

DEPENDABLE

Written by

Rachel Troche

"The suicide rate among US veterans is 57.3% greater than non-veterans, and the second leading cause of death of veterans under the age of 45.

It currently outpaces combat deaths 4:1."

-US Department of Veterans Affairs

OVER BLACK:

SUPER:

dependa: (n) a derogatory term for a military spouse, implying they are seen as reliant on their service member for their identity or well-being. Often perceived as lazy, entitled, or ungrateful.

TOMMY (V.O.)

Hey mom? Mom?

INT. AIRPORT TERMINAL - ARRIVALS - DAY

A sea of mostly women and children dressed in patriotic colors, necks strained towards the gate, waiting.

MEG (30s) stands out from the crowd, modest but alert, like a doe in an open field. She shifts her weight in her heels, tugging at her skirt riding up her leg with one hand, a fistful of poster boards in the other. She checks her watch.

TOMMY (8) yanks on Meg's sleeve.

TOMMY (O.S.)

Mom -

MEG

Yeah?

TOMMY

You know what I'm going to do when I see him?

MEG

What's that, buddy?

TOMMY

I'm going to run up and give him the biggest hug.

She smiles, her eyes welling with tears, and kisses him on the head.

MEG

That's a great idea, Tommy. I think I'll do that, too.

DEACON (6) hops from one colored floor square to the next, his shoes untied. CREWS (2) does his best to copy him. His loud GIGGLES echo through the space, attracting eyeballs.

INSERT - ARRIVAL BOARD

The Dallas flight is scheduled to arrive at 1:50pm.

Meg looks at her watch - 1:48. She shifts her weight again.
Should've worn the flats.

DEACON

What if he doesn't recognize us?

MEG

What do you mean?

DEACON

Grandma said we got taller and you made us get haircuts --what if he doesn't recognize us and leaves with some other family?

MEG

Daddy's not going to leave with another family.

TOMMY

What about you?

MEG

What about me?

TOMMY

You never wear this much makeup.

DEACON

Yeah, you look like a lady, there's no way he'll recognize you.

Meg tilts her head, *gee thanks.*

Her eyes dart to the arrival board.

INSERT - ARRIVAL BOARD

The Dallas flight has big bold letters next to it now -
ARRIVED.

Meg tries to steady her breath.

DEACON

How much longer?

MEG

Any minute now, buddy. He's here, he's just getting off the plane.

DEACON

But we've been waiting forever...

She drops her head in frustration, sees his shoe is untied.

MEG

Deacon, come here. Didn't we just fix these?

He nods, his head down.

MEG

Next time I want to see you do it by yourself. I know you know how to do it.

As she ties, Meg notices an influx of squeaky sneakers and rolling luggage on the tile floor. She quickly makes a sloppy knot with the laces, then stands.

MEG

Boys, come stand with mommy. Hold your signs so daddy can see.

She separates the posters from her cramping fingers and hands them out -

- Tommy holds up a red and blue handprint "welcome home" sign stained with little sneaker prints.
- Deacon and Crews each take a side of a sign that reads "good thing you're home, mom quit two weeks ago."
- Meg holds on to one with "I'd wait forever but 335 days is long enough" scrawled on it.

MEG

(deep calming breath)
Let's play who can spot daddy first.

Worn and weathered travelers are filing through the arrival gate. Through the sweatpants and neck pillows, Meg spots some camo. She strains her eyes. *Not him.*

More camo passes them, the echos of happy reunions filling the terminal. Tommy bobs and weaves his head trying to see.

The crowd thins. Meg looks around. *Did she miss him?*

DEACON

I-I don't see him...

MEG

Don't worry baby, he's coming.
(MORE)

MEG (CONT'D)
 (to herself)
 He's coming.

From the corner of her eye, she catches Tommy sprinting towards the gate. She's about to call to him when -

HENRY (30s) appears, wearing his army green camo and carrying a stuffed bear. He stoops to meet Tommy at his level and sweeps him up into his arms.

Deacon follows Tommy's lead, running towards Henry at full speed. Crews, on the other hand, plants his face into Meg's skirt. She picks him up as he wriggles his head into the crook of her neck and inserts his thumb into his mouth.

The overwhelming sounds and chatter of a busy airport blur together, then fade to nothing. Nothing but Henry's voice getting clearer as Meg gets closer.

HENRY
 You graduated kindergarten?! Wow,
 you're so smart dude! I'm so sorry
 I missed it.

Henry looks up and smiles. He reaches out to Crews.

HENRY (CONT'D)
 Hey Crews, remember me? It's daddy.

