleague.

NIGHT NURSE

I got it...I got it. I'm fine. Just scared him, I think. Jesus. I'm fine.

The CAPTAIN, having been pushed to the side looks at the two nurses with utter confusion, as if awoken from a nightmare. He crawls toward the broken dishes and silverware on the floor and starts to pick up the pieces.

NIGHT NURSE

And help him with that mess so he doesn't hurt himself.

The NIGHT NURSE walks out of the room, holding his neck, muttering under his breath. DAY NURSE sits down on the floor with the CAPTAIN and begins to pick up the pieces to the glass. She reaches for a piece of paper, an aged and worn envelope, which fell during the confusion. The CAPTAIN frantically grabs it from the floor.

DOCTOR

Get in. Get out.

*

*

The DAY NURSE sits back on her haunches, watching the CAPTAIN try to smooth the letter, which has become bent at the edges. She sits with him in silence, simply watching. Showing she means no harm, she eventually picks up the last few pieces of his dinner with a small broom and dust pan. She looks for a moment to see if anyone is watching, and whispers to him.

DAY NURSE

Is that a letter?

No response.

DAY NURSE

Can I see it?

She reaches gently for the piece of paper, and the CAPTAIN panics--pulling away. The DAY NURSE takes a moment, letting him relax.

DAY NURSE

Maybe later.

The CAPTAIN looks down at the letter in his hands.

DAY NURSE

I love letters. No one writes them anymore. I used to look through a box of my grandmother's letters when I was a kid. Letters my grandfather had sent during the war. Even after he came back, she kept them all those years. I think she wanted to remember him...his *words* a certain way...try and forget who he was when he came back.

The NURSE falls silent for a moment, remembering.

DAY NURSE

She used to pray for him every night...I could hear her sometimes, through the walls. Whenever he had...an *episode*, she'd tell me that the darkness would whisper to my grandfather. Tell him things.

The CAPTAIN looks at her, pausing. She was lost for a moment. She comes back.

DAY NURSE

Sorry. You just...you remind me of him a bit, is all.

She heads toward the door.

DAY NURSE

Anyway...try and get some sleep. You've got to start getting some sleep. And please, keep that television off. You see what it does to you.

She goes to exit and looks back as the CAPTAIN gently folds the piece of paper and puts it in the pocket of his coat. She exits.

Day breaks. The ritual begins. The CAPTAIN stands, takes his robe off, then folds it methodically and sets it aside. He opens the drawer and takes out the bundle. He places a personal trinket, surrounded in what looks to be cloth from a shirt and sets it on the table, touching it thoughtfully. He takes the worn letter, opens it, looks at a picture inside, puts it back, then folds it again, placing it with extreme care in his front pocket. The piece of fabric finds its way back into the drawer after his hands linger for a moment on the texture.

ACTOR 1

Evidence. Incident report, filed September 3rd with the AMRC. First outbreak of violence occurs at 5:24 a.m., on September the 2nd. A warning is issued to Doctor (redacted) regarding patient #4192.

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Night comes. A ritual. The CAPTAIN takes the letter and a piece of cloth--perhaps a piece of clothing and wraps it up in a neat bundle. He opens a drawer and carefully places the bundle inside the drawer. He closes the drawer, then finds his robe neatly folded, unfolds it, then puts it on. He sits in his chair and stares into nothing. The DAY NURSE comes in with food and medication. The DOCTOR addresses the audience during the night ritual and speaks into his tape recorder.

DOCTOR

Day 2. A bit of damage control. The night nurse has refused to work with the patient. Took all of one day. He won't tell me exactly what happened, but he seemed genuinely fearful. I gave him the evening off in the hopes that he would calm down.

*

Another morning. After his morning ritual, the CAPTAIN sits back down just as the DAY NURSE enters again with breakfast and medication. She walks to the window.

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*
*

DAY NURSE

*

Morning. Mind if I open this? It's....

She smells the air outside.

*

DAY NURSE

*

I just *love* the air this time of year. Nice and brisk. See all the colors? The Maple right by your window?

No response.

*

DOCTOR

*

The AMRC board read his incident report and threatened to end the evaluation process. I explained that I had yet to even begin therapy with the patient...and that I *needed* this to go smoothly. They agreed. I now have twenty days.

*

The DAY NURSE starts her own ritual. She places the tray down and pulls a chair up next to the CAPTAIN. She hands the small cup of medication to him and begins to take his blood pressure.

*

DAY NURSE

Any shut eye last night? Doesn't look like it. Relax your arm. Relax. There ya go.

The DOCTOR picks up the CAPTAIN's file.

*

DOCTOR

*

*

I should be angry or...anxious...or...something. *Something.*

Without even thinking, he takes out a pill bottle and takes a few, and leans back in his chair.

*

*

Birds can be heard chirping

DAY NURSE

*

And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper

The CAPTAIN looks at her. She pulls a small bible of her pocket and sets it on the table.

DAY NURSE

*

*

One of my favorite verses. Thought you might like something to read, just until some of you own things arrive.

As she gently finishes up, the DOCTOR walks in.

DAY NURSE

He's ready for you.

The DOCTOR nods. The NURSE starts to leave, then stops in the doorway as the DOCTOR sits.

DAY NURSE

Might want to be easy on him. Don't think he slept at all last night.

The DOCTOR simply looks at the NURSE, and she exits, knowing it's not her place. After a moment of getting situated, he turns on a tape recorder.

DOCTOR

You don't mind this, do you?

He laughs to himself.

DOCTOR

Of course you don't.

The CAPTAIN sits still, without an ounce of recognition. The DOCTOR continues, dryly.

DOCTOR

Based on your records here, looks like one thing is consistent: not much of a talker, huh?

Nothing. The DOCTOR drinks some nearby water.

DOCTOR

How about some water? No? Anything?

Nothing.

DOCTOR

Okay. Well. We've got a few weeks together, so...it's gonna feel like months if I'm the only one opening my mouth, here.

Nothing.

*

*

DOCTOR

This is ridiculous. There's got to be something you'd like to talk about. Hmm? I think I read something in here about you being an avid reader.

*
*
*

The DOCTOR sees the Bible.

DOCTOR

How about this? This yours?

No response.

DOCTOR

No? Must have come with the room, huh?

The DOCTOR gets up and surveys the room a bit.

DOCTOR

Captain. Mind if I call you that? Let's at least make it look like I'm doing something in here, huh? You wanna tell me about what happened with the night nurse? No? Hard to believe you're capable of anything looking at your right now. What do they have you on right now? Probably some pretty good stuff. I'll have to ask the nurse about it.

*
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*

Nothing. The Captain looks at him coldly.

*

DOCTOR

That bother you at all? Probably not. I could probably sit here everyday for the next few weeks and share your meds. We could just *float* along together. How does that sound?

*
*

Nothing. The DOCTOR begins to get agitated.

*

Do you *know* why you're here? Do you? With me? Okay. Without going into details about how I ended up...where I am...let's just say that I'm in the process of a pretty harsh slap on the wrist from the medical licensing board for some bad habits. My punishment? And I'm sure it's against some sort of protocol somewhere to tell you this...I don't care. My penance is to...*sentence* you, for lack of a better term. Judge and jury. Do you hear what I'm saying? You're here because they are fully prepared to move you to a much less comfortable facility. No comfy chairs, I can tell you that much.

*
*

Nothing.

DOCTOR

All I have to do is...and they expect me to...is to file a bunch of paperwork that says that you are, in fact, broken. Beyond repair. I do that, they ship you off. I get off probation, maybe get my license back. You understand what I'm saying? No? Nothing to say to that, huh?

The DOCTOR starts to gather up his things. He gets up, threatening to leave. The CAPTAIN doesn't move.

DOCTOR

You're making my report pretty easy.

He goes to the door, but turns around. *

DOCTOR

If you're in there...you'd better tell me. Tell me why I shouldn't just sign these papers right now? *

The DOCTOR aggressively puts his hand on the CAPTAIN's arm.

DOCTOR

Tell me.

Suddenly the CAPTAIN grabs the DOCTOR's hand and slowly begins to execute a painful submission technique, bringing the DOCTOR to his knees. The DOCTOR drops his things, reaches for a nearby bell and rings it with his other hand.

DOCTOR

Nurse! Nurse!

The CAPTAIN pulls the DOCTOR to the side of the chair and grabs his pen. He holds the pen and pulls back, poised to strike at the DOCTOR's neck. They look at one another. The DOCTOR releases any resistance.

DOCTOR

Do it.

The CAPTAIN looks at him with confusion. He abruptly lets the DOCTOR go and drops the pen.

The DOCTOR slowly retreats, and now stands with a chair between them, staring at one another. The DAY NURSE finally enters.

DAY NURSE

Doctor?

He keeps his eyes on the CAPTAIN.

DOCTOR

Everything is fine, nurse.

DAY NURSE

But, doctor--

DOCTOR

Please...leave us.

The DAY NURSE stays for a moment.

DAY NURSE

Oh...okay. Is this some kind of new therapy?

The DOCTOR finally looks at the NURSE.

DAY NURSE

Right. Well, my shift's almost over. The next shift should be in soon.

DOCTOR

Thank you, nurse.

The DAY NURSE exits. The DOCTOR carefully picks up the items that he has dropped. He sits. The Captain turns away.

DOCTOR

Why didn't you...

The DOCTOR puts his head in his hands, as if to sober himself. He pulls out the CAPTAIN's forms. He takes a moment and looks them over. He looks to the CAPTAIN, who is now staring forward, still.

The DOCTOR rings the bell again. He gets up and goes to the door, finding the NIGHT NURSE there waiting.

The NIGHT NURSE passes the exiting doctor, shaking his head. He moves toward the CAPTAIN slowly, administering his nightly medication very tentatively.

NIGHT NURSE

Don't try anything, got that? I don't wanna have to take self-defense classes just to survive this shitty job.

The CAPTAIN takes the medication, confused by the comments. The NIGHT NURSE goes to the door.

