

**ATOMIC FIELD****By Kenneth R. Robbins**

SETTING: The elder Long's home in the North Georgia Mountains. There is a large combination sitting/dining area adjoined by a kitchen with an attached screened-in porch and front patio/main entrance. To the side is the hibakusha station, a podium with a lectern light and microphone backed by a screen.

## ACT I

AT RISE: HOWARD LONG, a man in his late fifties is rummaging through the sideboard. He is dressed in his pajamas. He pulls boxes from the shelving and sits on the floor, tossing item after item in the garbage can beside him. After a moment, DELORES LONG, his wife of 55, appears behind him, also dressed for bed. She watches what he is doing without commenting on it. His cleaning of the sideboard becomes frantic for a moment, then subsides. He sits staring at something in his hands. On the screen appears the image of a young Japanese woman with an American serviceman, destroyed landscape beyond them. He discards the photo which he holds and the image disappears.

DELORES

What are you doing? Do you know what time it is?

HOWARD

Go back to bed.

DELORES

Can I help?

HOWARD

Yes, by going back to bed.

DELORES

If you'll just tell me what it is you're---

HOWARD

Just a little culling. Spring cleaning you could call it. Junk.

DELORES

At two in the morning?

HOWARD

All this God blessed junk. What're we holding onto this stuff for anyway, Del? Christ's sake, it's . . .

DELORES

It's who we are.

HOWARD

Were. Not any more.

(The garbage can is overflowing.)

You want to empty this? Put it in a grocery bag, haul it to the dump.

DELORES

I'll take care of it. You go back to bed.

HOWARD

(Rising from the floor, stiff and tired.)

Finish this tomorrow. Put it in a grocery bag. Sooner the better.

DELORES

Yes, dear.

(He goes to the bedroom, door closes. DELORES takes the garbage can and empties it into a sack. She considers what she is doing, then takes the sack to the porch area and hides it behind the sofa. We HEAR the sound of the creek outside the porch and tree frogs croaking. She stands, silently listening as lights change and WINSTON approaches the hibakusha station, turns on the lectern light. Behind him on the screen is a slide of the atomic cloud as seen over Nagasaki on August 6, 1945.)

WINSTON

(Reading from a document.)

At the time of the bombing, I heard someone shout, "A parachute is coming down." I looked for the parachute, but could not find it. Putting it out of mind, I turned back when there was an intense flash like the magnesium light used for photographing. I crouched. That was when I was knocked down by an immense force. I could feel the extreme heat. I moved my hand, but there was no feeling in it. I tried to move my feet, but I couldn't tell whether they were still connected to my body or not. I was numb from my knees down to my feet and from my elbows to my shoulders. It was pitch black and was stifling. I took a deep breath and sucked mud and sand into my mouth. The side of

my body was on fire. I tried putting it out, but it wouldn't go out so easily.

(Slide of a man with burn scars)

Here are the scars, these are my burns. I could see people running in the dark, some on fire, some just rolling around on the ground. It became lighter, and the light appeared to be in many different colors, red and yellow, purple and white. My face swelled. My lips and cheeks were popped up and my eyes--I had to force my eyes open with my fingers in order to see. Then after some time it started to rain heavily like a sudden storm. The drops were huge and black. That was what was known as black rain.

(He turns the hibakusha light out and the slide fades. As lights change, WINSTON enters the LONG home carrying a small overnight bag. Calling.)

Hello?

(Wait)

Anybody home?

(No answer. He carries his bag into the bedroom. In a moment, we HEAR the flush of a toilet. He returns.)

Yo! Mom?

(No answer. In the kitchen he takes a cookie from the cookie jar. He munches it as he goes to the screened-in porch and stands looking across the creek toward the golf course. The PHONE rings. He doesn't know if he should answer it or not. On the fifth ring, he answers it.)

Long's. . . Hello? . . . Oh, hi, Lou. No. Here all by my lonesome. You know where they've gone? Really? Well, they knew I was coming today, didn't they? If I'd known that, I could have started later. Well, you know, time is money, wherever you spend it, the car, in bed, you name it. Okay, okay. Sure, I'll be here. I didn't drive six hours just to turn around and head back home. Whenever. Sure. I'll call. Soon as they get back, I'll call, Sis, promise. Bye.

(He replaces the receiver and eats another cookie. He opens the fridge and takes out a Diet Coke. He rummages through the shelves and finds a hunk of cheese. He slices cheese and places it between two cookies and eats, takes a bottle of Jim Beam from his bag and spikes his can of Diet Coke and drinks. From off we HEAR a car drive up. The DOORS slam. He quickly returns the liquor to his bag. We HEAR two people approaching from outside. Entering are

HOWARD and DELORES. HOWARD scrapes his feet as he enters. DELORES shoves past him and is headed for the bedroom when she sees WINSTON.)

DELORES

Winston? I thought that was your car out there--

HOWARD

Who else you know drives with South Carolina license plates?

WINSTON

Mom. Dad.

(She hugs him.)

DELORES

It's been so long, sweetheart--

HOWARD

So look what the cat drug in.

WINSTON

Lou just called--

DELORES

How long've you been home? Oh, you're looking so good.

HOWARD

Let him breathe, Del.

WINSTON

How've you been, Dad?

HOWARD

Ask me later. Right now I gotta go pee.

(He goes to bedroom.)

DELORES

Can I help you with your things?

WINSTON

Traveling light, Mom. You're looking -- okay. How you doing?

DELORES

Oh, I'm just fine, I guess. Let me look at you, son. Oh, my, children are clocks, ain't they.

WINSTON

Beg pardon?

DELORES

Gray hair. You've got more gray hair than me. Just look at you.

WINSTON

Thanks for pointing that out. Just what I needed.

DELORES

Marisa Louise called?

WINSTON

Said you'd told her it'd be late this afternoon before you made it back. And I'm to give her a ring soon as you walk through the front door, that she's dying to know.

DELORES

Well, they got us in and out of that place quick as you please. You've lost weight. Can I get you something to eat?

WINSTON

No, not now, not hungry. What place? The hospital?

DELORES

Would you look at me? I need to have this nose powdered.

WINSTON

You've been crying, Mom? What--

DELORES

Oh, it's nothing. We hit a bunny rabbit on the way home, and you know how those things upset me. Go set down, I won't be a minute. Oh, Winston, I'm so glad you're home.

WINSTON

Home's where you live, Mother. I don't live here, so this to me isn't home. Home is. . .

(She has gone into the bedroom. WINSTON finishes his Coke and crams another cookie into

his mouth as HOWARD returns. He has on slippers and a bathrobe.)

Hey, Pop, you're looking good.

HOWARD

Sheeee.

(He sits in his chair and lights a cigarette.)

WINSTON

(Sitting at the kitchen bar. Referring to the smoke.)

Cancer ward.

HOWARD

You want to be helpful, you could turn on the television for me.

(Pause.)

Then, maybe not.

(WINSTON turns on the t.v., then returns to the kitchen bar where he waves the smoke from his face.)

Hand me the remote?

(WINSTON gives him the remote. HOWARD surfs through channels.)

Eighteen stations and nothing worth watching. You have cable over there in what you call it?

WINSTON

Greenwood. It's not that tough a name to remember, Pop.

HOWARD

Greenwood. Sap in the wood. That what you got over there in what you call it? A bunch of saps?

(Still surfing.)

Wasteland. Nothing but a big city landfill.

WINSTON

It's four in the afternoon. What do you expect?

HOWARD

For twenty a month? I expect paradise.

(DELORES comes from bedroom.)

DELORES

It's been too long, Winston, sweetheart. You've got to come around more often.

WINSTON

Come when I can. You know that.

DELORES

How're classes?

HOWARD

Look at this, Del. Nothing but garbage. Can you believe we pay twenty dollars a month for this garbage?

(DELORES turns the volume down.)

I can't hear!

DELORES

If it's garbage, what's to hear?

HOWARD

Tell Winston he's got to stop drinking so much. He's getting a pot.

(She leaves him and goes to kitchen.)

WINSTON

So, what's the prognosis?

DELORES

You must answer my question first, hon.

WINSTON

What did you ask?

DELORES

Are you finished with classes?

WINSTON

No. Spring break.

DELORES

And that's how long? Two weeks?

WINSTON

Don't I wish. Five days. Plus weekends. Just long enough to get used to a bit of free time and then it's back to the treadmill.

DELORES

It can't be that bad.

WINSTON

I'd like to see you teach three sections of world civ and come away sane.

DELORES

You said Marisa Louise called?

WINSTON

She invited me to come over there.

DELORES

Are you?

WINSTON

I might, some time this week. So, what do the doctors say?

DELORES

Oh, Winston, I just don't know. . .

WINSTON

(After a pause.)

How long did they give him.

DELORES

Half a year. . . maybe.

(SOUND of a car arriving outside.)

WINSTON

Be goddamned.

HOWARD

(Yelling.)

I heard that. Wash that kid's mouth out with Tide, Della!

DELORES

(Shaking her head.)

Ears like a hawk.

MARISA LOUISE

(Rushing in through the front door. She is a woman of thirty one and is breathless as she enters.)

You're back.

DELORES

Of course we are, hon.

HOWARD

Close the door! You're letting in flies.

WINSTON

Hi, sis.

MARISA LOUISE

You were supposed to call me. Why didn't you call me? Winston?

WINSTON

Good to see you, too.

DELORES

I meant to, Hon--

HOWARD

Will somebody please shut the dadblasted door!  
(MARISA LOUISE slams it shut.)

MARISA LOUISE

Nobody ever thinks of me around here.

HOWARD

Oh, good golly. . .

MARISA LOUISE

I have been setting up there in that God awful house of mine, waiting and waiting for the phone to ring, and it never did, and then you pass the house on the highway doing about ninety and don't even wave or anything. And if that's not enough, you don't even have the courtesy to give me a call!

DELORES

Now, don't get all worked up, sweetie--

HOWARD

Did so damn it give you a call. As we passed your house, I hung my head out the window and hollered, Hey, Marisa Louise? They give me no more than half a year! Wasn't that something to lift your head and sing about?

MARISA LOUISE

What?

WINSTON

Sit down, Lou, you're making me dizzy.

MARISA LOUISE

What'd he say?

DELORES

He said he has six months at most. That's all.

MARISA LOUISE

(Suddenly sobbing)

Oh, Daddy!

(She throws herself on him, hugging and kissing.)

WINSTON

I've been in a car six hours. I need a walk.

DELORES

In a minute, hon. Now, Marisa Lou, you're getting your Daddy's robe all wet.

HOWARD

Get her off me, damn it.

MARISA LOUISE

What'm I gonna do, Daddy? Lord Jesus, what'm I gonna do?!

DELORES

Sweetheart--

WINSTON

Be back in an hour.

DELORES

You go out that door, I swear-- I need help here, son.  
(MARISA LOUISE is wailing incoherently.)

HOWARD

Get her off me, I can't breathe!  
(He shoves MARISA LOUISE off.)

Let me breathe, damn it.

MARISA LOUISE

(A bit calmer.)

Oh, Daddy.

(She is rummaging through her purse for a tissue which HOWARD gives her.)

HOWARD

Jesus H. Christ, Della, if the cancer don't do me in, these children will.

(Lights change as DELORES enters the hibakusha station and turns on the lectern light. Behind her on the screen is a slide of a destroyed street car.)

DELORES

(Reading from manuscript.)

When we were near Hatchobori and since I had been holding my son in my arms, the young woman in front of me said, "I will be getting off here. Please take this seat." We were just changing places when there was a strange smell and sound. It suddenly became dark and before I knew it, I had jumped outside. I held my son firmly and looked down on him. We had been by the window and I think fragments of glass had pierced his head. His face was a mess as blood flowed from his head. He looked at me and smiled. His smile remained glued in my memory. He did not comprehend what had happened, so he looked at me and smiled at my face which was all bloody. I had plenty of milk which he drank all throughout that day. I think my child sucked the poison right out of my body, and soon after that he died. Yes, I think that he died for me.

(Lights out in the hibakusha station as they rise in the Long home. It is evening of that same day. MARISA LOUISE and WINSTON sit on the back screened-in porch.)

WINSTON

(He has been drinking a bit too much from the bottle hidden in his back pack. He offers the bottle to MARISA LOUISE.)

Now or never, Lou. Your chance for a little joy this evening.

MARISA LOUISE

You know they don't allow booze in the house.

WINSTON

Hurry. She'll be back out here and then we'll both be tee-totalers.

MARISA LOUISE

I'll pass.

WINSTON

Fine. Means more for me.

(He drinks. From off comes a bellow of rage.)

MARISA LOUISE

Hear that? No peace in the house since they found the tumor. He's been a baby and a bull all at the same time. I can't stand to come around this place anymore.

WINSTON

Mom needs you.

(They sit in an awkward silence. She takes a pad and chunk of charcoal from her purse and draws.)

It's been awhile.

MARISA LOUISE

What has?

WINSTON

You and me had a chance to sit around like this, talk.

MARISA LOUISE

We're talking?

WINSTON

Don't you want to?

MARISA LOUISE

Got nothing to say.

(She draws.)

WINSTON

Can I see?

(She gives him her pad. He turns it first one way, then another.)

What is it?

MARISA LOUISE

My brain. The side that doesn't work so well.

WINSTON

Interesting. Can I have a sheet of your paper?

MARISA LOUISE

What for?

WINSTON

A bit of doodling.

(She gives him a sheet.)

A bit too thick, but we'll see.

(He begins folding the paper origami style.)

MARISA LOUISE

What're you doing?