Crews buries his face into Meg's shoulder. Henry rubs his back, trying to coax him into a hug, but he doesn't budge.

Meg looks up at Henry.

MEG
 (apologetically)
 He's - just excited.

Henry takes a few gentle steps closer. She brushes a stray hair out of her face, and tugs on her skirt one more time.

MEG
 Hi.

HENRY
 Hi.

He pulls her in for a kiss. She melts into his arms.

TOMMY
 Ew, gross guys, seriously?

HENRY
 What? I haven't seen your mom for a
 whole year!

He plants another one on her and she blushes. The kids gag.

DEACON
 EW!

HENRY
 All right, all right! Yeesh!

MEG
 Welcome home, Henry.

INT. AIRPORT - BAGGAGE CLAIM

Two LARGE BLACK BAGS are the only ones left CLANKING around
 on the turnstile.

Henry yanks them off the conveyor belt, they SLAM to the
 floor.

MEG (CONT'D)
 What'd ya do? Bring all of
 Afganistan with you?

HENRY
 Everything but the camels.

TOMMY AND DEACON
 You brought us a camel?!

HENRY
 No I said I *didn't* bring any
 camels.

TOMMY
 Aw, man.

DEACON
 What did you bring us?

Tommy and Deacon talk over each other with curious
 questions. Crews tries to climb on top of the bag while
 everyone's back are turned. He teeters - Meg grabs him just
 before he falls, and he SHRIEKS.

Henry spins around and covers his ears, eyes full of fear,
 can't catch his breath.

Everything stops. Eyes wide, Crews, Deacon, Tommy and Meg
 all stare at Henry.

MEG
Henry? You okay?

HENRY
Yeah--yeah I'm, I'm good.
(recover)
I'm sorry. It's just - been a long
day. Can - can we go home now?

MEG
Yeah - yeah, of course. Here,
Crews, hold mommy's hand. Deacon
take the posters, and Tommy you can
help mommy pull daddy's suitcase -

DEACON
I wanna pull the suitcase -

HENRY
No, it's fine, I got it.

MEG
Crews, hold mommy's hand.

CREWS
NO!

TOMMY
Daddy?

HENRY
GUYS - can we PLEASE just get to
the car?

Everyone recoils.

HENRY
I promise I'll get your presents
out of my bags when we get home. I
just -- I can't unpack in the
middle of the airport.

Henry marches towards the exit with his bags, not waiting
for anyone else. Tommy and Deacon take off after him.

Meg pauses, her shoulders tense, frozen.

CREWS (O.S.)
Mommy I want up.

She shudders, snapping back to reality, and instinctively
picks him up. She takes a deep breath, then forges ahead.

I/E. CAR - DAY

Meg studies Henry as he drives - he's thinner than she remembered, some new gray hairs in his sideburns, a few extra lines by his eyes.

She places her hand on his thigh. His calloused hand meets hers and squeezes.

EXT. THATCHER HOME - DAY

A cookie cutter development with manicured front lawns.

At the end of a cul-de-sac is a home with grass that's peppered with American flags and dandelions, a large WELCOME HOME yard sign planted in it.

The green hatchback turns into the driveway. The car is barely in park before Tommy and Deacon are out and onto the lawn showing off the sign.

TOMMY

Look dad!

DEACON

I put the H-O-M-E in! And no one helped me.

CREWS

(shouting)

I put flags Daddy!

TOMMY

What do you think?

Henry steps out of the car.

HENRY

Wow, looks great guys.

MEG

Is it too much?

HENRY

(yes)

Nah, it's great.

INT. THATCHER HOME - LIVING ROOM

Neatly disorganized, clean-ish, a little small for a family of five.

The front door swings open. Deacon rushes in and kicks his shoes off. They fly across the entryway, scuffing the walls on their way to the floor.

Meg runs in with Crews. She quickly tries to rub the scuff marks off with her skirt. She gives the room one last look over - it's as good as it's going to get.

Tommy tries to drag a duffel bag twice his size over the threshold with both hands. Henry is behind him with two more bags, looking impatient. He give Tommy's bag a shove with his boot.

MEG

Deacon, go let Colonel out, please.

DEACON

Okay!

He takes off towards the kitchen.

Henry and Tommy get the bags through the door and pile them next to the sofa. Meg stares as the already small space just got smaller.

HENRY

I'll move them tomorrow.

MEG

Oh, it's no problem -- just glad to have you home.

She kisses him on the cheek.

HENRY

Does it smell funny?

MEG

What?