NIGHT NURSE

Can't imagine you staying awake through that. Sweet dreams, Captain.

The NIGHT NURSE exits and the CAPTAIN immediately feels the effects of the heavy depressants. He drags himself up through his nighttime ritual, with difficulty. Sleep seems inevitable, but he keeps shaking it off. Just as his head drops abruptly, the daylight punctures the night, causing him to awake.

*

ACTOR 1

Evidence. A voice recording.

The DOCTOR walks into the office. The fear starts to overwhelm him.

*

*

DOCTOR

*

Write the report. Quick and easy. Who the hell is this guy?

*

He picks up the tape recorder.

*

DOCTOR

*

Patient exhibits...patient...

*

The DOCTOR starts having extreme anxiety. He tries to take out some medication from his pocket while speaking into the recorder. He spills them on the floor.

*

*

DOCTOR

*

Damnit.

*

He goes to the floor and scrambles to pick everything up.

*

ACTOR 1 *

Second witness. Nurse (redacted). Employee, Ascension Military Recovery Clinic. *

NIGHT NURSE *

Uh...I don't know what you want me to tell you that's not sitting there in the report already. I mean...I reported the incident. I do as I'm supposed to in order to keep my job. So that's what I did. *

The DOCTOR physically begins to be overcome with anxiety as he takes the medication. *

DOCTOR *

Get in. Get out. They set me up. Those bastards set me up. They knew. They gave me just enough time to fail. They gave me just enough time to... *

The DAY NURSE walks in, having finished her rounds. *

DAY NURSE *

Doctor, do you mind signing-- *

DOCTOR *

What do you know about him? *

DAY NURSE *

Who? *

DOCTOR *

Him. *

DAY NURSE *

The Captain? Nothing, really. Just what's in his records. Last place said he was pretty easy to deal with. *

The DOCTOR laughs as he looks through files. *

DAY NURSE *

You worried about what happened the other night? The night nurse is fine. Water under the bridge, honestly-- *

DOCTOR *

Thank you, nurse. *

DAY NURSE *

He seems very sweet to me-- *

DOCTOR

Thank you, nurse.

She starts to exit, stops at the door.

DAY NURSE

Okay...I'll just need these prescriptions signed by tomorrow--

DOCTOR

Leave them.

She does. She exits. The DOCTOR looks through the
medications.

DOCTOR

Jesus. No wonder he doesn't speak. Why would they give him this much...

He scrambles through the Captain's files. Picks up tape
recorder again.

DOCTOR

Patient's files are heavily redacted. No information regarding the heavy dosages of opiates.
Patient is...what are they hiding? Why are they shutting him away like this? . He saw me...
He saw me floating along, and just...*yanked* me back down.

The NIGHT NURSE walks into the DOCTOR's office,
mid-conversation.

NIGHT NURSE

I'm just staying cause I need the job.

DOCTOR

I understand.

NIGHT NURSE

Look, I'm not a guy that spooks easy. One more time. That's all it's gonna take. He's a
dangerous dude, doc.

DOCTOR

Nurse. I've apologized already.

NIGHT NURSE

I'm not...I don't need an apology. It's just...I know this guy. He's a killer.

DOCTOR

Look. Just let me do my job. He needs to have his medications adjusted, the relocation has clearly agitated him, he just needs to get some legitimate sleep--

*
*
*

NIGHT NURSE

Sleep? I don't think you're hearing me, doc. I've seen that look before. That's what he is. He was made that way.

DOCTOR

Let me get this straight. So...you're a nurse. You work at a military *recovery* clinic. And you're telling me that a man has no choice in what he does or doesn't--

NIGHT NURSE

People are who they are, doc.

*

DOCTOR

You such an expert? Then what am I?

*

The NIGHT NURSE stops. A beat.

NIGHT NURSE

That's not what I'm--

DOCTOR

What am I?

*

The NURSE takes a moment.

NIGHT NURSE

I'm just a bit concerned that I'm not gonna be *alive* to report anything next time he gets violent. And I trust my gut a helluva lot more than your head.

DOCTOR

That all, nurse?

The NIGHT NURSE just shakes his head and starts to exit. He stops.

NIGHT NURSE

Doc?

CAPTAIN

Sleep...no...more.

NIGHT NURSE

Looks like you could use a bit of sleep yourself.

The NIGHT NURSE goes to the CAPTAIN, as
Night/Day transitions again.

ACTOR 1

Witness testimony continued.

DAY NURSE

The Doc was not sleeping very much. At all. Other than that, I can't really remember much about those first few days. Oh... his wife...she called the third or fourth night after he arrived...told me to keep an eye on him. Also told me not to tell him she called. I kept my mouth shut.

ACTOR 1

Evidence. A voice recording.

DOCTOR

Nurses don't know anything. Nobody does. The Captain...doesn't exist. They've taken his records, they've taken his things, they've kept him surrounded by a fog, locked up away from any contact. Why? Why would they choose me to throw him away for good? Maybe get rid of both of us in the process.

The DOCTOR, out of habit, takes out the medication. He stops. Looks at the bottle.

DOCTOR

I won't let them. I won't. I have time. I'll...engage with him. I'll ween him off those goddamn drugs. I'll find something...

He looks at a file.

DOCTOR

He's got some things in storage up north, must have been accumulating from years of moving from facility to facility. I'll send for them.

ACTOR 1

AMRC postal record. September 10th. Package received for patient 4192. Package includes personal artifacts, books, military paraphernalia. Package's contents delivered to patient's room, unpacked and itemized.

The DOCTOR is now only partially lucid. He speaks into the recorder. *

DOCTOR

They've made him this way. A man can't be created as a...spectre, a ghost. There is substance somewhere. To find, to fight for to grab hold of. For everyone. Something heavy. A person needs that to stay planted into the earth. If I could just...find that anchor...to set down again. The licensing board...they'd take me seriously again. Wouldn't they? I know they would. Full reinstatement. Then, maybe...my wife. My wife...

The DOCTOR trails off as he becomes distracted. He turns off the tape recorder.

Day breaks. The DAY NURSE enters to visit with the CAPTAIN.

DAY NURSE

Well, look at you. Feeling a bit better, huh?

She sets some food down, which the CAPTAIN devours.

DAY NURSE

Oh! I'm so happy to see you eating something! Seemed like you were rationing your food there for a while. Not necessary around here. We want you to eat. Let me go grab you some water.

She starts to get up, just as the DOCTOR walks in. She smiles and points back at the CAPTAIN as if to say "check it out!" Her enthusiasm isn't shared, as she grabs some water. The DOCTOR silently sits down. He starts the tape recorder, then takes a few brief notes. The CAPTAIN wipes his mouth, and finishes his own ritual with few personal articles he has with him.

DOCTOR

Good morning, Captain. Hope the nurses aren't giving you too much trouble.

The DOCTOR says this just as the DAY NURSE hands a glass of water to the CAPTAIN.

DAY NURSE

He likes me just fine. I'm the one who feeds him. Would you like something to eat, doc?
You look like you could--

The CAPTAIN grasps for the crumbs from off of the tray
before it's taken away.

DOCTOR

No. Thank you. That'll be all, nurse.

She exits. He sits. He moves his chair a bit further. *

DOCTOR

Why don't we start by you telling me what's going on. Hmm? *

Nothing. *

DOCTOR

No? Okay. Well, we've got a couple of weeks and I intend on using them. Some good,
old-fashioned therapy. Just you and me. *

The DOCTOR really gets set up with his notebook and
recorder. *

DOCTOR

So...how do you feel? *

Nothing. *

DOCTOR

Looks like the adjustments I made to that cocktail of meds you were taking helped. *

The CAPTAIN looks at the DOCTOR and opens his
mouth as though he is about to respond. He becomes
suddenly and acutely aware of his surroundings. The wall
goes up. After a beat, the DOCTOR takes note of some
new items.

DOCTOR

I see your things have arrived. Anything of interest?

The DOCTOR stands and picks through a few of the
seemingly random items placed carelessly on a nearby
table.

DOCTOR

Any of this ring a bell?

He holds up a lighter, a cigarette case. He holds up a small shadow box with the CAPTAIN's medals and other military items on display.

DOCTOR

How about this?

The CAPTAIN looks at it, then turns away. The DOCTOR reads.

DOCTOR

“Army Distinguished Service Cross.” Impressive. Between these medals and the piles of classified documents I’ve been reading, I’m going to have to assume you’ve got some pretty interesting stories to tell. (beat) I’d love to hear about them sometime.

Nothing. The DOCTOR finally sees the books newly piled on the floor.

DOCTOR

Quite the collection. And how kind of them to pile them all so nicely on the floor like this. I think we could probably get a shelf in here, what do you say?

As the DOCTOR sifts through the books, the CAPTAIN becomes suddenly engaged by seeing some of the books. The DOCTOR doesn’t notice at first.

DOCTOR

I must say I’m not too familiar with most of these titles.

The CAPTAIN suddenly stands, as if to say something. The DOCTOR still doesn’t notice, engrossed in the books.

DOCTOR

I could be, if you like. Would you like that? Give us something to talk about?

The DOCTOR turns, sees that the CAPTAIN is standing.

DOCTOR

Is there something you want to say?

The CAPTAIN nods “no,” then sits again.

DOCTOR

Okay. We can take it slow. (beat) Any favorites? Some Lord Byron, Euripides, I see...

He digs through the books, watching for a reaction to anything in particular. He finds an old Latin text. The DOCTOR stops, sets down the books, his pad and pencil and speaks from memory.

DOCTOR

‘What I may see or hear in the course of treatment or even outside of the treatment in regard to the life of men, which on no account one must spread abroad, I will keep myself holding such things shameful to be spoken about.’

The CAPTAIN is clearly interested in this. The DOCTOR sets the book down next to the CAPTAIN.