WINSTON

Folding a crane. I have this special friend back home. She taught me to fold paper cranes.

MARISA LOUISE

(Watching him as he folds.)

A crane like for lifting things?

WINSTON

No. A crane. Like the bird. My friend, she's Japanese. She claims there's an ancient legend in Japan where she lives that if a person who is ill folds a thousand paper cranes, he or she will get well. Have you ever heard that?

MARISA LOUISE

No. I wish it was true.

WINSTON

What makes you think it's not?

MARISA LOUISE

For one, we don't live in Japan. What's your friend's name?

WINSTON

Nora. Noriko but I call her Nora.

MARISA LOUISE

What does she call you?

WINSTON

Macho man.

MARISA LOUISE

No, really. What's her pet name for somebody like you?

WINSTON

Pooh.

MARISA LOUISE

(Big derisive laugh.)

Love her already!

WINSTON

First she called me Winnie and when I objected, she called me Pooh. Sort of stuck. You know how those things are.

(Continues folding.)

It took me a while to figure out the folding. But it's easy once you get the hang of it.

MARISA LOUISE

Is she pretty?

WINSTON

I think so. Long black hair. Marvelous smile. Eyes that glow in the dark. . .

MARISA LOUISE

Can I meet her sometime?

WINSTON

I don't know. Maybe.

(He finishes)

There you are. A less than perfect paper crane. It helps if you use origami paper.

MARISA LOUISE

Let me try.

(She folds a paper crane twice as fast as  
WINSTON.)

WINSTON

Hey. You're pretty good.

MARISA LOUISE

You're right. The paper's too thick. I've never known anyone from another country. Must be interesting.

WINSTON

We have our quota of foreign exchange students. Most come from Malaysia. One or two from Europe. Then there's Nora.

MARISA LOUISE

Any truth to this Japanese myth?

WINSTON

Just might be. Who knows?

(Admiring her work.)

I'm impressed.

MARISA LOUISE

If it's true this legend. Do you think if I folded a thousand of these for Daddy, he'd get well?

WINSTON

He might not get well, but he wouldn't get worse.

(Hearing his mother coming, he slips the bottle into his bag.)

DELORES

(Coming from the bedroom)

Well, that's that.

WINSTON

All tucked away? Snug as a bug in a rug?

DELORES

You know I don't want you drinking in my house, Winston. You insist on drinking, I'd just as soon you do it somewhere else.

WINSTON

I don't remember Dad going to bed so early before, Mom.

DELORES

It's his way, I guess. Way of dealing.

(Holding out her hand.)

Give it here, hon.

WINSTON

What are you talking about? My bag? You want my book bag? There's nothing in it. Junk mostly.

DELORES

Give it.

WINSTON

Mom, for Pete's sake. I need it and you don't. So what difference does it make?

(DELORES stands with her hand out. After a beat, WINSTON gives her the now nearly empty bottle. DELORES takes the offending bottle to the kitchen where she pours the liquid down the drain.)

I hate that, Lou, you know? It's too expensive to waste like that.

MARISA LOUISE

I told you.

WINSTON

Well, there's more where that came from. So, you're enjoying your new job?

MARISA LOUISE

Don't tell Mom. But they let me go.

WINSTON

When?

MARISA LOUISE

Middle of last week. I get two weeks severance and then back to unemployment, I suppose. Best friends I got work at the unemployment office.

(She finishes the crane as DELORES returns.)

DELORES

I know you have another in your car, hon. You bring it in the house and I'll pour it down the drain, too.

WINSTON

This is so ridiculous, Mother. Daddy doesn't mind a little--

DELORES

Oh but he does! He does mind indeed.

(Pause.)

Pretty paper dolls, Marisa Lou. What is it?

MARISA LOUISE

(Taking offense.)

It's a damn crane! For God's sake, Mom, can't you see?

DELORES

Sorry.

MARISA LOUISE

(Awkward pause.)

I should go home, I guess.

WINSTON

Is he sleeping?

DELORES

Of course not. He's lying in there, counting the flowers in the wallpaper pattern. When he's satisfied the number is the same as last night, he'll start bellowing, and I'll have to go running. It's become our little ritual. He'll need his back rubbed or his foot massaged. Since they found the tumor, his left foot's been giving him fits. I don't know. I've suddenly stopped being his wife and now I'm his nursemaid, somebody to order around and get angry with. At least I'm there, something he can touch. It's easier to get angry at something you can touch. The tumor -- he can't touch that.

(Neither WINSTON nor MARISA LOUISE know what to say.)

Oh, it's so good having my two children home again. You haven't been fussing at each other, have you? Your father and me have dibs on fussing, you're not allowed. Winston, how's work treating you? Marisa Lou just loves her new job, don't you, hon.

MARISA LOUISE

It's great.

WINSTON

When does he see the specialist, Mom?

DELORES

He saw him today. We drove down to Kennestone.

MARISA LOUISE

So, what did the man say?

DELORES

That doctor, he's just the sweetest thing. He's only a kid, you know, probably thirty. We had a nice long visit right there in the waiting room. He graduated from the University, too, Winston. His name's Dr. Sams. You meet him when you was in Athens?

WINSTON

Mother, I've been gone from the University for five years. And even then, I didn't have cause to visit the medical school, so how do you suppose I might have met Dr. Sams?

DELORES

I was just asking.

MARISA LOUISE

You've still not told us what this teenage wonder said.

DELORES

I don't think he's married. Marisa Lou, you should go with us next time and meet Dr. Sams. He's awful nice. Got the sweetest eyes you ever seen.

MARISA LOUISE

Momma! Will you leave me alone! I've seen enough doctors to last a lifetime, thank you very much.

DELORES

(Pause.)

They don't think they can operate.

WINSTON

Why not?

DELORES

Oh, I don't know. Something about where the tumor's located, up near the aorta or something like that. If they operated, they'd not be able to get it all anyway. So might as well rely on chemo therapy and radiation.

WINSTON

Chemo. My God.

DELORES

Oh, now, it's not all that bad. They want to start on Thursday. Can you go with me, hon?

WINSTON

Sure.

(Pause. MARISA LOUISE can't sit still. Finally, she rises, and starts toward the door.)

MARISA LOUISE

I got to get home.

DELORES

You mustn't let it upset you, hon. It's gonna be all right.

MARISA LOUISE

No, Mother, it is not gonna be all right. How can it be all right? My Daddy's gonna die, and there's not a damn thing I can do about it.  
(She leaves.)

DELORES

Go after her, Winston, make her see.

WINSTON

It isn't your fault.

DELORES

What isn't?

WINSTON

Never mind.

(We HEAR the car leave. DELORES lights a cigarette.)

Do you think that's wise?

DELORES

What? This?

(Gestures the cigarette.)

It's your father, not me.

WINSTON

But still, lung cancer's caused--

DELORES

You're not in class right now, hon. There's no need to lecture. I know it all, the doctor told me far more than I really wanted to hear about (waves her cigarette). Still. . .  
(She puts her cigarette out.)

WINSTON

Like what?

DELORES

He said he is a lung cancer specialist. He said if everybody in this country stopped smoking tomorrow, in six months he'd have to find a new specialty.

WINSTON

And what do you do? Come home and puff away.

DELORES

I know, I know. . .

WINSTON

(Gesturing to the grocery sack of old photos  
behind the sofa.)

What's all this?

DELORES

Oh, your father was going through those last night. Once or twice a week he does that. I've got sacks of stuff stored in every closet in the house. Culling, he calls it. He filled a garbage can with old photos, certificates, and things he was getting rid of. Don't tell him, but I keep fishing them out of the trash.

WINSTON

What was he tossing?

DELORES

Oh, I don't know. Mostly stuff to do with his years in the service.

WINSTON

Really? What for?

DELORES

He was saying how a friend of his died unexpectedly and the family had a great time discovering after he was gone all his hidden secrets. Said he didn't want that happening to him. He'd prefer controlling what we learn about him after he's (she waves). I can see that, can't you? Cleaning house is a natural sort of thing to do, isn't it?

WINSTON

How do you feel about that?

DELORES

What, cleaning house?

WINSTON

His--you know.

DELORES

I don't think about it . . . all that much.

WINSTON

If you don't want to talk about it --

DELORES

No, no, I'm fine.

(She gives a half smile.)

You realize, this July will be our forty-first wedding anniversary? Hard to imagine, spending that much time with another human being. Wonder if we'll make it to July. . . We were both teenagers then. He was going off to the war and I was . . . so young. Fourteen. Can you imagine that? I was pretty then.

WINSTON

You're beautiful now.

DELORES

I didn't even know your father's name, but when I saw him walking past our house that day, I was all of thirteen, I said, "Momma, I'm gonna marry that boy."

WINSTON

You've told me.

DELORES

And I did. Didn't even know his name. He was the second best looking sixteen year old I have ever seen.

WINSTON

Who was the first?

DELORES

You of course. Actually, when you were sixteen you were the spitting image of your daddy. You and he are so much alike in so many ways. He's awfully proud of you, you know.

WINSTON

Yeah, right.

DELORES

First of the Long's to graduate college two times.

WINSTON

Three. You missed the first.

DELORES

Well, we couldn't make it all the way up to Winnipeg. That last one your father still doesn't understand. How can you be a doctor if you can't make people feel any better?

WINSTON

I've wondered about that myself. (Pause. They listen to the stream of water rushing past the porch.) What are you going to do, Mother?

DELORES

When? Right now? I thought I'd brush my teeth and go to bed. Read a little, maybe. Listen to him snore.

WINSTON

No. I mean, after he's. . .

DELORES

You're allowed to use the "D" word, you know. It doesn't bother me. It did for a time, but I'm over that I guess. After Howard's dead, I'll deal with it. I don't know, son, I've thought about it and thought about it, but I just can't seem to get it in my head that he's really not gonna beat this thing. Yes, he'll beat it. He has to beat it. There's nothing else to do. He's beat just about everything else there is.

WINSTON

Will you sell the house?

DELORES

Sweetheart, I'm not about to disinherit you. You've got nothing to worry about on that count.

WINSTON

That's not what I mean, Mother.

DELORES

He's been so looking forward to this visit, son. It's all he talked about on the trip to Kennestone. When's Winston getting home, when's Winston getting home. He does so love you.

WINSTON

We know that to be the truth, right. He's spoken all of three sentences to me since I arrived. He's never forgiven me, you know.

DELORES

(HOWARD enters. He stands in the door.)

He has so done it. Forgiven and and and everything else. It's you who's not forgiven if you ask me, you and your highfalutin ways--

HOWARD

She do have a tongue in her head, don't she, son.

DELORES

Howie, you're supposed to be in bed.

HOWARD

Can't sleep. Need a cigarette.

DELORES

You need your rest.

WINSTON

Why not join us? Pull up a chair--

HOWARD

In my own house I get invited. Thank you very much.

WINSTON

You're quite welcome, sir.

(HOWARD sits. Pause. He lights a cigarette.)

HOWARD

You were talking about me, weren't you.

DELORES

Now, sweetheart--

WINSTON

As a matter of fact, yeah. You're a prime topic for conversation, Pop. It's your boyish charm.

HOWARD

And my goddamned tumor. Scuse my French, Del. They say it's grown in two weeks from the size of a skinny lima bean to that of a fat juicy kumquat. Healthy booger. How big's a kumquat?

(WINSTON waves the smoke away from him.)

Don't start. You know, for a school teacher, you sure preach a lot.

WINSTON

You give me a lot to preach about. It seems to me that with your condition--

HOWARD

My condition is my condition. It belongs to me. A couple packs of cigarettes every hour's not going to cure me, and it sure as hell can't make me worse. So don't preach. Del, fetch me that bag of pretzels from the kitchen. I thought Lou was here. You two have another fuss, Winston? You send her home in a red snit?

WINSTON

(As DELORES fetches the bag of pretzels.)

She's not your slave, you know.

HOWARD

Who?

WINSTON

Mom.

HOWARD

Been married to the woman for forty-odd years, and I still need my only son telling me who and what she is. If that don't beat all.

(DELORES has returned to her chair.)

So, where's my Coke?

DELORES

You didn't say--

HOWARD

You ever known me to eat pretzels without a Coke to wash down the salt? Go fetch me a Coke, won't you? (She does.)

WINSTON

Lie down. Roll over. Sit up and bark. Jeez.

HOWARD

She'll be past the slave part soon enough. Six months.

WINSTON

You know, doctors have been known to be wrong.

HOWARD

(As DELORES returns.)

Thanks, Della. You're precious and I don't deserve you. Give us a kiss.

(She does and sits.)

I got a tee time for in the morning. Want to join me for a round, say nine thirty?

WINSTON

Sure.

HOWARD

Good. You bring your clubs this time?

WINSTON

In the trunk of my car. Haven't been used since last time. I'll be rusty as an old hinge.

HOWARD

That's fine with me.

(They sit in silence.)

I heard your questions a bit ago, Winston. Among other things. You're family, I suppose, you've got a right to know. Your mother and me've talked about it. You want to, you can help, but it's not necessary. Della's to get rid of this place and find a house in town, maybe a condo, something less troublesome to keep. We've looked into a couple of places already. Expensive, though. It's been so long since we've bought a house, we'd forgotten how costly they've gotten. Still, this is too much of a place for a widow woman to maintain. I've already set up the accounts so the transfer to Del will be simple and complete. Mo Shealy in town's taking care of the financial end of things. The insurance company is already processing the claim. I'm leaving everything to your mother. Hope you weren't expecting a whole hell of a lot. I'm afraid of lingering, though. That could deplete what Del's to get and she'd have to turn to you and your sister for help.