HENRY

The house - it smells - weird.

MEG

Oh...must be the air fresheners? I refilled them all yesterday, and the kids helped me mop.

He looks around the space.

HENRY

You changed the furniture.

MEG
Yeah, I just -- needed to do something.

HENRY
Where'd you put all our stuff?

MEG
In the basement.

HENRY
Why?

MEG
I didn't get rid of anything, just - needed a change.

HENRY
What's wrong with how it was?

COLONEL, a big black Labrador, gallops into the living room, Tommy and Deacon chasing after him. He BARKS as he charges at Henry. Henry jumps.

MEG
Colonel! Down!

She wrangles him by the collar, dragging him away from Henry. He doesn't stop barking.

HENRY
Colonel? Seriously?

MEG
Tommy picked it.

HENRY
(to Tommy)
Why's the dog gotta to outrank me, kid?
(to Deacon)
Does he ever stop barking?

DEACON
Not really.

MEG
COLONEL! QUIET!

All the boys, including Henry, cover their ears. The dog finally stops barking, but continues to stare at Henry.

MEG
He'll get used to you.

HENRY

So...what else changed while I was
away?

Everyone sits with this, unsure how to answer. Meg's eyes
drop to the floor, wishing she could move it all back.

CREWS

Mommy, I wanna eat.

MEG

Oh shoot, I forgot we haven't eaten
yet. What does everybody want? I'll
place an order.

TOMMY, DEACON + CREWS

(over each other)

Grilled cheese! Hot dogs! Pasta!

MEG

What about you, babe?

HENRY

Oh, uh...I dunno.

(daydreaming)

That garlic butter steak from Moe's
Steak spot sounds good.

MEG

Oh, uhm...they actually closed last
year.

HENRY

For real?

MEG

Yeah...sorry.

HENRY

(deflated)

Well that fucking sucks...

DEACON

Fuck's a bad word, daddy.

MEG

Deacon!

HENRY

Shit, you're right Deacon.

DEACON

Daddy!

HENRY
Sorry, fuck!

DEACON
(laughing)
Daddy!

Tommy and Crews can't stop laughing. Meg is trying to keep it together.

MEG
Boys - including daddy - no more cussing. This isn't the army.

HENRY
All right, all right, fine.
(to Tommy)
Wait, I forget, what words can't I say?

DEACON
(laughing)
Fuck.

TOMMY
(laughing)
Don't forget shit.

HENRY
Fuck and shit, got it.

CREWS
Fuck fuck fuck!

MEG
(can't keep it together)
GUYS!

Colonel starts barking again. The competing sounds blend together like an underwater whir. Henry shifts in his seat, his smile fading. Meg notices he's no longer laughing.

MEG
Not even home for five minutes and already got them cussing...
(to all the boys)
For real now, no more.

A moment of calm. Henry and Meg let out a sigh, unintentionally in unison.

TOMMY
Wait, what about our presents?

DEACON
Yeah, daddy said he had presents!

CREWS
I want present!

MEG
Guys, we just got here.

DEACON
Please, daddy?

CREWS
Pwease daddy?

HENRY
All right all right, go grab my bag.

TOMMY
Which one?

HENRY
I don't even know to be honest.
Just start opening 'em.

Tommy rips open one of the black duffel bags and its contents spill onto the floor - rolled up shirts, socks, a few smashed pieces of a mug.

HENRY
(re: mug)
Well, there's one present.

Henry grabs a few of the pieces, sees how they would fit together.

HENRY
(to Meg)
That one was yours.

MEG
Maybe I can glue it...

She puts her arms around his neck. He half smiles, still staring at the shards of mug on the floor while Tommy continues to dig.

HENRY
Hang on, Tommy, you're making a mess of everything here and you're going to get cut.
(Tommy continues)
Tommy STOP.

Tommy doesn't stop until he slices his finger on a shard of broken mug. He grabs his hand to squelch a cry.

HENRY

You cut your finger didn't you?
 Didn't I tell you to stop? You see
 what happens when you don't listen?

He pushes Tommy out of the way, starts weeding through the rest of the bag.

MEG

(to Tommy)
 Is it bleeding?

Tommy shakes his head no. Henry turns, chops the air with a knifehand, his fingertips centimeters away from Tommy's nose (like a finger point, but all five fingers are pointed at the discipline - very common among sergeants to lower enlisted).

HENRY

Next time just fucking listen the first time.

DEACON

(daddy said it again)
 Daddy -

MEG

Deacon, don't.