DOCTOR

The Hippocratic Oath. The old one. I like that one best. I haven’t thought about that oath in a long time... *

He gets lost for a moment. He tries to change the subject. *

DOCTOR

The Oath is one of human history’s most ancient texts. You know that? *

The CAPTAIN looks at the DOCTOR. He nods very carefully at the DOCTOR. *

There is a moment of communication that is not lost on either. The DOCTOR hands him the book. Carefully, the CAPTAIN takes it and simply holds it. The DOCTOR picks up his things and moves toward the exit as the CAPTAIN thumbs through the pages of the book, remembering. The DOCTOR observes for a moment, then: *

DOCTOR
That's it for today, Captain. I look forward to *talking* tomorrow.

The DOCTOR rings the bell for the nurse, and exits.

CAPTAIN
And tomorrow...and tomorrow.

DOCTOR
The books hold something...they made him respond...feel something. I could feel it too.
Somehow.

*
*
*

Night. ACTOR 1 and the DAY NURSE step forward.
The DOCTOR goes to his office and ritualistically takes
his nightly medication

ACTOR 1

Witness testimony continued.

*

NIGHT NURSE

Things were fine for a while, like I don't know. Like lockwork. I like it like that.

*

The DOCTOR sifts through files as he speaks into his
tape recorder. He is already distant.

DOCTOR

He dug into the ground for a moment. The room changed.

*

The DOCTOR moves directly into the Captain's room,
almost interrupting the morning ritual, as the DAY
NURSE is taking the CAPTAIN's blood pressure.

DOCTOR

Anything? How is--

DAY NURSE

Same. Let him have his breakfast, maybe.

The DOCTOR ignores the remark and pulls a chair up.
The DAY NURSE notices that the DOC seems a bit off.

DAY NURSE

I think if you give him some space--

DOCTOR

Nurse, just let me do what--

The NURSE raises her voice.

DAY NURSE

He will be much more likely to open up. He's been through years of the same. You're not doing much to separate yourself. Also, I'm going to start some physical therapy. He's got some shoulder issues that no one seems to addressed for a few years. A person needs to take care of their bodies, too if they're gonna fix anything else, doc.

*

She exits. The DOCTOR doesn't move. A few days and nights pass as illustrated by the NURSES going through their rounds, as the DOCTOR stays by his patient's side. The CAPTAIN, meanwhile, continues his own day/night ritual. Occasionally, the DOCTOR will read something aloud from one of the CAPTAIN's books or make a recording. He wanders through day/night with little regard to either.

*

DOCTOR

I've been reading some Homer, some Sophocles. Which do you prefer?

NIGHT NURSE

I saw the books. Didn't think much about it.

DOCTOR

"To have a great man for an intimate friend seems pleasant to those who have never tried it; those who have, fear it." I thought of you when I read this. Homer must have known some dangerous men.

NIGHT NURSE

Didn't change my mind about the guy. There's a lot of bad men who read a lot of books.

*

DOCTOR

*

Be a craftsman in speech that thou mayest be strong, for the strength of one is the tongue, and speech is mightier than all fighting.

*

*

*

DAY NURSE

*

Little things. Ways he looked at you or gestured...felt...significant. The patient *was* responding. He was suddenly communicating *physically*. I make my living guiding others past physical injury. It's no different. The will.

*

DOCTOR

You are the fire that goes out.

DAY NURSE

The pure willpower to move past the first stages of pain...

DOCTOR

You are the house that falls down...

DAY NURSE

Then comes the patience. Intense patience is necessary--

DOCTOR

The ill-made wall that buckles when time has gone by...

DAY NURSE

No sir. I am not a psychiatrist, sir. But I know it was the right thing to do. He needed my help. So I gave it. The doc was running out of time...he mentioned his report was due on the Captain within days, so I thought it was worth helping as much as I could before they...they were about to ship him off.

DOCTOR

"To listen well, is as powerful a means of influence as to talk well, and is as essential to all true conversation." So I wait. And I wait. To sign a man's life away.

The DOCTOR goes to pop some pills, but thinks better of it. He puts them down and continues sifting through books. Day breaks slowly. The DAY NURSE starts her ritual. The CAPTAIN starts from her touch.

DAY NURSE

Easy. Easy. Forgot what it was like to wake up from a deep sleep, huh?

As he speaks, the DOCTOR wanders into the CAPTAIN's room, almost saying the final words to him directly.

DOCTOR

Nothing. Not a word. Every time I look through one of his books, it's moved from the pile the next day. He understands me. Every word I say...he listens and understands. The words are there for him to speak, but he won't--

CAPTAIN

Better be with the dead whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace, than on the torture of the mind to lie in restless ecstasy.

The DOCTOR and DAY NURSE both freeze. Their jaws drop.

DOCTOR

What was that, Captain?

DAY NURSE

You get all that, doc?

The DOCTOR scrambles for the tape recorder. He hits record.

DOCTOR

Can...can you repeat what you just said?

Nothing. The NURSE seems to be distracted by something.

DOCTOR

Say again...about the dead?

CAPTAIN

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly... *

The NURSE suddenly grabs the recorder, stops it, and starts to rewind.

DOCTOR

What the hell are you doing? We could miss--

She plays the recorder just enough to hear the line, “...twenty trenched gashes...” The NURSE stops the recorder and hands it to the DOCTOR.

DAY NURSE

I know this...it's got to be something I've read...

Just then, the NIGHT NURSE peeks his head in the door.

NIGHT NURSE

Just letting you know I'm here.

The DOCTOR and DAY NURSE aggressively hush him.

DAY NURSE

Shhhh!

DOCTOR

Shhhh!

Sensing something strange, the NIGHT NURSE takes a step into the room.

NIGHT NURSE

Everything alright in here?

DOCTOR

Fine. He's speaking.

NIGHT NURSE

Yeah? No shit. Speaks to me all the time.

The DOCTOR freezes. They both look at the NIGHT NURSE with total confusion.

NIGHT NURSE

At night. While he's sleeping. Or sleepwalking. Hard to tell sometimes.

CAPTAIN

I have seen her rise from her bed, throw her nightgown upon her, unlock her closet, take forth paper, fold it, write upon't, read it, afterwards seal it, and again return to bed; yet all this while in a most fast sleep.

NIGHT NURSE

Exactly.

DOCTOR

Keep recording. You didn't think that might be useful information for me to know?

NIGHT NURSE

Hey! No one tells me anything. I'm supposed to give the guy his meds, and make sure he doesn't systematically wipe out the entire staff. I think that's enough.

DOCTOR

I should have--it's my fault. We're just looking for a pattern so we can--

NIGHT NURSE

There's a pattern, all right.

DAY NURSE

What?

NIGHT NURSE

Crazy bastard's rehearsing a one-man Macbeth.

DAY NURSE

Macbeth! I was gonna say that. I was gonna say 'Macbeth.'

DOCTOR

Just Macbeth?

NIGHT NURSE

Not sure. But definitely the majority.

DOCTOR

How do you know?

He looks at the doctor, then the nurse.

NIGHT NURSE

Theater minor, Junior College. Don't ask.

The NURSES leave the DOCTOR with the CAPTAIN.
They sit in silence as ACTOR 1 addresses the audience.

ACTOR 1

AMRC Board Meeting. Minutes. September 15th. 'Doctor (redacted) requested more time and funding based on what he claimed to be 'significant breakthroughs' in the therapeutic process. With no repetition of the aforementioned violence, the Board has agreed, with specified limits, to discuss the extension after the allotted twenty-one day evaluation period has ended, at which time the board will evaluate the continued relevance of the project.'

The DOCTOR finally exits. The CAPTAIN takes out the worn piece of paper from his pocket. He smooths the paper.

CAPTAIN

I have lived long enough: my way of life is fall'n into the sear.

He puts away the letter. The NIGHT NURSE comes in with nightly medication, and the evening ritual commences. Days/nights pass.

ACTOR 1

Witness testimony continued.

DAY NURSE

I had been praying for him. Both of them. They needed one another. It may sound silly to you, but I know I have...*angels* watching over me. My mother, my grandmother. And I wanted that...for them. That's what I asked for. Just someone to look out for them.

Anyone.

NIGHT NURSE

Maybe I stopped thinking straight. I dunno, but...*something* was going on. The Captain. He--and I'm not sayin' or condoning anything that happened, and I...you know...I've think I've made it pretty damn clear how I felt about the guy, but...for a moment...for just a second...the Captain...he came back.

ACTOR 1

Evidence. A recording.

DOCTOR

I'm...it's really, truly incredible. He's using the entire text as a vehicle to communicate. To have it at his fingertips like that...I've never seen anything like it.

I'm trying to keep up. The day nurse found a copy of the play in an old duffle bag of his.
I've been pouring over it. Haven't been sleeping, but...God, it feels good to work again.

*
*

ACTOR 1

A phone call. September 13th.

*

DAY NURSE

Sorry to bug you about this, but I've got a PO for you. Yep. Number 6134. No--just the book. Hey, don't ask me. Anytime I ask the doc what he's doing he just gets that look on his face. (laughs) Right. That's the one. Alright. Thanks so much. Buh-bye.

The DOCTOR enters the CAPTAIN's room as he sleeps.
The NURSES and DOCTOR move between their
day/night rituals and testimony seemlessly.

The CAPTAIN suddenly awakens to the DOCTOR sitting
beside him. He grabs a glass of water drinks with a
violent thirst.

DOCTOR

It's dry around here, isn't it? You've got to keep hydrated. You're probably going
through some withdrawal. We'll try to keep the detox steady, okay? Nothing too rough.

*
*

Nothing.

DAY NURSE

I wouldn't have started PT with him if I was afraid. That's the truth. I never felt...danger.
Not at first.

DOCTOR

I found this in your books--

The DOCTOR holds up an older, worn copy of *Macbeth*.
The CAPTAIN sees it and reaches for it aggressively.

DOCTOR

Here you go. Don't worry...I didn't mark anything. I've ordered my own copy.