WINSTON

Lou and I will do what must be done.

HOWARD

I know you will. In some ways I raised you right.

(They sit in silence.)

Strange thing. If we're not talking about Mr. Cancer, we have nothing to say.

WINSTON

I was just thinking of going to bed. Damn if I ain't pooped.

HOWARD

Get your rest. You'll need it in the tee box if you plan to keep up with me. Guess I'd better get to bed, too. Be quiet when you come in, slave woman. Don't want you disturbing my beauty sleep.

(He goes leaving DELORES and WINSTON sitting on the porch.)

DELORES

(As WINSTON rises, stretching.)

Don't go just yet, son.

WINSTON

I'm really beat.

DELORES

There's something I want you to see.

WINSTON

Okay.

(He yawns.)

I'll try staying awake.

(She goes into the kitchen and takes a grocery sack from the cupboard.)

DELORES

(Bringing the grocery sack with her from the kitchen. She places the sack at WINSTON's feet.)

I want you to look at this.

(She pulls a large black and white photo of a navy ship from the sack.)

The USS Circe.

(We see the photo as a slide.)

Howie took this while still in dry dock at Pearl. Before they shipped off to that Japanese place --

WINSTON

Okinawa.

DELORES

That's the one.

WINSTON

He's throwing these things away? They're priceless.

DELORES

Wants me to, but he knows I won't.

(WINSTON thumbs through the photos, pulling them from the sack and looking at them. Some we see flashed on the screen.)

WINSTON

Why would he throw this away?

DELORES

It's like, if it has anything to do with him before you kids were born, he gives it a toss.

(She pulls a small wooden box from the sack.)

Here. Take these home with you and let me know what you think. I've not seen them before, can't make heads or tails of the lot. Only don't let him know you have them.

(WINSTON opens the box which is held closed by a rubber band. He holds what appear to be hundreds of small black and white photos. He takes one out and looks at it. We see an image of a city in ruins on the screen.)

I have no idea what those are of.

WINSTON

You know what these look like? A landfill.

DELORES

Well, I'm going to bed. Are you okay, son? Do you need anything?

WINSTON

No, I'm fine.

(This slide is of a destroyed trolley with a group of service men kneeling in front of it.)

These are. . .

DELORES

See you in the morning, Winston. I love you.  
(She is gone.)

WINSTON

Hmmm.

(He is alone.)

Curious.

(He looks at another. The image is of desolation, a city in destruction. In the foreground is a woman bent from the waist, tending to a small vegetable garden. Another image, this of a group of Japanese people walking down a street with the shadow of the photographer in the foreground; one of the people, a Japanese soldier, walks with crutches. Another image, this of three servicemen standing under a telephone pole, backed by a city in ruins. On the pole is a sign. Winston holds the photo closer to his nose. On the sign is written the words "Atomic Field." He drops the photo to his lap; the image goes dark.)

My Lord. . .

(Lights change as MARISA LOUISE enters the Hibakusha station backed by a slide of Nagasaki in ruins. She turns on the lectern light.)

MARISA LOUISE

(Reading from the manuscript, turning a page.)

When I sat at my desk and took my notebooks and pens, I saw a very strong flash of light. It was yellow. Despite the shower of glass, I didn't have any major injuries. I went outside, too dangerous to stay inside. So many people were terribly injured I felt embarrassed. At the river, a flood of people went down this cliff. Down. Everything was burning. More and more people came from behind me and crashed into us. I was pushed into the river with many other people. I was spun around by the current and large pieces of hail began to fall and my face started to hurt. I plunged my face into the water time and time again, but it just wouldn't stop. The water swirled around me like a tornado and I thought I was going to die. The faces of my family came to my mind one after another. I thought they might have already been killed by the bomb. Later I learned my mother was on Ninoshima. She died on August 10. My brother was with my mother. He survived. My sister had been mobilized to pull down houses. I never found her. I was only eighteen and had lost both my parents, and I didn't know what to do. I cannot afford to bend myself to grief. It is hard to talk about it. I can't. . .

(Lights rise in the Long home. DELORES is preparing sandwiches for lunch. MARISA LOUISE is at the counter. The radio is on, playing country music.)

DELORES

. . . from the start. It was a miracle, hon, that they found the tumor in the first place. His back's what led us to the doctor -- we couldn't find why he could get no peace from the ache in his back. Then the doctor said he wanted to do this biopsy on Howie's chest. You know what that is, don't you? Biopsy? They run this --

MARISA LOUISE

Mom!

DELORES

What, sweetie?

MARISA LOUISE

You're fixing lunch, for God's sake.

DELORES

I know what I'm doing.

MARISA LOUISE

Well, isn't there anything else you can think about? I mean, my God, for the past hour, nothing but gross talk of daddy's x-rays and back pangs and biopsies.

DELORES

Why are you so angry, sweetheart?

MARISA LOUISE

Daddy's got no right doing this to us, and it makes me a little pissed off, that's all.

DELORES

You think he's doing this to himself? On purpose?

MARISA LOUISE

He's still smoking, isn't he? That seems to me that he's all but given up. . . Mother, can't you get him to stop?

DELORES

Let me tell you something. This has to be our secret, all right? Howard would probably skin me alive if he knew I told you, but there are some things we need to know. You, me, Winston. The doctor said your father's lung cancer hasn't been caused by smoking. He said cigarette smoke may have been a contributing factor, maybe causing the tumor to show up sooner than normal, but it's not the cause. Not really.

MARISA LOUISE

Then what is?

DELORES

This I don't understand. He asked if your father had ever worked in the nuclear business or had an abnormal number of chest x-rays. He asked if we've ever lived near a chemical waste dump. Can you believe that? A chemical waste dump in Pickens County? Dr. Sams said your father's lungs are scarred like he's been around radiation or something, that the cancer is a result of his having been exposed at some point in his life to high levels of something he called gamma rays. He wanted to examine me, too, but I wouldn't let him. I mean, I'm not all that sure I want to know. (Pause.) Then he asked if you and Winston'd come in. He'd like to examine all of us he said.

MARISA LOUISE

What did you tell him?

DELORES

He was so insistent, hon.

MARISA LOUISE

(Moving to the porch.) Gamma rays?

DELORES

He asked me what Howard did during World War II. And I told him. . .

MARISA LOUISE

You told him what?

DELORES

That I honestly do not know. That your daddy spent almost ten years in the service after the war was over, and when he came out, I knew less about the man than if I'd never met him. He asked me about your -- you know, your condition . . . when you were born. . .

MARISA LOUISE

You didn't tell him, did you?

DELORES

He's a doctor, hon.

MARISA LOUISE

Oh, Mother. . .

DELORES

It's no reflection on you, Sweetheart. It's my fault, not yours, your condition --

MARISA LOUISE

My deformity! How much did you tell him?

(The look on DELORES' face tells MARISA LOUISE that the doctor knows everything.)

Oh, Mother!

DELORES

Well, he asked, Marisa Lou. I couldn't lie to him, now could I?

(MARISA LOUISE is crying.)

Oh, hon, now. It's okay, really. When you meet Dr. Sams, you'll see. No harm done, trust me.

MARISA LOUISE

You could have lied to him.

DELORES

What good would that have done? Mainly he was interested in when you and Winston were born and I told him, and he asked me if that was before or after Howard came out of the service and I told him it was during. . . Then he asked if we'd ever wanted any more children, and I told him, yes we had, but nothing ever came of it. You know what he asked me then?

MARISA LOUISE

Momma, was I there? How would I know what he asked--

DELORES

He asked if we knew that your father was sterile.

MARISA LOUISE

What?

DELORES

My reaction exactly. I couldn't believe it. So I asked him was he? He said, yes, he is, that from the looks of things, Howie's been sterile for quite a long time. I don't understand these things, hon, really I don't.

MARISA LOUISE

You suppose Daddy knows this?

DELORES

No, I don't think so. I mean, how could he be? We had Winston, then you. . .

MARISA LOUISE

That's strange. You don't think. . . it's catching, do you?

DELORES

What?

MARISA LOUISE

This whatever it is that's making Daddy sterile.

DELORES

We don't even know what it is.

MARISA LOUISE

You didn't tell Dr. Sams about. . . you know. . . my baby?

(DELORES is silent.)

I could just die.

DELORES

I understand so little of all this. Dr. Sams said Howie's radiation scarring was about as severe as any he'd ever seen.

(She lights a cigarette.)

MARISA LOUISE

Can I have one of those?

DELORES

Sure you can.

(MARISA LOUISE lights a cigarette. They sit on the porch, smoking in a moment of silence.

DELORES rises and returns to the kitchen.)

MARISA LOUISE

How would you find out such a thing anyway?

DELORES

You ask the most questions. If I whipped up some brownies, would you help me eat them?

MARISA LOUISE

(Storming back into the kitchen area.)

What the hell is Daddy doing? Out playing golf when he should be here in bed! Goddamn him for this, Momma. He has no right, no right to do this to me! He's smoking, he's overexerting -- he's killing himself, Momma, and he's sterile on top of it all! Now I don't even know where I came from. I mean, him being sterile and all, how could you get (she makes a gesture) with me?

DELORES

The doctors are just wrong, honey.

MARISA LOUISE

I can't take this, Mother, I swear I can't.

DELORES

Calm down, honey, your Father will be coming in in a little bit, feeling great and all that, and I don't want you upsetting him, do you hear me?

MARISA LOUISE

Momma, I love him so much--

DELORES

I know you do, sweetheart. We all do. But now, listen to me. Are you listening? The doctor said --

MARISA LOUISE

Hate all damn doctors.

DELORES

I know, I understand. The doctor said that there's coming a time, and not so far in the future, when your father won't be as active as we're accustomed to him being. Pretty soon, he's going to be bedridden most of the time, not because he wants to be, but because he won't have a choice.

MARISA LOUISE

But I don't understand -- radiation scars? Being sterile?

DELORES

I don't understand that, either, hon. Maybe it's best if we just forget about that and take it one day at a time. Okay. Let's start those brownies. Remember when you were a kid, we used to bake brownies every Saturday afternoon? We'd eat them while they were hot and the boys watched football on television and we'd refuse to give them any unless they turned those hateful games off. Remember that?

MARISA LOUISE

Not really.

DELORES

I'll need your help with this. First off, set yourself down over there and crack these nuts. Don't eat the meat, either, like you always do.

MARISA LOUISE

Can I lick the beaters?

DELORES

I'll think about it.

MARISA LOUISE

(Settling at the counter, cracking pecans with a nut cracker, leaving the shells on the Formica.)

This Dr. Sams --

DELORES

Oh, that Dr. Sams. He makes me wish I were a young woman again. He's just the cutest young man I think I've ever seen.

MARISA LOUISE

You're not old, Momma.

DELORES

Douglas. That's his first name. I do believe it's Douglas.

MARISA LOUISE

Do you think I might go with you next time to Kennestone? I wouldn't mind making the acquaintance of a handsome young doctor. Specially if he's called "Dr. Douglas."

DELORES

That would be lovely.

MARISA LOUISE

Do you really think he's not married?

(SOUND of an automobile pulling up and two doors closing. From off we HEAR two men arguing over a golf score card.)

DELORES

I don't know about that. I might have been mistaken. That ring on his wedding finger might have been a wedding band after all. It was certainly the most unusual wedding band I've ever seen, if indeed that's what it is.

MARISA LOUISE

I'm not going if he's married.

DELORES

Well, now, hon, I don't know if he is or not.

MARISA LOUISE

Why didn't you ask him? You knew I'd want to know.

(HOWARD and WINSTON enter with golf clubs.)

HOWARD

You added wrong. Let me see that score card. This college professor doesn't know how to do simple arithmetic, Della. What do you think about that?

WINSTON

Check it yourself, then. He's upset. I finally beat him, Mom, and he doesn't care for losing at all. Howdy, sis. What're you doing, going nuts?

MARISA LOUISE

Leave me alone.

HOWARD

(Having been checking the score card.)

Here. On number eight, the long par five? You have me down for a six. See? I parred the sucker, and you know it.

WINSTON

Your drive went in the woods. You took a seven, Pop. I was doing you a favor giving you a six.

HOWARD

Oh, yeah. Who asked you to change my score? Give me an eraser, Del.

MARISA LOUISE

Never understood golf. Chase a little white ball around and hit it with these weird sticks. . .

WINSTON

Clubs, sis. Woods, irons, wedges--

MARISA LOUISE

Putters. Don't forget the putter, bro. What kind of game is it that requires people to putter around, huh? (She giggles.) Sounds sort of kinky, doesn't it, Mom.

DELORES

Glad you had a good time, sweetie.

WINSTON

We come to number eighteen, Pop up by two. He has honors and puts his drive right down the middle, two hundred yards out.

HOWARD

Two twenty five. See? Can't do distance, either.

WINSTON

Then I step up and do the same. We're less than a yard a part. I'm out, maybe one fifty from the green, so I take my five iron and put a beauty of a shot, my best middle iron of the round, on the front edge of the green. It hits soft and rolls up, twenty five feet from the pin. Well, old Mr. Pro here says "I can do bettern that." He takes his six iron -- showing off, you see, takes a big swing, and the ball flies true as can be, straight for the pin. Well, you're not gonna believe this, but remember, he used a six iron--the ball comes down a yard shy of the green, hits a sprinkler head, and bounces way up in the air over the trap into the woods and comes to rest six inches from a post oak tree.

HOWARD

Ah ha!

(He points to the score card, then changes his mind.)

No, forget it.