The CAPTAIN touches the book. He runs his fingers
through the pages.

DOCTOR

Tell me about the play. It speaks to you...doesn't it? Why? *

The CAPTAIN looks at the DOCTOR, but says nothing.

The DOCTOR searches for something in the book. *

*

DAY NURSE

I mean, *I* couldn't understand what the Captain was saying. But the doc...

DOCTOR

Say from whence you owe this strange intelligence?

The CAPTAIN almost speaks, but refrains.

DOCTOR

Letting "I dare not" wait upon "I would?" (beat) Speak, if you can: What are you?

The CAPTAIN is surprised by the DOCTOR's words.
He is compelled to respond.

CAPTAIN

Such a one am I to fear...or none.

DOCTOR

Why are you to be feared?

CAPTAIN

Present fears are less than horrible imaginings.

NIGHT NURSE

His sessions started to go much later. They would cross over into my shift.

DOCTOR

What do you see?

NIGHT NURSE

I'm not used to that. I'm not. I usually work alone. I didn't like it.

The CAPTAIN begins to hallucinate the words are
causing vivid flashbacks.

CAPTAIN

....gouts of blood, which was not so before. There's no such thing: it is the bloody business which informs thus to my eyes.

DOCTOR

What bloody business?

CAPTAIN

....his bark cannot be lost, yet it shall be tempest-tossed.

DOCTOR

Who do you see?

NIGHT NURSE

I've had friends come back from the fighting. My age.

*
*

The CAPTAIN is completely wrapped up in some memory. Sounds can be heard, gunfire, screams and shouts.

CAPTAIN

Prithee, see there! behold! look! lo! How say you? Why, what care I? If thou canst nod, speak too!

DOCTOR

Captain...

The CAPTAIN stands.

NIGHT NURSE

No one knows what to do with them. Usually they don't do anything...

*
*

CAPTAIN

Do not muse at me, my most worthy friends, I have a strange infirmity, which is nothing To those that know me. Come, love and health to all; then I'll sit down.

NIGHT NURSE

He was sick. Both of them were.

DOCTOR

Captain...what infirmity?

CAPTAIN

Come! Love and health to all!

DAY NURSE

It's just that...

DOCTOR

Please, Captain...just relax.

CAPTAIN

It is *nothing*, to those that know me!

DAY NURSE

Sometimes he would push.

DOCTOR

Tell me about those that know you...

NIGHT NURSE

I didn't like it at all.

CAPTAIN

I cannot but remember...

DOCTOR

What?

DAY NURSE

What?

CAPTAIN

Such things...

DOCTOR

What things?

DAY NURSE

What was I supposed to do?

NIGHT NURSE

I hate this.

CAPTAIN

Such horrible imaginings. I cannot.

DOCTOR

You must remember. What "horrible imaginings?"

DAY NURSE

Please.

CAPTAIN

I cannot!

The vision becomes to much for him. He physically breaks down. He tries to shake the vision from his head.

DOCTOR

What do you see? Or who? Who do you see?

CAPTAIN

The spirits that know all mortal consequences have pronounced me thus.

DAY NURSE

Can we take a break?

DOCTOR

Consequences of what?

CAPTAIN

Thus. Thus.

Both NURSES stand, needing a break from the questioning. Simultaneously, the CAPTAIN screams. He can no longer handle the discussion.

CAPTAIN

Thus!

NIGHT NURSE

Damnit!

His body is wracked with physical pain from the hallucination. The CAPTAIN collapses to the floor and mutters under his breath.

CAPTAIN

I shame to wear a heart so white...so white...so white...so white.

The DAY NURSE hears this and rushes in, helping the CAPTAIN to his chair. The DOCTOR steps away and addresses the audience with tape recorder in hand.

DOCTOR

My mind is mush. All those words torn out of context. No information. Just words...spinning, swirling around. I don't know what I'm doing here. There's nothing to hold on to. I've got to have something to hold on to. I'm running out of time. I've got to find a way to focus the usage of the text. Find a way to be objective, so that I can mine for some meaning. Some substance.

*

*

The DOCTOR wanders off to his desk. Day/Night passes. DAY NURSE enters. She immediately begins to take him through his physical therapy.

DAY NURSE

Morning. How're the shoulders doing?

She demonstrates. The CAPTAIN raises both arms up slowly. He winces in pain.

DAY NURSE

Well, you're gonna have to start getting used to this whether you like it or not. Lucky for you, it just so happens that I am a bit of an expert with the ol' AC joint, which seems to be your problem, so you are in good hands.

She reaches for him again, and he pulls away violently. The CAPTAIN then reaches for her gently, in apology. She pulls back, watching him carefully. The DAY NURSE is clearly afraid, but swallows her fear and pushes forward.

DAY NURSE

I know you haven't been getting enough movement because the other PTs are scared of you. But I'm not scared of you.

She looks in his eyes.

DAY NURSE

Maybe I should be, huh?

The DOCTOR appears in the doorway. He startles the NURSE.

DAY NURSE

Jesus! Not the best time to be sneaking up on a person.

DOCTOR

How's he doing today?

DAY NURSE

Still in a lot of pain.

DOCTOR

I'll up his Inderal a bit.

DAY NURSE

Don't. You were right. The medication's just making his attacks worse. Every time he does fall asleep he wakes up so violently. I think that what's making the shoulders so bad.

*

DOCTOR

Understood. I'll put some more time in for therapy, if you're up for it.

She examines the CAPTAIN, unsure. She nods.

DOCTOR

Good.

She goes to exit.

DOCTOR

Nurse.

DAY NURSE

Doctor?

DOCTOR

Have you been reading the copy I gave you?

She nods.

DAY NURSE

Practically memorized, just trying to understand the thing. Not the most pleasant story I've read, that's for sure.

The DOCTOR turns his attention to the CAPTAIN.

DOCTOR

I'm sure there's nothing pleasant about being a soldier on the battlefield...lauded for acts of courage and violence, like 'Valor's minion. The brave Captain, for well he deserves that name.'

The CAPTAIN is immediately responsive to this.

DOCTOR

Then coming home, given honors and asked to leave everything behind...

DAY NURSE

Did you need something, doctor?

DOCTOR

Would you like to help?

DAY NURSE

How's that?

DOCTOR

Here. Sit down.

DAY NURSE

Okay...

DOCTOR

I need to keep him talking, so I can listen more carefully. I'm looking for something, some meaning. Some reference. He trusts you. Don't you?

He looks at the CAPTAIN, who is holding on to the arm chair tightly.

DAY NURSE

How do I--

DOCTOR

Just use the words...try to find ways to engage with him. Use any phrase, line...anything. Just keep him talking. I'll be right there. Yeah?

DAY NURSE

Um...

DOCTOR

You can help him.

She looks at the CAPTAIN.

DAY NURSE

Alright.

DOCTOR

Good.

The DOCTOR hands her a copy of the play, turns on the tape recorder and readies his pencil and paper.

DAY NURSE

He didn't sleep again last night.

*

DOCTOR

"Sleep shall neither night nor day hang upon his pent-house lid; he shall live a man forbid."

The CAPTAIN seems to understand and be fully engaged for the first time.

DOCTOR

How are you today, Captain?

Nothing.

DOCTOR

Thane?

The CAPTAIN perks up a bit. The DOCTOR looks at the nurse and waits. He motions for her to continue.

DOCTOR

Speak...use the words. Anything. Just keep him talking for me.

The NURSE slowly begins to speak, occasionally paging through her copy for words, lines, etc.

DAY NURSE

Speak...speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear your favours nor your hate.

CAPTAIN

I pray you, speak not; he grows worse and worse; question enrages him.

DAY NURSE

The fit is momentary; upon a thought, you will again be well.

DOCTOR

Not bad.

The NURSE smiles, continues with more confidence.

DAY NURSE

This is the very painting of your fear: If there comes a truth from them--

CAPTAIN

Oftentimes, to win us to our harm, the instruments of darkness tell us truths, win us with honest trifles, to betray us in deepest consequence.

The CAPTAIN looks at the DOCTOR suspiciously. *

DAY NURSE

He is a gentleman on whom you may build an absolute trust.

CAPTAIN

There is no art to find the mind's construction in the face.

The DAY NURSE is lost. The DOCTOR motions for her to keep him talking. She has run out of ideas, she reads the first thing that she sees.

DAY NURSE

From this time such I account thy love. Art thou afeard to be the same in thine own act and valour as thou art in desire?

The CAPTAIN reaches out and grabs the NURSE's hand.

CAPTAIN

Prithee, peace: I dare do all that may become a man; who dares do more is none.

The NURSE pulls away.

DAY NURSE

Maybe we should stop there, I think he could use some more sleep.

The CAPTAIN, hearing the word 'sleep' abruptly engages with some memory and begins to hallucinate.

CAPTAIN

Sleep! Methought I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more! The innocent sleep, sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care!

DOCTOR

Who's voice?

CAPTAIN

Still it cried 'Sleep no more!' to all the house...

The DOCTOR, seeing an opportunity to find out some specific information, pushes further.

DOCTOR

Who's it that cries out?

CAPTAIN

No...

The NIGHT NURSE responds to an unheard question.

NIGHT NURSE

I took no part. I swear. I don't know what either of them were trying to do. They both started learning lines from...you know, the Scottish play.

*

Pause.

CAPTAIN

No...This is a sorry sight.

*

The DOCTOR nods to the NURSE to respond. She does, carefully.

DAY NURSE

A foolish thought, to say a sorry sight.

CAPTAIN

One cried 'God bless us!' and 'Amen' as he watched me with these hangman's hands.
Listening his fear, I could not say 'Amen,' when he did say 'God bless us!'

*
*

DOCTOR

What do you see?

*

The DOCTOR pushes, while the NURSE tries to calm him.

CAPTAIN

Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope the Lord's anointed temple, and stole thence the life o' the building...

DOCTOR

Who's murder?

DAY NURSE

Consider it not so deeply.

CAPTAIN

But wherefore could not I pronounce 'Amen'? I had most need of blessing, and 'Amen' stuck in my throat.

The CAPTAIN takes the letter out of his pocket and runs his fingers over it.

CAPTAIN

I could not say 'Amen.'

The DOCTOR starts again, but the NURSE puts her hand on his arm. It's time to stop. He decides not to push any further. The CAPTAIN is lost again, repeating his words over and over.

CAPTAIN

Amen...amen...amen...

The DOCTOR gathers his things and leads the NURSE out of the room. Before he exits, he turns back to the CAPTAIN.

DOCTOR

These deeds must not be thought after these ways; so, it will make us mad.

The DOCTOR exits. The CAPTAIN takes a small picture from inside the letter. He looks at it briefly, then puts it back in the folded letter. He then puts the letter inside the copy of Macbeth now lying on the table.

ACTOR 1

An official military record. Incident report 887842. ‘The incident in question, involving Captain *redacted* and Sergeant *redacted* has been designated classified. Captain *redacted* was given an honorable discharge as the Sergeant’s testimony was later verified by multiple sources who witnessed the event first hand.’

DOCTOR

‘Sacrilegious Murder.’ Keeps playing through my mind on a loop. It’s the *word*. Soldiers don’t refer to killing in the line of duty as murder. He’s telling me something. Something specific. But what? I need more information. His military record. It’s just...black. Just black streaks. How the hell am I supposed to help someone who’s been stricken from the record like this? Soaked with black ink. I need to see the words beneath all those careless black lines. What are they hiding from me? *

As the DOCTOR continues reading, ACTOR 1, now the SERGEANT steps forward.

ACTOR 1

A phone call. September 28th. AMRC. *

ACTOR 1 puts on the SERGEANT’s military-issue jacket. *

DOCTOR

I did find something. Details about a classified incident leading to the Captain’s honorable discharge. Very few survivors. Mentions one other survivor by name. Sergeant something. Can’t make it out. *

SERGEANT

Yeah. I need to talk to whoever’s in charge around there. Someone tells me you’re the one working with the Captain. That true? *

DOCTOR

If I could find this “Sergeant.” Bring him here...

SERGEANT

Listen, doc. I need to see him.

DOCTOR

I'll have the nurse make some phone calls. Ruffle a few feathers. Maybe there's someone that can help find him.

SERGEANT

Well, you poke around the military enough, people are going to notice, doc. It was pretty easy to find you. *

The DOCTOR walks into the CAPTAIN's room.

DOCTOR

"How goes the night?"

The CAPTAIN turns, not used to being visited by the DOCTOR this late. The phone call continues throughout.

SERGEANT

If I come by, I'm not answering any questions or getting into it with you...you understand?

DOCTOR

I have some interesting news.

SERGEANT

I've had enough of you hacks trolling around up in my head for lifetime. You at AMRC?

DOCTOR

A friend of yours called.

SERGEANT

I need to see the Captain.

DOCTOR

He calls you 'Captain.'

SERGEANT

I'll be there Sunday night.

The sound of the SERGEANT hanging up the phone, dial tone. The CAPTAIN takes in a breath. He is clearly affected by the news.

DOCTOR

Know that it was he in the times past?

CAPTAIN

I know not.

DOCTOR

The Sergeant? From your files.

CAPTAIN

I know not.

DOCTOR

Well...he wants to see you. He'll be here this weekend.

The CAPTAIN turns to look at the DOCTOR.

CAPTAIN

Such welcome and unwelcome things at once 'tis hard to reconcile.

DOCTOR

I want you to see him. Talk to him. My hope is that he can--

CAPTAIN

I have lost my hopes.

He takes the worn piece of paper from out of his pocket.

DOCTOR

And that which you are my thoughts cannot transpose.

CAPTAIN

Our knocking has awaked him... he comes.

DOCTOR

Sunday.

The DOCTOR stands.

DOCTOR

Until then, may you “tell pale-hearted fear it lies, and sleep in spite of thunder.”

The DOCTOR exits. The CAPTAIN looks back at the door and whispers.

CAPTAIN

I thank you, doctor.

Day/Night passes. Rituals, testimonials, recordings.

NIGHT NURSE

I don’t wanna...go back there. C’mom. Still gives me nightmares. I don’t want to want to talk about it again. I’m not going to talk about it again.

DOCTOR

Can’t stop thinking about the play. Why *Macbeth*? A man...a soldier. Comes home. Brings the violence from the battlefield back with him. A killer, just like the night nurse said. A man capable of dispassionately ‘unseaming’ another man from ‘the nave to the chaps.’ Then, after having ‘dignities heap’d upon him’ for brutally slaughtering men in battle, suddenly has to go home and play the good host. A sociopath in a suit and tie. A butcher in ‘borrowed robes.’ Extraordinary paranoia, hallucinations, insomnia... *textbook* severe post-trauma, really.

He continues paging through the book, making notes.

DAY NURSE

I needed a break. I needed to go home, to see my family. Just for a few days. And I was supposed to get back in time, but...the Sergeant arrived a day early. I wanted to be there.

*
*

A man, a former SERGEANT, stands in the doorway to the CAPTAIN’s room in silence.

DOCTOR

But this...force. This fate.

*

DAY NURSE

Something kept me away from the clinic that day.

*

The CAPTAIN suddenly senses the SERGEANT and tenses. He begins to fight against the memories. The SERGEANT slowly leaves the doorway and makes his way to the DOCTOR's office.

DOCTOR

That we all move toward our inevitable end without...choice.

*

The SERGEANT stands in the DOCTOR's makeshift office. He begins speaking, mid-conversation.

SERGEANT

You'll have to excuse me if I'm a bit exhausted with formalities, doc.

In the next room, the CAPTAIN is stirred further by the Sergeant's voice.

DOCTOR

Of course. Thank you for deciding to--

SERGEANT

You need to stop what you're doing immediately.

The DOCTOR, surprised, takes a moment.

DOCTOR

I'm not sure I--

SERGEANT

Or I will make sure someone else stops you--

DOCTOR

Sergeant. Let me explain the situation. The progress that we've made--

SERGEANT

I've heard about your progress. The nurses quit yet?

DOCTOR

No. No, they've been completely understanding about--

*

SERGEANT

Surprising. And they let you hold on to your license?

DOCTOR

I don't know where you're getting your information--

*

SERGEANT

It's hardly a secret, doc.

DOCTOR

Sergeant. You called me. I think if you were to just talk to him--

*

SERGEANT

Quit digging around in his head. You don't think I know what you're doing? I barely made it to the other side. The Captain. He won't. He's...he is who he is.

*

*

DOCTOR

No. He needs help.

*

SERGEANT

You think you're helping--

DOCTOR

Or they will send him away for good. Perpetually drugged, locked away, discarded--

*

SERGEANT

Good. Better that way.

DOCTOR

How can you--? He deserves to feel something again, Sergeant--

*

SERGEANT

Feel something? You have no idea. No concept of what he's been through. What I've been through.

*

DOCTOR

Then tell me.

SERGEANT

Sacrifice...piercing shrapnel and sound. Screaming, tearing sound. Louder than anything. You have no idea. And you want him to 'feel' that again? You know the only thing that stops most of us from ending it ourselves? 'Cause we could. It's what's on the other side. I still got that left to look forward to. Just...just leave the Captain alone. Leave him in peace.

DOCTOR

Leave him to rot, you mean?

SERGEANT

Watch it, doc.

The DOCTOR gets up, takes his time.

*

CAPTAIN

Cannot be ill, cannot be good:

DOCTOR

If ill, why hath it given me earnest of success, commencing in a truth?

SERGEANT

Excuse me?

*

DOCTOR

I used to be very successful. I'm sure there was a time...I must have felt happy, useful. Felt something. But I can't remember...like hazy footage from someone else's past. (beat) Doesn't matter now. I screwed up somewhere along the way and I got thrown in with people like you. Psychological casualties of...war, trauma, life. Only work I could get.

*

*

*

SERGEANT

We all do things we have to do, doc.

DOCTOR

No. We don't. We have a choice, Sergeant. (beat) All I had to do was get in, sign an eval, and get out. Just sign my name, and that'd be the end of the Captain. Then something happened. I finally *felt* something. I don't know. A sense of duty? An obligation to uphold my oath? I don't know. But I've got just moments more with him, and I'll do whatever I can...I'll keep looking. If you won't help him. I'll find someone.

*
*

SERGEANT

He has no one.

DOCTOR

There has to be--

*

SERGEANT

You found no records at all?

DOCTOR

There has to be someone. A family member. Someone.

*

SERGEANT

The Captain has no family.

DOCTOR

The Captain mentioned a 'murder.'

*

The SERGEANT, surprised by this, sits--totally silent.

DOCTOR

You know what I'm talking about, don't you?

Nothing.

DOCTOR

I found something in his service record--

*

SERGEANT

Service record?

DOCTOR

Yes. Mentions you both. Discharged with valor following an incident, but I can't find a single goddamn word about what happened in combat..other than that *you* walked out of there alive. And here you are.

The SERGEANT takes a moment.

CAPTAIN

Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill.

SERGEANT

He's my Captain. I'd do *anything* for him.

DOCTOR

Then help me. This isn't about you--

SERGEANT

Or you?

DOCTOR

Help him.

SERGEANT

There's nothing I can do. He hasn't spoken in years. What makes you think he'll suddenly start now?

DOCTOR

Tell me about the incident mentioned in these reports and I won't ask another question.

The SERGEANT takes a moment.

SERGEANT

No more digging?

DOCTOR

I'll just say I pieced together the puzzle from the documents, and he did the rest. I won't make another call.

SERGEANT

And if he doesn't make progress? If he gets violent again?

DOCTOR

You, the Captain...Christ, the entire medical community will probably never hear from me again. I'm on my own, here, Sergeant.

The Sergeant sits quietly.

DOCTOR

Sergeant?