WINSTON

So I two putt, in with a par. And Dad's over there, figuring out his shot. First, foot wedges himself away from the tree and then pitches into the trap. Then he blasts out to the fringe. He's a good sixty feet from the pin. Now, he's got to get down in one to win, two to tie--and that's not counting the foot wedge. What does he do?

HOWARD

I hate gloating.

WINSTON

Not from me you don't. You've never seen me gloat before. I never had cause to gloat until today. And oh my, did that three putt for a triple bogie feel good!

(He gives a whoop.)

Can you believe it, Mom? After all these years, I finally beat the old coot! This is how spring break is supposed to be!

HOWARD

You're making me want to go puke.

DELORES

Did you understand a word he said, Marisa Lou? What's a foot wedge, hon?

MARISA LOUISE

You ask me, Winston's the one who's nuts.

(She is eating more nuts than she is putting in the nut bowl.)

HOWARD

It makes no difference anyway.

(He tosses the score card in the garbage.)

WINSTON

No! I want that. I'm going to frame it and hang it over my desk in my office at school where I can gloat every day if I want.

DELORES

(To HOWARD.)

Did you have a good time, hon?

HOWARD

Actually, it's nice to know I can make someone so goddamn happy! Next time, Winston, S.N.F.M. You hear me? S.N.F.M.! T.N.F.P.!!

MARISA LOUISE

What in the world's that mean?

HOWARD

He knows. Don't you, son. S.N.F.M. T.N.F.P.! You want to play again in the morning?

WINSTON

We'll see.

HOWARD

When's lunch, woman!

(He goes into the bedroom. In a moment we hear the flush of the toilet.)

MARISA LOUISE

What does that mean, Winston? S.N.F.M.T.N.F.P.?

DELORES

Please, hon, don't ask.

MARISA LOUISE

I want to know.

WINSTON

(Getting very close to her.)

Show No (he mouths the word "fucking") Mercy. Take No (he mouths the word "fucking") Prisoners.

MARISA LOUISE

Oh. (She giggles.) I've got to remember that.

DELORES

Did you have a good visit with your father?

WINSTON

Sort of. He's so damned closed mouth about things. Does that come with age or is it genetic? Or is it just me?

DELORES

Lord knows.

WINSTON

I think he's a little pissed at you, Mom, for not letting him throw those pictures away. And he won't tell me about them.

MARISA LOUISE

Pictures?

WINSTON

Pop's cleaning house. Thank God Mom was around to save the good stuff. You should see these little photographs Dad was trying to throw away. They're fascinating. But he won't tell me a thing about them.

MARISA LOUISE

Can you blame him?

WINSTON

What do you mean?

MARISA LOUISE

Well, I for one am sick and tired of your writing about this family and plastering us all over the place for other folks to ogle at. What was that last one? Some God forsaken magazine --

WINSTON

The Midwest Quarterly is highly respected.

MARISA LOUISE

What right have you got to write about us that way?

WINSTON

It was a memoir, Lou. It wasn't about us. It was about me. You're not even in it.

MARISA LOUISE

Why not, that's what I want to know.

DELORES

Lunch is ready, sweet. We have egg salad, tuna fish, or turkey breast sandwiches. Can I fix you a plate?

WINSTON

I'll get it, thanks.

MARISA LOUISE

Is this enough nuts, Mom?

DELORES

It's a start. Here, eat this tuna fish sandwich so your brother don't have to eat alone.

WINSTON

Pop?! What kind of sandwich you want?

HOWARD

(Off.)

Not hungry!

DELORES

He'll eat. It's a game we play every meal. Never hungry and he eats like a horse.  
(Setting places at the counter.)

WINSTON

(Calling.)

Dad? I really am sorry. I didn't mean to beat you!

(To DELORES)

Honest, I didn't. The fun is in playing, being together in the middle of a garden, not winning. Tell him for me, will you? I mean, God, the man's sick--

MARISA LOUISE

He is not SICK! Will you leave him alone?

(She goes to the screened-in porch.

WINSTON gestures to DELORES "What

did I say?" and DELORES gestures back

"Don't worry about it, it's not your problem.")

DELORES

(After a pause.)

Howie? You need anything, hon?

HOWARD

(Off.)

No!

WINSTON

(Quietly.)

Have you looked at those old photographs very closely, Mother?

DELORES

No. They're part of Howie's life he wishes he could forget. So I let him the best I can.

WINSTON

It's quite possible they could be important. Maybe even unique. I'll need to study them more closely. They could be quite a find. And he won't talk to me about them.

DELORES

What are they of -- the unique ones.

WINSTON

Well, several show Japanese soldiers, vintage World War II. Others are of Asian women with children strapped to their backs. But the most unusual ones are of American sailors in strange places. One has six of them posed outside a burned out streetcar. Another is of a sailor sitting next to a destroyed building. Then, the really interesting one has three sailors standing beside a telephone pole and a destroyed city behind, and on the pole is a sign. I can't be sure, but I think the words on the sign are "Atomic Field."

DELORES

(She stops what she is doing.)

What in the world would that mean?

WINSTON

Has he told you anything about what he did after the war was over?

DELORES

Well, he stayed in the service for nine and a half more years following the war. Only after the war, he was in the Marines instead of the Navy.

WINSTON

The Marines? Seriously? I didn't know that. Why would he switch branches of the service?

DELORES

More money, I suppose. I don't know. Why don't you ask him?

WINSTON

He won't talk to me! He can't stand me, you know, all because of . . . It's frustrating. There're only two places I know where a sign that reads "Atomic Field" might be appropriate. Hiroshima or Nagasaki, Japan.

(Pause.)

Is it possible do you think. . .

HOWARD

(As he returns from the bedroom.)

Turkey breast, Della, light on the mayo, slice of tomato and some lettuce.

(He sits beside WINSTON.)

And the answer to your question, son, is yes, it's possible. We anchored for six weeks in the harbor outside Nagasaki after the war.

WINSTON

You never told me this.

HOWARD

I didn't think you'd be interested.

WINSTON

Not interested! Dad, my dissertation topic was contemporary American History. One of my focal areas of study was the Jewish holocaust and its aftermath. You know that. Sheez.

HOWARD

I thought you were only interested in Viet Nam . . . and Watergate, all that crap.

WINSTON

I'm not that provincial for God's sake.

HOWARD

So I was wrong. Excuse my stupidity. If you want to know, we got to Nagasaki September 29. The bomb had been dropped in August. Yes, I saw it all. More than I ever needed to see, more than I ever hope to see again. What're you doing anyway? Writing a book or something? Marisa Louise? Come join us in here. We won't bite, we promise.

MARISA LOUISE

Leave me alone.

HOWARD

Come in here now. That's an order.

(Pause. MARISA LOUISE returns to the kitchen,  
bringing her half-eaten sandwich with her.)

Now look at this, Delores Elizabeth Boyd. Once again, one big happy family. Don't it make you feel all goosepimply inside? I called the club, son. We have an eight-thirty tee time in the morning. Don't disappoint me.

MARISA LOUISE

Can I come too? Please?

HOWARD

Well. . . sure. More the merrier. I'll lick you both with one hand tied behind my back! And you can forget white flags! Don't mean squat in the game of golf!!

WINSTON

(To his sister, grinning.)

S.N.F.M.

WINSTON/MARISA LOUISE

T.N.F.P.!!

(They are laughing. DELORES is looking on in surprise as the lights change. WINSTON, DELORES, and MARISA LOUISE stand at the hibakusha station. DELORES turns on the lectern light. Behind her we see a slide of a Nagasaki image.)

DELORES

(Reading from a manuscript.)

It was very, very hot. I touched my skin and it just peeled right off. The driver of the streetcar was not in sight. I thought he had been quick to run away but now I think that he was probably hurled outside by the blast. It was around August 25 that a pile of my hair just fell off at once. I had a high fever and maggots infested my eyes. I've had two children, but I have not told them about this experience. And I don't want to talk about it. I have tried to avoid it until now.

(She steps aside. WINSTON takes the station.)

WINSTON

(Reading)

My wife didn't know I was a victim of the A-bomb, a hibakusha, until she read about it in my diary. I didn't want to talk about it. Every year from the end of July to the beginning of August, I run a high fever, become ill. It was, it is a burden, though, but I just, I just have no more choice.

(He steps aside. MARISA LOUISE takes the station.)

MARISA LOUISE

(Reading.)

Several months later, I can remember, I remember a cold morning, I don't know why but my mother always kept a round hand mirror by my pillow which I picked up without thinking. I looked at my face and I saw something so shiny on the corner of my head. I called out to my mother who was in the kitchen, and I said, "Mother! My hair is growing back!" I'll never forget that day and the feel of the tears that my mother shed for me while she held me in her arms.

(She turns off the lectern light. Lights rise in the Long home. It is that night. HOWARD and WINSTON are listening to a spring training baseball game between the Atlanta Braves and Montreal Expos being broadcast over the radio. MARISA LOUISE is stretched out on the sofa, sketching in her pad.)

HOWARD

Biggest mistake the Braves ever made was signing that guy, Andy Messerschmidt.

WINSTON

Or thinking they could get by with that new kid--what's his name?

HOWARD

Or letting go Bob Horner fly the coop. You're not supposed to treat your heroes like that. Horner wasn't much of a third baseman, but when you can deliver in the clutch, you've got something real special. Know what I mean?

WINSTON

I got Horner's autograph. Did you know that? He signed the bill of my Braves cap and then some son of a bitch stole the cap out of my car. Where's he playing these days?

HOWARD

In Japan for all I know. He deserves better.

WINSTON

I'd love to go to Japan. What's it like?

HOWARD

Listen to the game.

WINSTON

No, tell me, what's Japan really like.

HOWARD

You expect me to know?

WINSTON

Yes.

(Pause.)

If I were a baseball player--like Horner?--I'd choose to play over there, just to see a different part of the world.

MARISA LOUISE

I'm going abroad one of these days.

HOWARD

I thought you were asleep.

MARISA LOUISE

Sleep with that God awful noise blasting away?

WINSTON

You don't have to listen to it. There are other rooms in the house you know. You have rooms of your own, too--at your place?

HOWARD

Leave your sister alone, bud. She's not bothering you.

WINSTON

How would you know?

(They listen to the game. After a moment.)

So, what was Japan like?

HOWARD

You'll need to look someplace else for book material.

WINSTON

(Taking the box of photos from his book bag.)

I believe there's a book right here in this box. More than that, I believe there just may be tenure and promotion in this little box.

(HOWARD stares at the box. After a beat, he rises.)

Where you going?

HOWARD

Bathroom.

WINSTON

Game's not over.

HOWARD

Just pre-season. Who gives a . . .  
(He leaves.)

MARISA LOUISE

What'd you do that for?

WINSTON

I didn't do anything.

MARISA LOUISE

You're so blind. Can't you see he doesn't want to talk about it? Whatever it is. Why can't you leave him alone?

WINSTON

(Pause)

Do you realize that in less than a year, our father will be dead?

MARISA LOUISE

Jesus, you're morbid. I don't want to think about that. I can't--

WINSTON

And I'm not asking you to. It's just that. . . when he dies, he'll take everything he's experienced with him. I can't let him do that.

MARISA LOUISE

Why not? Who are you to say--

WINSTON

He's a history text. There are things in him that need to be remembered, and I plan to attend to them if he'll just let me.

MARISA LOUISE

Maybe he don't want to remember them.

WINSTON

He has to. I mean, look at this.

(He takes out a photo. On the screen we see the three sailors standing next to a telephone pole with the sign above their heads.)

That's amazing. How old do you think Dad was in this photo? 1945. I figure he was nineteen.

MARISA LOUISE

You know, Winston, you don't come home much. And when you do come home, it's as if you don't realize that Mom and Dad have a life when you're not around. They do, you know. They live day by day--

WINSTON

I know that.

MARISA LOUISE

--day in, day out, just like you'd never been born, just like they'll do when your spring break's up and you're back in Carolina doing whatever it is you do.

WINSTON

Do you remember when you were nineteen?

MARISA LOUISE

When I was nineteen, I had my last surgery. It didn't work.

WINSTON

I didn't know that.

MARISA LOUISE

How could you know? You were in Canada by then. The doctors messed it all up. They tried to make my left leg as long as my right. All they gave me was another scar and thirty eight weeks in bed plus a severe case of blisters from the crutches I used for half a year after that. So. I don't particularly enjoy remembering when I was nineteen and maybe Pop doesn't either. You should leave him alone and let him have his little secrets.

WINSTON

I can't.

MARISA LOUISE

Seems easy enough to do. You just say to yourself I'm not going to bother my father any more. Be done with it.

WINSTON

Our history is who we are, Lou. Don't you realize that? Our parents define us just like we'll define our kids --

MARISA LOUISE

Not having any kids.

WINSTON

Marisa Louise. Ever wonder where your name came from?

MARISA LOUISE

Mother told me she had a pet dog named Louise when she was growing up.

WINSTON

Not it. This is your history, Sis, and it's not half bad. When Dad was seventeen he met this woman. Mom told me this. She worked the loom next to Dad at the cotton mill. They got along really well to hear Mother tell it. I've asked Dad about her, but he won't tell me a thing. Who knows. He might have actually loved her. This co-worker? Her name was Marisa Louise.

MARISA LOUISE

You're full of crap.

WINSTON

It's history, sis. Your history. It's important to know these things.

MARISA LOUISE

What else did Mother tell you?

WINSTON

Your conception. Did she tell you about that?

MARISA LOUISE

No. Do I want to know?

WINSTON

Listen, the historian doesn't control the truth. We seek it, we question it to make certain of its credibility, and once that's pretty well set, we accept it and go on. I'd think you'd want to know about your own personal history, your conception. Do you?

MARISA LOUISE

I don't know. Do I?

WINSTON

I was six months old. Mother was still just a baby herself, hardly past twenty. She was in bed with a headache late one afternoon and Pop--he was home on leave--came home from the mill filthy and stinking. He was filling in for Granddad while home, giving him a little vacation and picking up a little pocket money I guess. He came in, covered with cotton lint and sweat. All he wanted was a hot shower and a good night's rest. But he came through the bedroom door, and there was our mother, lying on the bed with me nursing.

MARISA LOUISE

You are so full of crap.

WINSTON

Never argue with a historian. Of course, I have only the one source for this information, Dad not caring to talk about it. So I can't vouch for the truth of all this.

MARISA LOUISE

Mother wouldn't lie.

WINSTON

That much is absolute. Anyway, that was the night you were conceived, Lou. You should be proud of your remarkable beginning.

MARISA LOUISE

Well, I'm not. Why would she tell you such a thing anyway?

WINSTON

I asked.

MARISA LOUISE

You are such a sicko.

WINSTON

It's important. If we don't know who we were, how can we possibly know who we are or who we might become? I was conceived during an electrical storm.

MARISA LOUISE

I cannot imagine my Mother and Father doing it.

WINSTON

There are two facts which prove they did.

MARISA LOUISE

There's only one thing wrong with your stories. Dad's sterile.

WINSTON

(Pause)

Where'd you get that?

MARISA LOUISE

Mother. They did some tests at Kennestone and low and behold, Dad turns up . . . And our mother does not lie.

WINSTON

That changes things, doesn't it.

(MARISA LOUISE nods.)

It's just one damn mystery on top of another. I mean, how could our father leave home at eighteen, coming from the poorest family in all of Pickens County, and return ten years later with enough cash to buy a grocery store? You're not curious about where the money came from?

MARISA LOUISE

No. I don't think you should be either.

WINSTON

Only one person knows, and he's dying of lung cancer. It's hateful to think of him going to his grave with so much stored away.

HOWARD

(He has been standing in the semi-dark  
for quite some time.)

It was my salary. The branch of service I was in paid good. Who won?

WINSTON

Expos I think. Do you always go around eavesdropping on people?

HOWARD

If it's said in my house, I guess it was meant for me to hear. What is it you want to know? Did I steal all that money? The answer --

WINSTON

Of course not --

HOWARD

-- to that ridiculous question is "No, I did not, thank you very much." What a son I've got, thinks his old man's a thief.

WINSTON

I didn't --

HOWARD

We played poker, I was good at it, and my earnings, I sent home to your mother. Simple as that.

WINSTON

No one is that lucky at cards, Dad.

HOWARD

Well, I was. Now, what else do you want to know for this book of yours?

WINSTON

I want to know it all. Everything. I want to understand you as a young man. And not because of any book, either. I love you and want to know everything I possibly can about you. Maybe if I come to know you, I might know myself.

HOWARD

There are things best left forgotten, son. You'll understand someday. There are things in my past I'm not too terribly proud of, Winston, and I'd just as soon you'd leave those things alone.

WINSTON

You can't deny that --

HOWARD

I can deny anything I damn well please.

(Hatefully)

Marisa Lou, if you're spending the night, you need to tell somebody.

MARISA LOUISE

No, I'm leaving. (She stops at the door.) You know, Daddy, one of these days you're not going to have me to push around any more.

HOWARD

I think it's the other way around. (MARISA LOUISE exits. In a moment we hear her car leave. To WINSTON.) Where do you plan on sleeping tonight?

WINSTON

Sofa's fine. Why were you in Nagasaki? Were you part of the occupation?

HOWARD

Of course not. I was in the Navy. I was there because that's where my ship dropped anchor. You know where the bedding's kept. You want a pillow, there's one on the bed in the basement. You can sleep down there if you want.

WINSTON

No, this is fine. What was it like, Dad?

HOWARD

You've seen the pictures. Figure it out.

WINSTON

I want to hear it from you.

HOWARD

So you can write this epic of yours.

WINSTON

The book isn't important. It's there to be written, that's all. If there's a book in this and it gets published, great. If not, that's okay too. (Pause.) I'm not convinced I can write a book, but it's worth a try. And I'll do it whether you talk to me or not.

HOWARD

So it's yourself you're concerned with. Typical.

WINSTON

I don't know. What the hell, Dad?

HOWARD

(After a pause.)

They say. . . Hell is a burning inferno. Little do they know. Hell is what's left after the inferno's burnt itself out . . . Hell is seeing things you never suspected you'd be led to see and smelling things, like burned human flesh left four weeks in the sun, and hearing things. . . like silence.

(He sighs.)

Hell is being exhausted and knowing that in just a couple of hours, you've got to get yourself up out of bed and feed your offspring a slice of humble pie on the golf course. Rest up. You'll need all the energy you've got come morning.

(He leaves. WINSTON is alone. He enters the hibakusha station, but does not turn on the lamp. Behind him we SEE an image of the mushroom cloud that rose over Nagasaki that day so long ago. The image slowly fades along with the lights.

End Act I.)

## ACT II

AT RISE: Being projected onto the screen is actual film footage taken in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, August, 1945. We HEAR the sound of the whirring projector and the soundtrack of the film. The hibakusha station is empty but the lectern light is on. After a few minutes of the film, HOWARD enters the station, his upper torso interrupting the beam from the projector. He stands there for a moment, the images from the film reflecting off his shirt.

HOWARD

Turn the damn thing off.

WINSTON

(From the dark.)

It's almost finished.

HOWARD

I've already seen this, I don't need to see it again.  
So turn the damn thing off.

(The projector beam is turned off. HOWARD leaves the hibakusha station and goes to his easy chair as lights rise in the Long home. WINSTON enters the hibakusha station and turns off the lectern light; lights off in the station. He goes into the Long home. It is midday, middle of the week. HOWARD coughs. He reclines in his chair, breathing deeply.)

WINSTON

I didn't mean to upset you.

HOWARD

Yes, you did.

(Long awkward pause.)

WINSTON

I'm sorry. . .

HOWARD

This book of yours -- it's that important to you?

WINSTON

Actually -- (A moment.) Could be, sure.

HOWARD

There's just so much you don't understand. . .

(Silence. HOWARD sits with his face tightly clenched. WINSTON tries to ease him, but gets no response. After a moment, he goes to the front porch and stands leaning against the rail. DELORES enters carrying a bouquet of wildflowers.)

DELORES

Would you look at these beauties? It is indeed spring. The woods are filled with the most beautiful wildflowers. It's not normal to have so many. Are you not feeling well, Winston?

WINSTON

I'm fine.

DELORES

This is my favorite season of the year. The woods are bursting with life, the creek is full, and the air is laden with promise.

WINSTON

What promise is that?

DELORES

Oh, I don't know. You're the one with all that book learning. Spring is just such a wonderful time to be alive, that's all. . .

WINSTON

What are you thinking?

DELORES

Oh, the usual. I'm thinking that I should really enjoy this spring since. . .

WINSTON

Since what?

DELORES

Oh, sometimes I have these morbid thoughts.

WINSTON

(Fingering the flowers.)

These are beautiful, Mom. Why are these called wildflowers?

DELORES

Cause they grow in spite of us, I guess. Have you had lunch?

WINSTON

Not hungry.

DELORES

Where did you go this morning?

WINSTON

Down to Canton. The library there. I rummaged through their film collection and found a movie I wanted Dad to watch with me. He refused.

DELORES

What movie was that?

WINSTON

Oh, something from World War II.

DELORES

I wish you'd relax when you come home, hon. Always the same, bringing your work into the house with you.

(She starts inside.)

I best get these in a vase before they keel over and die.

WINSTON

(Taking a folded piece of paper from his pocket.)

Mother, can you explain this?

DELORES

What is it?

WINSTON

Dad's discharge from the Marines, December, 1954. It was in that grocery sack you gave me.

DELORES

It is what it is. What's to explain?

WINSTON

This. ". . . for compelling medical concerns. . ." Dad was discharged from the Marines forty one years ago for medical reasons. What was wrong with him?

DELORES

I don't know. He never talked to me about it. I didn't ask.

WINSTON

Why not?

DELORES

It wasn't any of my business, now was it.

WINSTON

You're saying it's none of mine, too?

DELORES

What I'm saying is, if you want to know something, ask your father. If it's any of your business, he'll tell you.

WINSTON

How can you stand to have so many secrets in this house?

DELORES

We have no secrets.

WINSTON

Really? No secrets? Mom, there is only one absolute in this world--that you cannot lie. No secrets?

DELORES

Well, naturally we have what might be called "secrets," but none that concern you.

WINSTON

If they relate to this family, they concern me.

DELORES

You're keeping something from us as well.

WINSTON

I'll share my secret if you'll share yours with me.

DELORES

All right. What do you want to know?

WINSTON

About Marisa Louise.

DELORES

(Pause)

What about her?

WINSTON

Why you blame yourself for her condition.

DELORES

I am to blame. I mean, look at you. The perfect child.

WINSTON

Ha. That's a laugh.

DELORES

Well, physically so. But Marisa Louise? She was born -- I don't know -- with far more problems than she deserves. It was as if her entire left side was unrelated to her right. Oh, the operations.

WINSTON

How many?

DELORES

I lost count. Cleft palette. Lung blockage. They removed her sternum. To this day she carries a piece of metal in the middle of her chest. That was when she was only eleven.

WINSTON

She told me about her leg operation. I should have been here for that.

DELORES

It wouldn't of made any difference. She thinks the doctors butchered her, but really, she's walking better now than before. They gave up on getting her left kidney to work. It's healthy and all that, just not hooked up. That's what the doctor said. Makes my daughter sound like she's nothing more than an erector set. This is hooked up, that's not.

WINSTON

None of this is your fault, Mom. You and Dad did everything you could for her.

DELORES

Did we? While I was carrying her, I must have done something wrong. There's no other explanation.

WINSTON

Nature.

DELORES

My God would not be so cruel.

WINSTON

You still haven't told me the secret.

DELORES

What secret might that be?

WINSTON

Lou's baby.

DELORES

(Sitting on the porch.)

You know about that?

WINSTON

Mother, pregnancies are very difficult to conceal.

DELORES

But you were in Canada --

WINSTON

So. I have a nephew. Or niece. I'd like to get to know this person.

DELORES

Little Howard died three hours after his birth.

WINSTON

Oh. I didn't. . . What went wrong?

DELORES

Oh, nothing went wrong. Marisa Lou carried the child full term.

WINSTON

Then, what--

DELORES

The actual birth was easy enough, considering it was her first and the condition of her body. No, it was the baby. He was . . . how should I say this. . . terribly deformed.

WINSTON

Like Marisa Louise?

DELORES

Oh, far worse. No, Little Howard came into this world with so little to help him along. His lungs were -- Oh, Winston, I've never seen such a child as that. There wasn't much about him that appeared human. The doctors asked if we wanted to put the baby on life support and Howie said no, not really. I think I agreed. I'm not sure any longer. Of course, Marisa Lou was devastated. She so wanted to have that baby. . . be perfect.

WINSTON

Who was the father?

DELORES

I know what you're thinking. I thought the same. No, whatever affected that child came from Marisa Lou. The man -- he's married now and living in Roswell. He has three children, all beautiful and perfectly healthy. Marisa Lou doesn't know that, of course, and I'd appreciate it if she doesn't find out about it. This whole thing about birth defects. . . I pray nightly that your children, if you ever have children, will be whole. If Marisa Louise knew I told you all this, it would distress her. So when she tells you about Little Howard, try to act surprised, okay?

(They sit in silence for a moment.)

All right, your turn. Secret for secret. What are you keeping from us?

WINSTON

It's not so much a secret as it is something I've not told you yet. I had full intentions of telling you that first day, but the opportunity never presented itself. In a way, it's related to your prayers. I'm engaged to be married. We just decided before spring break and she wanted to come meet you but --

DELORES

Oh, Winston! This is wonderful.

WINSTON

Her name is Nora. Actually, it's Noriko, but I call her Nora. She's Japanese.

(DELORES's face shows her disappointment.)

She's an exchange student from Kyoto, been studying at the college for almost three years. Now she's graduating and has to return home -- unless she marries while over here, which would qualify her for American citizenship. Then she can stay.

DELORES

A student?

WINSTON

She just turned twenty-two.

DELORES

Oh, Winston. . . Do you love her?

WINSTON

More than I can say.

DELORES

And you're only now telling us about this?

WINSTON

Telling you. How can I tell Dad? I mean, he's never forgiven me for being what he calls a yellow-belly -- his yellow-belly, chicken-livered son. How can I expect him to accept a Japanese woman into the family?

DELORES

You underestimate your father, Winston.

WINSTON

I don't think that's possible.

(Pause.)

Nora and I haven't decided yet. Does she stay here, live in Greenwood with me? Or do I go with her and live in Japan? Actually the second option is rather appealing. I've always wanted to visit Japan. And Kyoto is supposed to be so beautiful.

DELORES

You should have brought her home with you. Do you have a photo of her?

WINSTON

(Taking out his wallet.)

Not a very good one.

DELORES

She's so. . . young.

WINSTON

Eight years older than you were when you married Dad.

DELORES

We were different back then, matured earlier.

WINSTON

Nora's more mature than. . .

DELORES

I'm sure she is.

WINSTON

You will love Nora. She is kind, generous -- so bright. She's probably the finest student I've ever taught.

DELORES

She took a course from you?

WINSTON

How else would we meet?

DELORES

And it's okay for a professor to marry one of his students?

WINSTON

Happens all the time.