CAPTAIN

Thou comest to use thy tongue, thy story and quickly too...

SERGEANT

We were...

During the story, the testimonies, scene and monologue overlap one another seemlessly.

NIGHT NURSE

I don't know what he told the Doc. I wasn't in the room. The session had already started. I saw the Sergeant leave, just as I was about to bring in the Captain's evening meds. Then I heard the bell. God...last time I was that afraid was when I was a little kid... *

The DOCTOR walks into the CAPTAIN's room as the SERGEANT recounts the tragedy.

SERGEANT

We had positioned ourselves on the edges of a small valley in the mountains.

DOCTOR

Captain.

SERGEANT

We called it the 'hundred foot grave.' The enemy would walk through...really the only way to get to their supply lines.

CAPTAIN

Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return to plague the inventor...

SERGEANT

And we would just...we'd just empty our clips. All you could see was dust...they were all just dust. And they poured in. We must have done that dozens of times at various points along the ridge. Dozens.

CAPTAIN

This even-handed justice commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice
To our own lips...

The CAPTAIN can hear all of this in his mind. He relives the events as the SERGEANT recounts the memory.

SERGEANT

I wore headphones so I didn't have to hear anything. The Captain understood it had to be done.

*

CAPTAIN

*

Screw your courage to the sticking-place! Sergeant!

*

SERGEANT

*

After months and months the sand, grains of sand--started driving some of the men mad. It seemed like it was the sand...so much of it. All the same. Displaced, blowing from place to place. Moving like a slow, angry flood. Captain was--he was the only one that could make sense of the shifting surface. He'd believe someone just before the sand got to them. He knew every time. Almost every time. It was so hard to see in the dust. One day a huge train of them rolled into the grave, and we cut them off--started shooting.

*

CAPTAIN

*

Fire!

*

SERGEANT

*

As soon as the roaring started echoing off the rocks, one of the men...snapped. He started screaming out commands for us to hold fire. Many became confused. The enemy had just enough time--the dust settled just enough and they began to return fire. You could see there were families in there.

*

CAPTAIN

*

Private! Hold your positions. Hold!

*

SERGEANT

*

Some of the men left their positions and sprinted down the side of the mountain to the south to pull some of the unarmed out of the way of our firing squad. Some of the men kept firing. It was impossible to tell who was firing at who. Our own men were firing back. I'm sure of it. The Captain ordered us to use the heavy artillery.

*

CAPTAIN

*

Sergeant! Weapons free! Weapons free!

*

SERGEANT

He knew it couldn't be a conversation. I took command of the eastern position and we forced the end of the debate. We made the dust swirl again...a mushroom cloud that could be seen from space. A perfectly silent cloud to swallow the screams and shouts to God.

CAPTAIN

Hold!

SERGEANT

We eliminated a major target that day, but lost...so many. The target had brought families--children--as shields. It would have been worse if he had gotten through. I know that. I believe that. I've made my peace.

CAPTAIN

Listening their fear, I could not say 'Amen,' when they did say 'God bless us!'

SERGEANT

But the Captain, he...he had so much anger after. He felt too much, I think. He could never accept who he was. The best soldier I've ever known. A great man.

*

CAPTAIN

'Amen' stuck in my throat. Amen...amen! Amen, amen, amen...

SERGEANT

That's how he should be remembered. You got that, doc? A great man.

CAPTAIN

Amen, amen, amen...

The CAPTAIN begins to repeat the phrase over and over again, getting further and further agitated. The DOCTOR moves toward him in order to calm him, but the CAPTAIN pulls away violently, protecting something in his pocket.

CAPTAIN

Awake, awake! Ring the alarm bell. Murder and treason! And look on death itself! Up, up, and see the great doom's image! As from your graves rise up, and walk like sprites, To countenance this horror! Ring the bell!

*

The DOCTOR suddenly understands the CAPTAIN's warning. He grabs for a small bell on the table to call the NIGHT NURSE, who rushes into the room just in time as the CAPTAIN starts to fall off the edge. Sounds of war can be heard, along with the cry of a child. A woman's voice cries out.

CAPTAIN

I have almost forgot the taste of fears

The CAPTAIN lunges for the DOCTOR, but the NIGHT NURSE restrains him. The NURSE struggles to thrust the syringe into the wildly violent ex-soldier. The CAPTAIN disarms the NURSE and brings him to the ground and begins to break his arm. The DOCTOR rushes for the syringe and quickly injects the CAPTAIN as we hear a loud 'snap.' The NIGHT NURSE screams in pain.

The CAPTAIN quickly loses strength, letting go of the NIGHT NURSE, who drags himself out of harms way. The CAPTAIN fights to keep conscious. The DOCTOR removes the syringe and lies the CAPTAIN against his chair.

NIGHT NURSE

Jesus Christ...

The NIGHT NURSE, holding his seriously injured arm, backs our of the room, leaving the DOCTOR and the CAPTAIN. The CAPTAIN stares at the DOCTOR as he fades.

DOCTOR

Captain.

*

CAPTAIN

I am one...so incensed that I am reckless what I do to spite the world.

The DOCTOR sits for a moment, numb.

DOCTOR

Things without all remedy should be without regard: what's done is done.

The CAPTAIN reaches for the DOCTOR and touches his arm. The DOCTOR pulls away at first, but the CAPTAIN grabs hold.

CAPTAIN

What's done is done. Doctor. Those men...they did their duty.

*

The DOCTOR, astounded that the CAPTAIN is speaking normally, grabs his hand to keep him awake.

DOCTOR

What men?

CAPTAIN

My men. They did what they had to. They had no choice. They did--

DOCTOR

You all did.

CAPTAIN

No. Not me.

DOCTOR

Why not you?

The CAPTAIN retreats a bit, pulls his hand away, the DOCTOR holds him up to keep him awake.

DOCTOR

Why won't you let me help you?

CAPTAIN

My...

The CAPTAIN starts to fade quickly.

CAPTAIN

My wife and children's ghosts will haunt me still...

The CAPTAIN passes out from the medication. The DOCTOR sits, in silence, trying to digest his words.

ACTOR 1 steps forward.

ACTOR 1

AMRC Board Meeting. Minutes. September 22nd. 'An immediate termination of the project was issued the following day. Doctor (redacted) was ordered off the premises and recommendation was made for the suspension of his medical licensure. Also, based on the reports given by both attendees, it was determined that the patient was driven to outburst and was to be kept at the facility under strict military supervision. Nurse (redacted) agreed to a settlement, covering only his hospital fees.'

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The NIGHT NURSE sits downstage center in silence.

*

The DAY NURSE sits opposite. The DOCTOR walks upstage to the perimeter of the room. He stands.

*
*
*

DAY NURSE

*
*
*

I feel awful about his arm. I really do. And I know he'll blame the doc and say he wanted nothing to do with the Captain, but that's bullshit - pardon my french.

He wanted to see him recover, too. I know that's why he recommended I stay after the doc got kicked out.

*
*

NIGHT NURSE

It took weeks for my arm to heal. I couldn't work. I couldn't do a damn thing. (beat) I hate that I knew...that I was *right* about him, you know? I wanted the doc to prove me wrong. But he couldn't. You know how I knew? I've seen that look before. It's more than just the eyes. It's the whole body. Like...I dunno...like...suddenly the rage becomes heavy...sinks the feet into the ground. Becomes like quicksand. My dad. He was just...a nasty person. A bad person. He would get angry and...I couldn't move. You can't change a person like that. No matter what you do, no matter how much time passes.

*
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*

ACTOR 1

Evidence. Tape Recording. Time stamp, September 23rd.

*
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*
*

DOCTOR

Time. I am...tied to it. It's current moves so violently past me. And now, I can't grab hold of enough of it. To stop it. Or move against it. We were so close.

*
*
*
*

DAY NURSE

They needed one another. It was the right thing to do. I've seen so many patients medicated, then left to become ghosts...

*
*
*
*

DOCTOR

'My wife and children's ghosts will haunt me still...' It races across my mind. Presses against it. What happened to them?

*
*
*
*

DAY NURSE

But this was different. This was progress. Therapy. The kind I expected when I first began this job. Real therapy. Communication.

*
*
*
*

DOCTOR

Reaching out, actually communicating with him created a...moment. So brief. A chance to save him. He chose let go of Macbeth. He chose to give me that...painful, buried, distant memory about his family. I just need more time with him. Time. Time, so that I can... 'pluck from the memory that rooted sorrow and with some sweet oblivious antidote cleanse the bosom of that perilous stuff which weighs upon the heart.'

*
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*

DAY NURSE

I couldn't find it in my heart to leave him, so I stayed and worked late. Graveyard. So I could administer both sets of meds.

*
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*
*

DOCTOR

I'm going back. I've got to. I've got nothing else.

*
*
*

The DOCTOR finds himself in the doorway of the
CAPTAIN's room.

*
*

DAY NURSE

*

It was easy--no one there. So I let the doc in. I let him in. I admit it. (beat) They were
both in need of something. Forgiveness. *Grace*.

The DOCTOR finally gets up the courage to enter the
room. He crosses through the door. Stands for a moment.
The CAPTAIN is wincing through his physical therapy,
facing away from the door.

*
*
*
*
*

DOCTOR

*

Captain.

The CAPTAIN stops, but says nothing. The DOCTOR
moves to the window.

*

DOCTOR

*

I don't have much time--

CAPTAIN

*

You shouldn't be here.

The DOCTOR moves to get a good look at the
CAPTAIN.

*
*

DOCTOR

*

God, it's so good to hear you talking like this, I was afraid it was my imagination--

CAPTAIN

*

How did you get in?

DOCTOR

*

The Day Nurse let me in. No one knows I'm here--

CAPTAIN

*

Please. Leave.

DOCTOR

*

I can't do that.

CAPTAIN

*

They'll arrest you. I'll call them. Go.

DOCTOR

Not until you answer a few questions for me.

*
*
*

CAPTAIN

Get out.

*
*
*

He turns back around and continues with the exercises,
still wincing from the pain.

*
*
*

DOCTOR

Kind of pointless doing those exercises when you're about to be strapped to a bed and
drugged into a coma, don't you think?

*
*
*

Nothing.

*
*
*

DOCTOR

I'm not leaving until you tell me about your... 'ghosts.' Tell me about your wife. Tell me
about your child--

*
*
*

CAPTAIN

GET OUT!

*
*
*

The CAPTAIN makes an abrupt, violent movement
toward the DOCTOR. The DOCTOR retreats. The
CAPTAIN stops. He sits down, as the DOCTOR holds
his position in the doorway.

*
*
*
*

DOCTOR

Is that what you're afraid of? If they knew you were talking again, regardless of the
violence - something you were *trained* to do - they'll let me keep working with you. Why
would you let them shut you away for good?

*
*
*
*

CAPTAIN

Better that way.

DOCTOR

Jesus Christ, the Sergeant said the same thing. What the hell have we been doing for the last three weeks? Can't you see that they've isolated you?

CAPTAIN

Not them.

DOCTOR

What are you saying? They took your things, they kept you hidden away--

CAPTAIN

Not them.

DOCTOR

Then who? Who?

The CAPTAIN just looks at him.

DOCTOR

You?

The CAPTAIN confirms by turning away.

DOCTOR

Why?

The CAPTAIN become lost in thought.

DOCTOR

You chose to say those words to me. Now you need to tell me why.

The DOCTOR pulls up a chair.

DOCTOR

If not for you, for me. I can't leave here and never know...Never know whether I could have helped you with a bit more...time. Please. I need to know...

Nothing.

DOCTOR

What happened to them?

The CAPTAIN picks up his copy of the play. He touches
it silently.

DOCTOR

The Sergeant told me about serving under you...what you were like on the battlefield. He
told me how you could see, how you just *knew* when your men were close to the edge.
You saved many, many lives...didn't you?

The CAPTAIN remembers.

DOCTOR

You saved mine. Why?

CAPTAIN

Every...*honorable* man is worth saving.

DOCTOR

Then why won't you let me save you?

The CAPTAIN finally looks at the DOCTOR. He looks
away and struggles with something private.

DOCTOR

We all have ghosts, Captain.

The DOCTOR takes out his wallet and finds a picture. He
hands it to the CAPTAIN.

NIGHT NURSE

No. Jesus. The doc never mentioned that. Why would he. Not something you go around
volunteering to people.

DAY NURSE

I had no idea about his boy. That's...that's so sad.

DOCTOR

I got to spend a couple days with him in the hospital. He was so small. Came too early.
Never even...I mean, we didn't have the time...we didn't even *think* of naming him. My
wife cried. I held her as she held our little boy. We had a wake. That's when it started. I
watched myself and everyone else from what seemed like twenty feet in the air.

Friends would look at his little footprints and handprints the nurse had made on a nameless sheet of paper and just start to sob. And I looked at myself and saw what I would be for the rest of my life. Expressionless. Floating.

*
*
*

NIGHT NURSE

I mean, everybody's got something, don't they?

*
*

DOCTOR

My wife. She waited for me. She waited and waited. First came the drugs. I don't remember if I started taking them to stop feeling or to start again. I got caught. They relegated me to a local VA psych ward. Threw me in with others just like me. Severe trauma. Deeply scarred. I began to follow a new oath. Medicate them. Medicate myself...everything became a way to anesthetize...to suspend myself in air. Higher. Further.

*
*
*
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*
*

DAY NURSE

The doc's wife stopped calling after a while. I'm not sure exactly when. She just stopped calling.

*

DOCTOR

She left me, but I lost her long ago. I love her still. I miss her. This part of me that feels so distant and thin...like vapor. That part of me always loved her. But it wasn't enough to keep hold of her. She needed so little. A touch. A look. And I couldn't. Touching her felt painful to me. The surface...the affection physically hurt. I don't know. I turned myself inside out to protect certain parts and it destroyed my marriage. All because I couldn't handle, I couldn't cope with...

*

The DOCTOR looks at the CAPTAIN, who is now staring at him with pity.

*
*

DOCTOR

Then I met you. You have pain, but you choose to keep it at bay. I thought I could never go back, but with you I find I can pull myself to the ground again...if only for a moment. Even if it's too late for my family. Or myself. But you. I can help you....your family...you...

*
*
*

The CAPTAIN takes the letter out from between the pages of his script. He looks at the DOCTOR and holds the letter in front of him.

*
*
*

DOCTOR

What's this?

The DOCTOR just stares at it for a moment, then takes it. He notices a small photo and pulls it out. He looks at the CAPTAIN, who closes his eyes and sits back in the chair.

DAY NURSE

I know what was in there. I noticed it the first day we met. I probably should have said something to the doc about it. I don't know why I didn't but...and know I shouldn't have, but the Captain was sleeping and...he trusted me. So I just *peeked* one night. I saw the picture. And the letter. The Captain looked so young, so handsome. His wife was...she looked like a movie star from the 40's or something. And that little boy with big blue eyes. They looked happy. Have you seen it? They look happy. It's...a *shame*.

The DOCTOR begins to read the letter silently. His jaw drops. He shakes his head silently. He looks to the CAPTAIN.

Suddenly, the CAPTAIN speaks the contents of the letter aloud.

CAPTAIN

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow creeps in this petty pace from day to day to the last syllable of recorded time, and all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more: it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. Truly, your wife. Your love. I forgive you. I forgive you. I forgive you...

The CAPTAIN keeps repeating these words over and over again, eventually just mouthing them. The DOCTOR neatly folds the letter and puts it back in the envelope. He touches the CAPTAIN'S arm, and places the letter in his hand again.

*
*
*
*

DOCTOR

Thank you.

*

Out of respect, the DOCTOR quietly gathers his things and walks out of the room. He walks downstage. He clicks on the tape recorder. He pauses for a while. He takes out the little picture.

*

DOCTOR

I meant to give this back. I...

He stares at the picture.

NIGHT NURSE

I saw him with the letter a couple of times.

DAY NURSE

I should have told the doctor about the letter. Just seemed so private. And I didn't really even understand it. Until now.

DOCTOR

It all makes sense. It must have happened soon after he came back from active duty. The year missing from his file...he was probably...violent. So many are when they come home. Night terrors. Unable to socialize, to work. His wife undoubtedly became depressed. Seeing what he'd become. It's...not uncommon. She chose her last words to him from a play about a man, a soldier, a killer, unable to change his path. She released him from accountability, and forgave him through..*fate*.

*
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*

The DOCTOR just sits in silence, examining the picture. The SERGEANT, appearing from the periphery of the stage, purposefully walks toward the CAPTAIN's room. The DAY NURSE, stands from her interviewing desk and makes a movement to stop him, but stops and sits down again. The SERGEANT enters the doorway, with no resistance.

SERGEANT

Captain.

The CAPTAIN opens his eyes with a start. He keeps his eyes forward, avoiding contact.

DOCTOR

I can still submit my report. If I just explain the progress we've made. I can push them to keep him in therapy.

*
*

SERGEANT

Captain?

DOCTOR

Maybe by then I can get my license back...keep working with him.

*

The DOCTOR frantically scribbles something in his note pad.

*
*
*

SERGEANT

What, no hello?

He walks around and looks at the CAPTAIN.

*
*
*

NIGHT NURSE

Yeah. I talked to the Serge. After my arm. He musta found out. He called me, asked a bunch of questions. I, uh...I mentioned that the Captain had been getting better.

SERGEANT

You look good, Cap. Better than the last time I saw ya.

*

Nothing. The CAPTAIN doesn't respond.

NIGHT NURSE

I mentioned he had been...talking.

*
*

SERGEANT

So this is...I'm at a loss, to be frank. I'm just completely...

He fiddles around with some of the books which are now neatly piled.

NIGHT NURSE

I thought he might want to know...as a friend. But he hung up on me. He just...hung up.

*
*

SERGEANT

You know, when I found out the doc was working with you, I didn't think much of it. I kept my ear to the ground, heard you almost got the whole thing shut down within the first week, so I just chalked it up to another failed experiment. Then, I heard that you were still here. Fine. Good. As much as I tremble when I think about *my* shrink dragging me through the wreckage again, I wouldn't be standing here without him. So, you know, I wasn't opposed to you getting some help...even after all these years...

The CAPTAIN, seeing that he won't be able to avoid the conversation, stands. The SERGEANT immediately sees this and stands at attention.

CAPTAIN

At ease...Sergeant.

The SERGEANT is frozen from hearing him speak.

CAPTAIN

Sergeant.

The SERGEANT finally releases.

SERGEANT

I...it's been... (beat) It's nice to hear you voice again, Captain.

The CAPTAIN abruptly sits in his chair again.

CAPTAIN

How can I help you, Sergeant?

The SERGEANT starts to walk around the room, poking around nosily. He seems pre-occupied, anxious.

SERGEANT

Can't a soldier have a conversation with an old friend? *

No response.

SERGEANT

I can't believe that quack actually did some good. Right? I mean, I visited you for years and...I never heard a peep. Not one word.

DOCTOR

Conclusion. Patient 4192. Post-traumatic stress disorder and primary relatable causes.

SERGEANT

You know, the doc started poking around some of your files, my files a few weeks ago.
Pissed a lot of people off...probably not the first time.

DOCTOR

By piecing together text from a Shakespeare's *Macbeth*--from memory--

SERGEANT

So I gave a call. Stopped by for a visit.

DOCTOR

Patient was able to communicate much of the personal trauma which had caused him to
psychologically retreat.

SERGEANT

Doc told me, if I tossed him a bone, that would be it. I knew those classified documents
would be released soon anyway so...no skin off my back. I ain't ashamed of what
happened...not like you. So I told him about that dusty hell-hole, young men killing one
another and...a mission complete.