DELORES

And her not much more than a baby . . . half your age.

WINSTON

Eleven years. It happens.

DELORES

Just so long as you love her.

(She rises to go into the house.)

WINSTON

Will you help me? I need Dad to talk to me before I lose him.

DELORES

No, son, I don't think I will. If Howard has anything to say to you, he'll say it. And I'm certain he'll treasure your bride to be. If you love her--

WINSTON

She has a name. Noriko.

DELORES

I know that. If you love her, so will your father and me.

(She goes into the house.)

Are you coming in, son?

WINSTON

After a while.

(He wanders off.)

HOWARD

You going to fix lunch?

DELORES

Are you hungry, dear? Look at the flowers I found in the woods.

HOWARD

Can't eat flowers.

DELORES

(Kissing him on the forehead.)

Are you feeling better then?

HOWARD

I can feel the cancer, chewing away at my lungs. Other than that, I feel hunky dory.

DELORES

Can I get you anything?

HOWARD

Yes. Lunch.

DELORES

Yes, dear.

HOWARD

(Following her to the kitchen.)

Can I help?

DELORES

Of course you can. Sit down here and keep me company.

HOWARD

Where's Winston?

DELORES

Taking a walk, I think.  
 (Pause)  
 Winston's getting married.

HOWARD

I heard. Isn't he something? Afraid I won't care for his new bride just because she's a Jap. Jesus. He doesn't know his old man, does he.

DELORES

He wants to.

HOWARD

After I'm gone, you can tell him whatever you please. There'll be nothing to stop you then.

DELORES

Honestly, I don't know you either, Howard.

HOWARD

You know everything about me that's worth knowing.

DELORES

With me, you know everything. I have no secrets. I wish the same were true of you, Howie, dear Lord Jesus I wish that. It scares me too much not knowing.

HOWARD

Del. . .

DELORES

No. I don't want you protecting me, I don't want you hiding behind some brick wall of secrets. If you die, Howard, I want who and what you were to continue living. Is that too much to ask?

HOWARD

Yes. Yes it is.  
 (Pause.)  
 Forget lunch. I ain't hungry.  
 (He leaves the house. DELORES is crying, silently.)

DELORES

It's not "if" Howie. "If" is the wrong word. . .  
 (Lights change as MARISA LOUISE enters the hibakusha station. She turns on the light. On

the screen, we see the image of a Japanese woman, obviously severely wounded, nursing her equally wounded child.)

MARISA LOUISE

(Reading)

The longer I looked for my child, I knew I would not find her. Still, I looked. And I wondered about the wisdom of humankind. Who created this bomb? Smart people. People smarter than me. But are they wise? If they were wise, why would they do such a thing? Why would God let them? I cannot find my child because someone somewhere is smart but not wise. I fear for all mothers and their future of lost children, since humankind has opened the box God knew should not be opened.

(The light is turned off. Lights rise in the Long home as a meal is just being completed. Seated at the table are HOWARD, DELORES, and WINSTON.)

DELORES

. . . just the cutest thing you ever seen. She grabbed my hand, like this, and squeezed it and just squeezed it. For six months, such a grip. Horace was just that pleased -- beamed like he'd done it all by his lonesome. Her name's Lotta Clarinda, named after Lottie's mother and her mother before her. Lord, are those two a pair. You'd think Lotta Clarinda was the last baby girl to be born on this earth.

(HOWARD has pushed his plate back and risen from the table. He waits, but DELORES does not stop her chatter. He goes to the sitting room and turns on the t.v. He channel surfs.)

And already, Lotta Clarinda's just turned six months, and Lottie's pregnant again! Just like that. Old Horace must be full of something more than I ever suspected. (HOWARD has turned the t.v. up too loud.) Turn the volume down a mite, would you, hon?

HOWARD

What?

DELORES

You've got it too loud, sweetie. Turn it down a little, will you please?

(The volume dies a little.)

Tomorrow, your father goes to the hospital for his first radiation treatment. Will you go with us?

WINSTON

I thought it was Lou who was so eager to meet this incredible Dr. Sams.

DELORES

Well, she's going to.

WINSTON

Wow. A Family Journey! That'll be exciting.

DELORES

Actually, Dr. Sams wants to examine us.

WINSTON

Examine? Like how?

DELORES

I don't know. When I called this morning to confirm our appointment, he asked that all of us come in for a brief examination. That's all I know.

WINSTON

I'm not sick.

DELORES

Will you go with us?

WINSTON

Is it important?

DELORES

Dr. Sams made it sound like it was.

WINSTON

Well, shouldn't disappoint the man, should we.

DELORES

Thanks, Hon.

(The phone rings.)

That'll be Marisa Lou. I'll take it in the bedroom.

HOWARD

What?

DELORES

The phone! I said -- I'll take it in the bedroom!

(She goes to the bedroom and shuts the door.

WINSTON clears the table of dishes, leaving them in the kitchen sink. WINSTON, after a long pause, turns off the television)

HOWARD

Well jiminy -- Who do you think you are, Ronald Reagan?

WINSTON

We've got to have a talk.

HOWARD

Had enough talk at dinner tonight. That woman --

WINSTON

No, other talk. With Mom, sometimes it's a matter of keeping silence from taking over. I want to talk, and in my opinion, it's time. I've decided to head back to Greenwood as soon as I can but before I go I need to know a few things.

HOWARD

Like what?

WINSTON

Like -- when're you going to lighten up on Mom. Like when are you going to trust me enough to tell me the truth. Like what're you going to do to get ready for. . . this cancer thing.

HOWARD

That's it? You need to know so little, seems to me. You being a college professor and all, I figured you'd want to know the secrets of the universe.

WINSTON

Well, they'll do for a start.

HOWARD

Let me see then. I don't count on lightening up on Della because she wouldn't know what to do with herself if I did. Trust? That was the second thing, right? Well, son, I figure I'll trust you to handle the truth when you're ready to leave me what little of myself I have left. The last one -- what was it? What'm I doing to ready myself for the cancer? The "cancer thing," I think you called it. What'm I doing. . . Well, for one, I'm hanging in there. For another, I'm going to let it win. What else is there to do but hang in there and lose?

(Pause.)

Well? Anything else? Will you turn my TV back on for me, please?

WINSTON

Like why you dislike me so much.

(HOWARD is silent.)

Listen, Dad, this cancer of yours is real.

HOWARD

I think I know that better than you.

(Pause.)

I don't dislike you, Winston, never have.

WINSTON

You probably don't know this, but everything I've ever done was to please you, to get your approval --

HOWARD

Everything?

WINSTON

I went to Canada --

HOWARD

I know you went to Canada. I don't need reminding that you went to Canada for God's sake. Why bring that up?

WINSTON

Because it feels like it's the main thing between us.

HOWARD

You and your damn feelings. Well, maybe it is. You went to Canada because -- well, you've got this selfish streak, son, no denying it.

(WINSTON tries to interrupt.)

Let me finish. You did not go with my blessing then and you won't get it now. You're my son and for that I love you and am willing to give you just about anything that's within my power to give. But blessings -- well, that's not within my range. If I'd been President, there would never of been amnesty. You'd still be up there and your mother and me would never of seen you again. I don't like to talk about it because to be perfectly frank, Winston, the subject makes me want to throw up.

WINSTON

I wish you'd try to understand --

HOWARD

I understand! You in your eighteen year old brilliance decided you knew more than everybody else.

WINSTON

My lottery number was fourteen! There were hundreds --

HOWARD

Hundreds of selfish no-good traitors! (Pause) So there. Our little talk's finished already.

WINSTON

You said you'd forgiven me. It's been years now, and you said you'd forgive and forget.

HOWARD

I lied. So go home, marry this Jap gal, and leave me to die in peace.

WINSTON

She is Japanese -- not a Jap. She is the woman I love, not some -- some slant-eyed yellow skinned --

HOWARD

And what sort of children do you expect to have?

WINSTON

Beautiful ones. Healthy, perfect -- your grand children. I never knew you to be such a bigot before.

HOWARD

Bigot my . . . You think it was easy, being in Japan when I was, where I was, for as long as I was? Some of the kindest, most giving people I've ever met were there in Nagasaki. And you talk about beautiful children? We'd go on these long walks and visit the wreckage, and in the middle of it all were these remarkable people, scratching at the soil or putting up tin slabs over charred cement blocks, anything to keep the sun off their backs. Flowers were everywhere. It was strange, the mixture of smells -- flowers and rotting human flesh. There was this woman, Omiya, about the same age as Delores, only prettier. Slant eyes? God, they were magnificent. Her hair had been singed off by the fire from the bomb and she wore a rag wrapped around her head. She carried her baby girl strapped to her back. I visited her every day for weeks. She spoke no English, I spoke no Japanese. But we didn't need language, not for what we had to say to one another. She ignored me at first, but I kept bringing her little things, a tin of sardines, another of biscuits, jars of jam, and sticks of gum. She ate the gum like it was food. She finally accepted me I think, got to where I looked forward to seeing her and she me. Only she was sick, got sicker. My CO learned I was giving her food, and he ordered me to stop. I don't know why. Just stop. Something about aiding and abetting. . . (Pause.) I didn't stop.

(Pause.)

Her baby girl died. She was no more than a year old. The kid had these dark spots on her tummy, and her hair fell out, and her skin turned orange and peeled off. It was the bomb sickness as they called it. You know the name they gave folks who survived the A-bomb? Hibakusha. That's what they called her and her baby, hibakusha. They

were hated by other Japanese. Omiya carried her baby on her back for two days before she allowed them to burn the body. I was with her when they took her baby to the bonfire. The fires never went out. Day after day, the fires burned. The only fuel they had to keep them going were the bodies. . .

(Pause.)

My CO caught me with my pockets full of canned food and he confined me to the ship. I didn't get to tell her good-bye. Last time I saw Omiya, she had the brown spots showing up on her forehead and her skin was starting to turn orange. . . Christ, we were sitting on board a supply ship, Winston. We had more food and medicine and bottled water than we knew what to do with, and they wouldn't let us help those people. I wasn't allowed off the ship again, not while we were docked in the Nagasaki harbor. And our supplies stayed on board with me.

(Pause.)

WINSTON

Teach me how not to be a selfish no-good traitor any more.

HOWARD

I don't know how . . .

WINSTON

You got the call, you served. You fought in the great war. Me, I avoided my little one. You didn't shirk. How did you do it?

HOWARD

I went because at eighteen I had already been working at the looms for five years. The cotton mill had trapped my mother, my father, my older brother, and it was trapping me. I joined the Navy to get free of that life, son, and it worked. It was the service that gave me the chance to become something I'd never been before -- a free man.

WINSTON

But after the surrender, you signed up a second time? Why the Marines? And why've you never talked about that?

HOWARD

(Pause)

I can't. I'd like to talk about it, son, but I can't. I took an oath of silence.

WINSTON

I don't understand. Oath? What for?

HOWARD

There in Nagasaki harbor, they approached us. They said you've seen this side of the bomb, you want to see the other? As soon as we left Japan, we knew we were due to be decommissioned. The Circe was going into the scrap heap and all of us with her. . . and I'd come back home to the cotton mill. So, I joined a special branch of the service. They recruited a whole bunch of us who'd been aboard the Circe. There was something about the atom bomb. I mean, to be there, to see the city after only one bomb had been dropped. One bomb and the devastation . . . It was awesome. The power of it. Something difficult to ignore. They needed recruits, they said, to get us ready for World War III. Actually, they called it "The Next Big One." I don't think they were talking about Korea -- though they sent us there for a nine month tour. No action. Just sat around, waiting for the bomb to drop. The pay was the best part of it all. I earned enough in a year to set Delores and me up for life. Thank God for those years. Without them, I don't see how we could have managed during Marisa Louise's problems. So, thanks to my service to my country, we didn't go belly up. You understand, don't you? It's money that makes a man truly free?

WINSTON

And power.

HOWARD

Power of course. Christ, I've already told you more than you need to know.

WINSTON

Well, if you can't tell me more, then write about it.

(HOWARD gives him a look.)

Yeah, sure. Write it down, write everything down. You didn't take an oath not to write, did you?

HOWARD

You're the writer in the family, not me.

DELORES

(Returning from bedroom.)

Marisa Louise says she's surprised with you, Winston, seeing as you're getting married again. And pleased.

(She looks from one to the other.)

Did I interrupt anything? Marisa Lou's on her way over.

HOWARD

Lord have mercy.

DELORES

Can I get anything for you boys? A cup of coffee, sweet?

WINSTON

We're fine, Mom. Sit down, the dishes'll wait.

DELORES

(As she sits.)

What were my two handsomest men in the world talking about?

HOWARD

Get me a cup of coffee.

(DELORES starts up.)

WINSTON

I'll get it. God's sake, Pop, can't you let her sit still for a minute?

(WINSTON goes to kitchen and prepares a cup of coffee.)

DELORES

Seriously, what were you two talking about?

HOWARD

Becoming free.

DELORES

If you figure out how to go about it, let me know.

HOWARD

Do you remember how the President signed this sheet of paper and gave amnesty to all those draft dodgers? It was a sort of freedom --

DELORES

And it brought us our son home from Canada. I prayed none stop for that amnesty.

WINSTON

I would have come home without it.

HOWARD

But you wouldn't have been free. Where's my cream?

(WINSTON gets cream for his coffee.)

Only amnesty could make you free, and that was given. Quite a power, this amnesty. Well, I have some amnesty of my own. Delores Elizabeth Boyd, I'm granting you your freedom in six months -- maybe less. You'll have all the freedom you can stand.