DOCTOR

Working first through guilt associated with his military past--

SERGEANT

And I don't know what sort of miracle happened with you after I told him, but...

CAPTAIN

What do you want, Sergeant?

The SERGEANT finally sits, looks over his shoulder and
looks at his CAPTAIN. He pauses, a bit overcome again
by seeing his old friend.

SERGEANT

It really *is* good to see you again.

DOCTOR

The patient was eventually able to discuss extremely painful memories associated with his
immediate family.

The SERGEANT looks at the CAPTAIN, and turns
abruptly curt.

SERGEANT

I heard you did quite a number on that orderly. So I called him...just to see if anything had changed. He told me...

He seems very anxious and begins to wipe the sweat from his brow.

DOCTOR

The suicide of his wife upon return from active duty, being the most challenging.

SERGEANT

Whew! See? I started sweating, like I am now.

The DAY NURSE finally gets up the strength to stand and walk to the DOCTOR.

DOCTOR

I also now have evidence that his son, whom has not been mentioned in any of the redacted documents contained in his file is--

SERGEANT

He said you were talking again. And all I could think was...what did you tell him?

DOCTOR

My god. His son.

DAY NURSE

I tried to warn him, but I just froze.

SERGEANT

Captain?

DOCTOR

I never asked him about his son.

The DAY NURSE interrupts the DOCTOR's recording.
She speaks from her testimony chair.

DAY NURSE

Doctor...the Sergeant. He's here. I couldn't...he's here...with the Captain. I think you should--

The DOCTOR rushes toward the doorway. The SERGEANT begins to aggressively grill the CAPTAIN.

The DOCTOR enters the doorway, undetected. The *
SERGEANT grills the CAPTAIN. *

SERGEANT *

What did you say? *

CAPTAIN *

I don't understand. *

SERGEANT

Don't screw with me, Cap. You need to tell me exactly what you said to him.

*

CAPTAIN

Nothing. We--

SERGEANT

Goddamnit! Tell me what you said!

CAPTAIN

I--

SERGEANT

Say it!

The CAPTAIN starts to breathe quickly. He is physically starting to react to the badgering.

CAPTAIN

I'm...sick.

SERGEANT

Don't pull this shit on me.

*

The SERGEANT grabs the CAPTAIN by the shoulders.

DOCTOR

*

Sergeant!

*

SERGEANT

Tell me.

The CAPTAIN starts spouting words.

CAPTAIN

I'm...I'm...I am sick at heart. I have lived . I have lived long enough: my way of life Is fall'n into the sear...

The DOCTOR can no longer watch his work unravel in an instant.

DOCTOR

Sergeant. What--why are you here?

SERGEANT

A few people might like to know the same about you, doc.

*

CAPTAIN

Doctor. I'm not feeling well...I'm...I am sick. I am sick at heart.

*

The DOCTOR runs to the CAPTAIN's side, who is breathing heavy and seeming less and less lucid.

DOCTOR

Captain...Jesus. Stay with me... Nurse!

CAPTAIN

I told you. I told you to leave. I...I have lived long enough!

The DAY NURSE hears, but doesn't respond. She's frozen in fear.

DOCTOR

What did you do to him? Hey! Look at me, Captain. Right here.

SERGEANT

What did he tell you?

DOCTOR

What the hell are you talking about? Nurse!

*

The DOCTOR gives the CAPTAIN some water. The DOCTOR's presence seems to be helping a little.

SERGEANT

Tell me what he said. I swear to God.

DOCTOR

His wife? His son? Yes. I know. I asked you to help me...help him, and you sat and lied to me about his family.

*

The SERGEANT is suddenly extremely paranoid. He darts around the room.

SERGEANT

Aww. Christ. I can't--How could you? How could you tell him?

The CAPTAIN just babbles on, uncontrollably.

CAPTAIN

Friends...I must not look to have; but, in their stead, curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath, which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not.

*
*
*

The DOCTOR, focused on his patient keeps his attention on the CAPTAIN, not noticing the strange behavior.

DOCTOR

I'm going to have to ask you to leave, Sergeant.

*
*
*

SERGEANT

I can't testify again. I can't. You can't say anything, Doc.

The SERGEANT addresses the CAPTAIN as though the DOCTOR is no longer in the room. He tramples over his incoherent speech.

SERGEANT

You know how long I've carried this...this weight? Just sitting there.

CAPTAIN

Infected minds to their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets:

*
*
*

SERGEANT

I can't even swallow sometimes. I've kept that. Me. I couldn't tell the cops, my shrink...my own wife for chrissakes. I couldn't--

*
*
*

CAPTAIN

I think, but dare not speak.

*
*
*

SERGEANT

You can't say anything, Doc. You promised. What's done is done. It was an accident. He loved that kid.

*
*
*

The CAPTAIN starts getting heavily agitated.

CAPTAIN

Such horrible imaginings. I cannot.

*
*
*

DOCTOR

Captain, what--

*

CAPTAIN

I am afraid to think what I have done; look on't again I dare not.

*

*

SERGEANT

When I found them...the Captain was just holding him in his arms.

*

The CAPTAIN grabs for the SERGEANT's hand,
pleading.

*

CAPTAIN

As from your graves, rise up and walk like sprites to countenance from this horror

*

*

SERGEANT

His boy was...

DOCTOR

Captain?

SERGEANT

He said it was the noise, the screaming. He just wanted the screaming to stop. We're trained to kill grown men with our bare hands....

The DOCTOR finally realizes what he has been missing.
He starts to retreat from the CAPTAIN. The CAPTAIN looks at him and stops him for a moment.

DOCTOR

His son, did he...?

*

He gives a gentle warning.

*

SERGEANT

His head just hung there, his big eyes staring at me, red with blood. He looked...

CAPTAIN

Ring the alarm-bell.

*

*

DOCTOR

No...

SERGEANT

I made up a story. A fall...to explain his crushed neck, blood streaming from his eyes...said I found the Captain trying to save him...the cops started asking me questions... *

DOCTOR

Oh God.

SERGEANT

So many questions...I lied. I can't...not again. I can't... *

The DOCTOR grabs the bell, and rings it. He backs toward the exit, staring at the CAPTAIN.

The CAPTAIN, seeing the DOCTOR retreating, turns toward the SERGEANT.

CAPTAIN

God...

As the CAPTAIN reaches for the DOCTOR, the SERGEANT grabs a hold. The DAY NURSE, who has been listening from the DOCTOR's office, drops the tape recorder just as the CAPTAIN turns on the SERGEANT and violently attacks him.

CAPTAIN

God forgive us all!

In an instant, the action becomes highly stylized. We hear the real-time, muffled shouts and violence via the tape recording, but what we see is much simpler. The DOCTOR watches, slowly sliding down the frame of the doorway. The CAPTAIN struggles with the SERGEANT, almost dance-like...deliberate and with little tension. He eventually presses the SERGEANT down, into the chair, which falls backward away from the audience. The CAPTAIN grabs a hold of a nearby serving tray, and raises above the SERGEANT's head like a guillotine. He strikes him in slow motion, obscured from the audience view. The DAY NURSE finally walks through the scene and sits downstage again. She sits just as the SERGEANT's last shouts are heard.

DAY NURSE

Please. I can't listen any more.

NIGHT NURSE

Stop the tape.

The sound of the tape stops, just as the SERGEANT's body goes limp. The CAPTAIN and DOCTOR also seem to physically become neutral, as if releasing all the tension in their bodies. The DAY NURSE continues.

DAY NURSE

I was always taught to forgive. Always forgive...

NIGHT NURSE

Like I said, we all got our shit. Every family. Everyone.

The SERGEANT opens his eyes, rises and exits permanently.

DAY NURSE

And I still believe that. I do.

NIGHT NURSE

And I still can't understand it.

The CAPTAIN rises, takes off his robe and exits permanently.

DAY NURSE

Have you ever sat next to someone as they take their last breath? I have. More times than I can count.

NIGHT NURSE

I can't sit here and accept that kind of rage...not in my own family...not in anyone else's.

DAY NURSE

I couldn't possibly know the truth about all their stories. I just knew what I saw of them.

NIGHT NURSE

Some people are just bad people.

DAY NURSE

My grandfather. He died. I was young, but I remember sitting by the side of his hospital bed. I hated the smell of that place, and here I've surrounded myself with it. Life has a funny way.

NIGHT NURSE

Whether they're born or made.

DAY NURSE

My grandmother sat at his side. Such...*loss* in her eyes. Loss had taken place of the fear so many times before. He was...he had great, great anger in him.

NIGHT NURSE

Someone must be held accountable for that kind of anger.

DAY NURSE

But here she was, shattered by watching his body, his face...release. Release the weight, the burden of sorrow, anger, love, time.

NIGHT NURSE

No matter how much time passes, I'll never completely forgive my father.

DAY NURSE

She forgave him in an instant.

NIGHT NURSE

I can't. Whether the war caused it...or his father....or...

*

DAY NURSE

I think we're all on the brink of something terrible. Or something beautiful. I've seen too much of both. What the Captain did...

NIGHT NURSE

People fight against the gravity of their own rage, I think. I've seen people dig their fingers into anything nearby to escape it.

DAY NURSE

I mean, how much choice do any of us really have?

NIGHT NURSE

I've seen people attack it like they might destroy it with their bare hands.

DAY NURSE

So there must be a path for all of us.

NIGHT NURSE

It's the fight that means something. I saw my dad fight it everyday. Everyday.

DAY NURSE

And all we can do is the best we can with what we're given. I think they did the best they could, the Doc and the Captain.

NIGHT NURSE

And sometimes the fight just isn't enough.

DAY NURSE

I'm sorry. I need to be done now. I'm...that's all.

NIGHT NURSE

That's it. We're done.

The NURSES both stand, and exit the space permanently, leaving the DOCTOR, alone, sitting in the stage center chair.

DOCTOR

I go, and it is done; the bell invites me; for it is a knell that summons me to heaven or to hell.

END.

*