(MARISA LOUISE enters carrying three large cardboard boxes. She dumps the boxes just inside the front door.)

MARISA LOUISE

I'm home.

(She is all smiles.)

HOWARD

What the hell is all this?

MARISA LOUISE

My things. I'm moving in. Look, Winston. I found some origami paper.  
(To DELORES)

You didn't tell him.

DELORES

We just hung up the phone, hon. I didn't know you meant immediately.

MARISA LOUISE

That's what I said, mother. Immediately.

DELORES

I know, but usually you don't mean "immediately." You mean "sometime soon, maybe tomorrow" when you say "immediately."

HOWARD

Anybody care to answer my question? What the hell. . .

MARISA LOUISE

You and me, Daddy. We're going to fold a thousand paper cranes.

HOWARD

She's out to kill me. The cancer's not moving fast enough for her.

MARISA LOUISE

It's easy, Daddy. And like Winston says, it won't make you worse.

HOWARD

Paper cranes?

MARISA LOUISE

Christ, Daddy, when are you ever going to take me seriously?

(WINSTON joins in the laughter.)

Well, hell, laugh then, see if I care.

(She begins to tear up.)

DELORES

Now, Marisa Lou--

MARISA LOUISE

No, mother, it's clear I'm not welcome here.

(She starts off, fumbling with her cardboard boxes.)

HOWARD

Hey!

MARISA LOUISE

Leave me alone.

HOWARD

Hey. . .

MARISA LOUISE

I said---

HOWARD

(Hugging her.)

Hey. . .

MARISA LOUISE

(In his embrace.)

Don't die on me, Daddy. Please. Don't die on me. . .

(Lights fade as WINSTON enters the hibakusha station, turns on the light. We see a slide of a nuclear bomb. He reads.)

WINSTON

(Reading.)

I am become death, the shatterer of dreams.

(He snaps the book shut and turns off the lectern light. The image fades as lights rise in the Long home. It is late evening. No one is home. We HEAR the creek roaring and SEE a few origami cranes, some perfect, others haphazardly done, on the kitchen counter. In a moment, we HEAR an automobile approaching the house. The four

members of the family file in from the outside. DELORES, first, goes directly to her bedroom. HOWARD, second, stands on the porch, looking into the dark. MARISA LOUISE, next, goes to the counter and begins folding cranes. WINSTON, last, doesn't know where to go or what to do. After a moment or two, he goes to the downstairs and returns in a moment with his travel bag, packed.)

WINSTON

(To whomever might be listening.)

Well. . . I guess I'm off.

MARISA LOUISE

Winston?

WINSTON

Yeah, Lou.

MARISA LOUISE

Next time you come home, bring your fiancée with you, okay? I want to meet her.

WINSTON

Sure thing.

(Calling into the bedroom.)

Mom? I'm heading out. Okay?

DELORES

(Entering. She has changed for bed.)

It's too late to be heading off to Carolina, hon. Why don't you get a good night's rest and start out in the morning.

WINSTON

I don't think I'd be able to sleep anyway. Might as well spend the time driving. Less traffic this time of night.

DELORES

Call me when you get to Greenwood? And tell Nora we can't wait to meet her?

WINSTON

Dad? I'm sorry about all this.

HOWARD

Did you know?

WINSTON

I think I might have eventually put two and two together. But no, I didn't. Will you be okay?

HOWARD

Do I have a choice?

WINSTON

Doctors are human, you know. They could be wrong.

(HOWARD glares at him.)

Well, it's possible. I've got to be going.

MARISA LOUISE

You know, it doesn't make any difference, one way or another. I mean, if we fold enough cranes. . .

(She is folding at a rapid pace.)

HOWARD

(To MARISA LOUISE.)

Because of me. . . You are the way you are.

DELORES

I won't let you do this to yourself, Howie --

HOWARD

Because of me, my grandson --

DELORES

Stop it! I mean it.

(Pause.)

It's late. We're all tired. Winston, really, you should wait until morning to leave. Now go put your bag back in your room --

(He kisses his mother on the cheek.)

WINSTON

Tomorrow when I get home, I'm consulting a lawyer.

HOWARD

What about?

WINSTON

Somebody's got to pay for this, damn it.

HOWARD

Like who do you have in mind?

WINSTON

It's obvious to me that this top secret stuff you did in the military --

HOWARD

Is no lawyer's concern. This is a family matter and we'll deal with it like every other family matter -- in the privacy of our own home.

WINSTON

I've got to get out of here, damn it.

(He waits for a moment, then leaves. In a bit we hear his automobile pull away from the house. As he is going, DELORES calls to him.)

DELORES

Call me when you get home. Okay, hon?

HOWARD

How long have you known, Del?

DELORES

Dr. Sams mentioned to me about your sterility, nothing about this genetic stuff. . .

HOWARD

I guess you feel better now.

DELORES

How could I feel --

HOWARD

You are one hundred percent normal. All the burdens in this family? Monkey off your back, they belong to me. Marisa Louise's disfunctions . . . Little Howard's deformity. . . Winston's cowardice. . .

(DELORES glares at him, then goes into the bedroom, slamming the door.)

And my baby is playing with paper dolls.

MARISA LOUISE

I'm trying to save your life, Daddy.

HOWARD

I don't think I want it saved, Sweetheart. Go on to bed, okay? I have a lot of thinking to do.

MARISA LOUISE

(Kissing him on the cheek.)

I already have twenty five done. Will you help me tomorrow?

HOWARD

Sure thing.

(She goes into the basement to her room. HOWARD is alone on the stage. He goes to the counter and sits. After a few moments, he goes to the sideboard and rummages through one of the drawer's contents; he finds what he is looking for, a small leather address book, and thumbs through it. He also finds a pad and pencil. In a moment, he dials a number on the telephone and waits.)

Hello? Hello there. This is Howard Crawford Long calling . . . Hello, are you there? . . . Is that right, that late, huh. I didn't realize. Well, I won't keep you then. . . No, don't hang up. Okay? I'm calling for Spence. Spencer Palkovik. Could I speak to Spence please? . . . Oh, I didn't know. . . When? . . . Is that right. . . What from? . . . Well . . . No, I knew Spence way back when, we were kids together, in the Marines . . . Listen, I'm sorry I bothered you.

(He hangs up. He searches through the address book and dials another number. He waits for the beep, then talks.)

Hello. This is Howard Crawford Long calling, a long time friend of Al Keller. It's been a while since we talked, and I was just making contact. Al can return my call at -- Hello? Hello there. I was leaving a message -- Yeah, I understand, prank calls and all. . . Is that so? It's really that late? Well, I was wondering, do you know how I might reach Al? . . . Oh, no I didn't know that. When? . . . Jesus. . . No, him and me were in the service together. Yeah, that's been a hell of a long time. How did he. . . No, let me guess. Lukemia or lung cancer, right? . . . Yeah, I figured. Look, I'm sorry if -- . . . Thanks, okay? Bye.

(He sits looking at the phone. Lights fade. When lights return, it is several weeks later. HOWIE is at the counter, writing. He coughs into his handkerchief. His writing pad is full. He tosses it aside and begins his search for other pads. He moves much more slowly now. He almost wobbles. After a moment, he bellows and coughs.)

Della? Where do you keep the writing pads around here? Del!  
 (He searches a moment longer before going to the  
 bedroom door and yells.)

Delores Elizabeth!

DELORES (OFF)

(From the bedroom.)

Howie? Are you okay? What is it, hon?  
 (As she enters, he returns to his search.)

HOWARD

I could use some help here.

DELORES

(Watches him for a moment before speaking.)

What are you doing now, sweetheart?

HOWARD

I've run out of paper. How am I supposed to write these things  
 down if I can't find any paper?

MARISA LOUISE

(Coming in from the basement door.)

What's going on? The house on fire or what?

HOWARD

Go back to bed, Lou. Nothing's the matter.

MARISA LOUISE

What time is it?

DELORES

Howard, do you know what time it is?

HOWARD

I've got no use for time.

DELORES

Well, I do. For Heaven's sake, sweetheart, it's two in the morning and we have to be at  
 the hospital at nine for your treatment.

(To MARISA LOUISE.)

Go on back to bed, hon. He's just being his normal outlandish self.

HOWARD

Fine. I'll find it myself if you don't want to help.

MARISA LOUISE

Find what?

HOWARD

(Bellowing.)

Go back to bed, Marisa Louise. Goddamn it.

MARISA LOUISE

(On the verge of tears.)

Well, you don't have to yell at me, Daddy.

DELORES

Now look at what you've done.

HOWARD

Me?

MARISA LOUISE

If you don't want me living with you, all you have to do is say so.

(She waits a moment before leaving. She slams the basement door as she goes.)

HOWARD

(Under his breath.)

So.

DELORES

I swear, sometimes --

HOWARD

I thought I told you to pick up some writing pads next time you go to the store. You went to the store this morning, so where're my writing pads?

DELORES

Did you check the table beside your easy chair?

HOWARD

(He does. The writing pads are there.)

Now that's smart. Who in the world would think to put things like these out where they don't belong?

(He sits at the counter and prepares to write.)

DELORES

Well, I'm going back to bed. Don't bother me anymore tonight, okay, sweet? I've got too many things to do tomorrow.

HOWARD

Get me a cup of coffee, will you?

DELORES

(Pause.)

What did you say?

HOWARD

Get me a cup of coffee, that's a sweetie.

DELORES

There's no coffee made. You know that. I'll fix you some coffee in the morning if that's all right.

HOWARD

Now -- if you don't mind.

DELORES

There's some Maxwell House instant in the cupboard --

HOWARD

(Putting his pen down.)

You know I can't drink that instant crapola. It tastes like ground dog turds mixed with hot water.

DELORES

Well, hon, I guess you'll just have to be satisfied with dog turds, less you want to brew you some coffee yourself.

HOWARD

What say?

DELORES

I'm saying. . . Get it yourself.

HOWARD

I don't know how to brew coffee.

DELORES

Then it's time you learned. I'm going to bed.

HOWARD

Del? Did I say something? Do anything?

DELORES

Nothing new, no. It's just that I'm tired and sleepy, and I want to go to bed. In my opinion, twelve-fourteen hours a day of waiting on you hand and foot is enough. I don't need to do it at wee hours in the morning.

(He gets a hurt look on his face.)

You can look like that all you want, Howard Long. It's not doing you a bit of good.

HOWARD

Look like what?

DELORES

Like somebody busted your party balloon. Actually, if you do make yourself some coffee, don't break the cup, and clean up after yourself, put everything away. And if you're going to continue this writing you're doing, I'd appreciate your going someplace else. The glare from here is keeping me awake. Be sure to turn off all the lights when you finish. And don't come to bed. You'll find a pillow and a blanket in the hall closet, you can sleep on the sofa. No more bellowing, either. Marisa Louise and me need our beauty sleep. And first thing you do in the morning? You apologize to your daughter. Do you understand what I'm saying to you, hon?

HOWARD

Yes. Make my own coffee.

DELORES

What else?

HOWARD

Go write some place else.

DELORES

And?

HOWARD

Apologize.

DELORES

That's right. Good night, sweetheart.

HOWARD

Good night, my love.

(She goes. HOWARD sits for a moment contemplating making himself a cup of coffee. He decides against it. He turns off the lights. The moon throws shafts of light across the floor. We see HOWARD approach the hibakusha station with his writing pen and pads. There, he turns on the lectern light and writes. He continues to write as the lights change in the Long home. He moves to the sofa and lies down, DELORES covering him with a blanket and MARISA LOUISE hanging folded cranes about the room. When the lights have returned to full, it is five months later. WE hear HOWARD's rasping cough; he is quite ill. DELORES sits beside him, dozing. The t.v. is not turned on.

There is silence except for the gentle sound of rushing water coming from the creek. Strewn about the room are thousands of paper cranes, strung together and hanging like decorations from every possible place. In a moment we HEAR an AUTOMOBILE approach, idle, then go quiet. In another moment, WINSTON approaches the house with his travel bag. He enters the house. DELORES meets him at the door with a hug that is long and tight.)

DELORES

Oh, Winston, I'm so glad you were able to come. He's been waiting just for you.

WINSTON

He's asleep?

DELORES

Thank goodness, yes. Here, let me take your bag.

WINSTON

I've got it, mother.

DELORES

You're awful thin. Are you eating properly? Where's Nora? I thought she was coming with you. You promised I could meet her.

WINSTON

She had too much work to do, couldn't get off.

DELORES

Oh, hon, I'm so sorry. I was so looking forward to meeting her.  
 (He looks at his father for a long moment.  
 HOWARD's breathing is raspy. His eyes  
 open. He sees WINSTON standing in front of him.)

HOWARD

Well. . . would you look what the cat drug in. . .  
 (His eyes close and his raspy breathing returns.  
 WINSTON sits on the sofa, staring at his father  
 while DELORES carries his bag into the bedroom.  
 In a moment, she returns and stands with her  
 hands clasped in front of her.)

DELORES

You must be famished after your long drive.

WINSTON

How in God's name has this--  
 (He gestures widely.)

DELORES

He's given up, son. That's all. Stopped eating last week. There's nothing we can do. I  
 believe he's been waiting for you. Now you're here.

WINSTON

Why isn't he in the hospital?

DELORES

There's little they can do for him there. All they have left to offer is comfort. He can get  
 what little comfort there is here. He's better off at home. This is where he belongs.

WINSTON

God, mother.

DELORES

I suppose I should have prepared you better. The radiation treatments have affected  
 his voice somehow or other. One morning, he sounded like an eighty year old woman.  
 I don't know.

WINSTON

He's so. . . old.

DELORES

I'm sorry, Winston. It's been hard.

(She is weeping silently.)

Oh, I promised myself this wouldn't happen. Would you look at me? Blubbering like a baby.

WINSTON

(Holding her tightly.)

Hey, there, I'm home. It's all right. It's fine.

DELORES

There. I've finished. It's daily, you know. Once a day I have to turn on the spigot. Wash myself clean, then I'm fine. You see? Fine and dandy. Marisa Lou? Your brother's home!

MARISA LOUISE

(From the porch where she is lying unseen on the sofa.)

I know. I heard him.

WINSTON

How you doing, sis?

MARISA LOUISE

Shitty I guess.

DELORES

Well, now listen. It's good having you home. I've got a bunch of things waiting for me to finish in back. You make yourself comfortable the best you can. You need anything, you just let me know.

WINSTON

Mother. I have some papers from the lawyer. They need your signature.

DELORES

You're serious about going through with this?

WINSTON

Someone must accept responsibility.

DELORES

For what?

(He can't answer.)

Leave them on the counter. I'll get to them when I get to them.

(She goes into the bedroom. WINSTON goes to the porch and sits with his sister.)

WINSTON

Good to see you, sis.

MARISA LOUISE

Yeah.

(Pause.)

You're lucky, you know that? You get to hang out over there in Carolina while the rest of us have to be here, watching him slip away. It's not fair if you ask me.

WINSTON

Well, I'm home now . . .

MARISA LOUISE

I see that . . .

WINSTON

Well, Christ, Lou, maybe I should go back to Carolina if that's the way you feel about it.

MARISA LOUISE

It makes no difference, one way or other. Leave, stay, it makes no difference whatsoever.

WINSTON

I like your paper cranes.

MARISA LOUISE

Folded almost three thousand of them. Old wife's tale. Didn't make one bit of difference. . .

WINSTON

(After a pause.)

I'll let you finish your nap.

MARISA LOUISE

Not sleeping. I just lie here, waiting. It won't be long now with you home.

(They are both silent for a moment.)

I have a job, you know. Nights. I'm cashier at a Seven Eleven north of Canton. And I hate it. I've been thinking about taking some courses over at Rhinehart since I work nights.

WINSTON

You'll need to finish high school first.

MARISA LOUISE

Damn it, Winston, I'm not stupid. I may be a lot of things. But stupid ain't one of them.

WINSTON

Sorry. I didn't mean. . .

MARISA LOUISE

When you work nights at a Seven Eleven, you have time to think an awful lot. Of course, you wouldn't know that. You wouldn't know either that I got my GED last fall.

WINSTON

Well now, that's what I call good news.

MARISA LOUISE

I didn't think I could do it, but I did. Not all that difficult either, not really. So I've been thinking -- a college course here and there might be the thing to do. I'd like to study art. Would you send me some information about the college where you teach?

WINSTON

Be happy to.

MARISA LOUISE

I'd appreciate it. Would you help me -- if I needed it?

WINSTON

I would enjoy it.

MARISA LOUISE

You think I might visit you, maybe take a look at this college of yours? You think that might be possible?

WINSTON

More than possible. A sure thing. Who knows? You might even enroll in one of my classes. I'd like that.

MARISA LOUISE

Doubt it. I hate history.

WINSTON

Do you suppose we -- you and me -- might be friends one of these days?

MARISA LOUISE

I always thought we were. Daddy's been waiting for you to get home. I've been here every day, but that doesn't seem to matter to him any. He never loved me anyway. It

was always you. You were the smart one, the one to succeed. I was just the one they had to put up with, pay out big doctor's bills for, more trouble than she was worth.

WINSTON

You know that's not true.

MARISA LOUISE

There's no need for you to lie to me. I'm a big girl. I can take it.

WINSTON

Fine. I won't lie. The truth. He loves you far more than you will ever know. It's a shame that he's going to his grave without telling you just how much he loves you.

MARISA LOUISE

Hey, bro -- you win some, you lose some --

WINSTON

And some never get out of the starting blocks.

MARISA LOUISE

You got your bottle?

WINSTON

What do you think?

(He pulls a bottle from his bag.)

I'll get a glass.

MARISA LOUISE

Who needs a glass?

(She drinks.)

WINSTON

We -- you and me -- may never be friends, but at least we can be drinking buddies.

MARISA LOUISE

You're more than my friend, you know that. All I know is my Daddy's leaving me . . .

WINSTON

Something we have in common.

MARISA LOUISE

Yeah. Fancy that. And Mother's becoming a widow. She deserves better.

(She drinks.)

I'm real disappointed you didn't bring your sweetheart with you.

WINSTON

Nora and I are no longer . . . Well, I broke it off.

MARISA LOUISE

I'm sorry. Why?

WINSTON

All this stuff with Dad. . . The genetic thing. I was afraid. I mean, I really want to have children. Children with Nora. But what if my genes are. . . I couldn't do that to her. Or myself. Listen to me. Will I ever get past being so selfish?

MARISA LOUISE

I think it's not selfish at all. As long as she understood.

WINSTON

That time I went to Canada. That was the Big Selfish. I don't blame Dad for not being able to forgive me.

MARISA LOUISE

You were right to go. You were against the war.

WINSTON

And nothing but the truth. I went because I didn't want to die.

(Looking at his sister for the first time. She is smiling in a knowing way.)

You know sis, I think you're right. You are more than a friend.

MARISA LOUISE

Drinking buddies.

(They drink.)

I really wish I could have met your Japanese girlfriend, though. The Japanese in the movies are always such beautiful people.

WINSTON

(Beat.)

I miss her.

MARISA LOUISE

I'd like to tell her. Her myth about the thousand cranes? It's full of crap.

WINSTON

You tried. Isn't that what counts?

MARISA LOUISE

It was the least I could do. That's what it turned out to be the least.

HOWARD

(He is awake. He calls out.)

Hey? Somebody?

(DELORES rushes in from bedroom.)

WINSTON

(Not moving.)

Dad's awake.

DELORES

I'm right here, hon.

HOWARD

Did Winston get here yet?

DELORES

You spoke to him. He's on the porch with Marisa Lou.

HOWARD

He's here?

DELORES

Yes, sweet.

HOWARD

Would you tell him. . .

DELORES

(Calling.)

Winston? Your father wants you.

(WINSTON comes, followed by MARISA LOUISE.)

Here he is, Howard.

HOWARD

Winston?

WINSTON

Right here, Dad. How you doing.

HOWARD  
(Taking WINSTON's hand.)

Thank God.

DELORES

Do you need a shot?

WINSTON

A shot?

DELORES

Morphine.

HOWARD  
Don't let her shoot me, son. You don't know. . . Morphine does nothing. Dulls it, but it doesn't go away. Del, get Winston a glass of water.

WINSTON

I don't want--

HOWARD  
A glass of tea then. Get him something. Go.

DELORES

If you want me I'll be. . .  
(She goes to bedroom.)

HOWARD  
Winston, there's something -- Come close. There's something I want you to have.

WINSTON

Later, okay?

HOWARD  
No, it can't be later. Listen carefully.  
(He hands WINSTON a sealed envelope.)  
Don't open this until after the funeral. Promise me you won't open it until I'm in the ground.

WINSTON

I promise.

HOWARD

An oath is for life. The rest, they're all dead. I couldn't find any of the others. Most dead years ago. I don't know if they kept their oath or not, but I did. I have. But the silence has to stop somewhere.

(He pats the envelope.)

You're smart. You'll know what to do with this. Do whatever you want, I won't care. They're all dead anyway. Same as me . . . Marisa Lou --

MARISA LOUISE

Right here, Daddy.

HOWARD

Maybe if you'd fold a couple hundred more cranes for me. . .

(He closes his eyes.)

WINSTON

(After a pause.)

I'll be here when you wake up, Dad. I'll be right here.

(MARISA LOUISE has joined WINSTON.

He stands, gives her a long embrace.)

There's nothing to worry about, not really. You realize that, don't you, Lou?

MARISA LOUISE

(Rocking him gently as she whispers, patting him gently as he weeps in silence.)

Hey, there, bro. We're in this together, okay? Hey there. . . hey. . .

(Lights slowly fade in the Long home and rise in the hibakusha station. WINSTON, DELORES, and MARISA LOUISE enter it; he turns on the lectern lamp. A slide appears behind him, one of HOWARD as a young man dressed in Navy white surrounded by fellow swabbies.

He opens the envelop and reads. He looks for a moment and speaks directly to us.)

WINSTON

Howard Crawford Long was a hibakusha. Here is what my father wrote.

(Reading.)

In February, 1946, I was recruited out of the Navy and into the Marines, a special unit, high security. We were known simply as Charlie Company, but we called ourselves Cattle Squad. We were given special training first in San Diego, then in New Mexico up in the mountains, then in Nevada for awhile, later on a remote island somewhere in the Bering Sea.

(He is joined by HOWARD who speaks from his rocker, sitting in a tight spot of light.)

The training took up four years and I was told, if I re-upped for a second stretch, my salary would be quadrupled. A thousand dollars a month, who could beat that?

HOWARD

(Taking over by himself, still in his rocker, WINSTON standing in the hibakusha station.)

We went on mission after mission, always top secret. Then on October 22, 1952, we were shipped to the Marshall Islands somewhere in the Pacific, a place called Eniwetok Atoll. There on November 1, we witnessed something like I never dreamed existed. The world exploded and I felt the power of God sweep across the sea. They called it "The H Bomb." We were later told the Russians had exploded a similar bomb somewhere in central Asia. And that scared us. I don't recall ever being so scared before.

(Slide of a nuclear explosion.)

MARISA LOUISE

(Replacing WINSTON at the reading station.)

My father was a hibakusha.

(Reads)

A year afterwards we went back to the Eniwetok Atoll, top secret mission, and we found nothing there. No life of any sort -- no plants, no animals, no insects.

(She is joined by HOWARD who has risen from his chair.)

The place was a desert in the middle of the sea.

HOWARD

(Standing at his rocker in a tight spot.)

I re-upped again, this time making over fifteen hundred dollars a month. They hauled us into the Nevada desert where we stayed for a year and a half. During that year and a half, we received no liberty and could send letters home only if they had been read by officers. There were three hundred of us in Cattle Squad, a close knit bunch of guys. We watched as device after device exploded there in the desert wasteland, each time different, each time the same.

DELORES

(Replacing MARISA LOUISE at the reading station.)

My husband did not tell me while he lived that he was a hibakusha.

(Reads. HOWARD approaches her at the station.)

My family was growing up and I wasn't allowed to be part of that. I tried to gain early discharge, but I was told it would be unpatriotic to leave the service at such a crucial time.

(HOWARD joining her.)

Then word came, the Big Boom was set for July 4.

HOWARD

(Taking over for her. She stands in the station,  
he to the side.)

We dug our fox holes twenty feet deep. They told us the Big Boom was going to take place less than three miles away, and we were to go in. That was why we were Marines, right? It scared me. In the Pacific, we had been over twenty miles away at sea. Here we were under three miles back. And they told us the Big Boom was ten times greater than anything that had ever been tested before. The Fourth of July came and went, no fireworks. Then on July 5, I thought the whole world had come to an end.

(The slide changes. A series of slides of various moments inside a nuclear explosion. He is in the station.)

The shock wave threw me out of our fox hole. A wind came from nowhere and as I tried to crawl back into the bunker, it caught me under the arm pits and hurled me through the air. A desert dune broke my flight. I think that when I hit the ground, I lost consciousness. The fireball passed over us high in the air. Water in my canteen turned to steam. My goggles felt like they were melting into my eye sockets. Then word came, move in. Go slow but get as close to ground zero as possible. My Geiger counter was off the scale already, so it did no good keeping it on.

(The screen goes dark.)

Some of the best buddies I ever made were in Cattle Squad. Long after we were discharged, we kept in touch. Three hundred of us. As I write this, I have lost contact with all but eight. The rest have died, either of leukemia -- they went quick -- or lung cancer, like myself. As we moved in that morning, we got separated. Three of us stuck together. What we saw sent all three of us to the hospital. It was a steel cage. It had been twisted out of shape by the bomb. I was the first to see what was inside that cage. There, handcuffed by the wrist to the side of the cage was the burnt body of a human being. When I told the captain what I'd seen, he looked at me like I was crazy. The other two told him, too, we had all seen it. The captain decided all three of us were crazy. They separated us after that. I lost touch with the other two guys, their names were Spence Palkovik and Al Keller. They're both dead now. I underwent what they called psychological testing in San Diego and after six weeks of that was assigned to a VA hospital in Hot Springs, South Dakota for six months. After that, I signed a statement which said in so many words that I had hallucinated while in the field that day. But I know: what I saw was no hallucination. I had wanted to share this with all of you earlier, but I took an oath back when I was recruited. That oath said, as God was my witness, that as long as I lived, I would never share with anyone what I was about to engage in. As God is my witness and for as long as I have lived, I have kept my oath.

(Pause. HOWARD leaves the station; MARISA LOUISE returns. She has her own confession

to read. She unfolds it as we see the image of  
Little Howard on the screen behind her.)

MARISA LOUISE

(Reading.)

To Whom It May Concern. My name is Marisa Louise Long. I am a second generation American hibakusha, and I'm still alive. My only son, Howard Crawford Long, Junior, was a third generation American hibakusha, and he's not. There are more of us than you could possibly know . . .

(She leaves, turning off the lectern light. Lights in the hibakusha station dim out except for the image on the screen of three American sailors standing at the base of a telephone pole in Nagasaki with the sign over their heads that reads "Atomic Field."

End of Play.)

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