Her eyes track Henry as he digs through the bag - his weathered skin, swollen biceps, furrowed brow. Familiar, yet foreign.

She looks over at Tommy, nursing the cut on this finger. His eyes catch hers. He hides his finger and stands up straighter, totally fine.

Deacon and Crews arch their necks trying to see into the bag. Henry's hand re-appears with a stuffed camel wearing a camouflage hat.

DEACON

You said you didn't bring a camel.

HENRY

I lied.

CREWS

That's mine!

DEACON
What about me?

HENRY
Don't worry, I got you one too.

He pulls out a second camel with a hat on. Deacon gives it a big squeeze.

HENRY
(to Tommy)
I got you something special buddy,
come here.

Tommy kneels next to Henry. Henry pulls out a wooden box, opens it to reveal an exquisite marble chess set.

HENRY
This is just for us, okay?

TOMMY
But I don't know how to play.

HENRY
I'll teach you. Go and find a safe
place for it, and we'll start
learning tomorrow.

Tommy runs off. Henry looks up to see Meg smiling at him.

HENRY
You think he likes it?

She nods. He sits with this for a moment, relieved.

HENRY
I'm going to take a shower - is the
bathroom still in the same place?

MEG
For now...

Colonel follows after him with a low rumbling growl.

HENRY
(to dog)
Yeah yeah yeah...

The bathroom door slams a little louder than she's used to, she jumps.

Her phone BUZZES.

INSERT - MEG'S PHONE

Text Message from AUDREY - "Did he make it home yet?"

She types back - "yes...finally!"

Audrey replies - "oh, thank God!" with a link to a news article - there was an attack at a base in Afghanistan with casualties.

Meg's fingers hover over the link. She hesitates, but she doesn't click. She puts her phone away and grabs Henry's army boots. She places them next to the door with the other shoes, ceremoniously.

He's home.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

The house is quiet.

Paper plates and styrofoam containers litter the countertops. Colonel munches on the crust of a grilled cheese under the high chair.

INT. BOYS BEDROOM - NIGHT

A galaxy of stars dances on the ceiling from the nightlight on the bed side table.

Tommy and Deacon each in their own beds under crumpled comforters, fast asleep.

INT. MASTER BATHROOM - NIGHT

Meg and Henry lie awake in bed, with Crews squished between them, contently snoozing away, having completely ruined the moment.

Meg's eyes meet Henry's.

MEG

Hey...I'm really glad you're home.

HENRY

Yeah?

MEG

Yeah. The kids are too. It hasn't been the same without you.

She smiles. He feigns one.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

Crews is awake, poking Meg in the nose with his little finger. She cracks one eye open.

CREWS

Guh morning mommy.

MEG

Good morning, Crewsy.

He rolls out of the bed and toddles out of the room. Her hand falls to the side of the bed where Henry should be, but it's empty. Even his pillow is gone. *Did she dream him coming home?*

She hears faint playful screeching from down the hall and checks her phone - 6:23am.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MORNING

Meg stretches into her robe, rubbing her eyes. She opens them to see all of Henry's bags still on the floor where he left them. She smiles.

Crews shoves his little legs into Henry's boots - they come all the way up to his hips. He waddles over to Henry, asleep on the floor.

His tiny, chubby finger pokes Henry's chin. Henry startles, but doesn't fully wake.

CREWS

Guh morning, daddy. Looh, I army too.

HENRY

(grunts)

You sure are, buddy. What time is it?

MEG

Early. Why didn't you sleep in the bed?

HENRY

Too soft.

Deacon and Tommy charge into the room, waving lightsabers, engaged in a heated intergalactic battle.

Tommy jumps on top of Henry's bags.

TOMMY

It's over, Anakin, I have the high ground!

DEACON

Oh yeah? We'll see about that!

MEG

Tommy, get off those please.

TOMMY

Take that!

He THWACKS his light saber against Deacon's. Colonel BARKS each time it hits.

HENRY

Guess I'm getting up now...

Crews maneuvers his way in-between Tommy and Deacon and tries to perch himself on top of the bags.

Deacon swings his light saber. It connects with Tommy's and bounces back, smacking Crews right in the forehead.

He SCREAMS as he and one of the bags crash to the floor, spilling socks, shirts, and manilla folders all over the hardwood.

Henry jumps, yanks his pillow and blanket off the floor and storms down the hall. The bedroom door SLAMS - if a door could sound annoyed, this would be it.

The boys all jump, Meg flinches.

Tommy looks up to her for direction, her face softens.

MEG

Go play in the other room, let Daddy get some rest.

The boys rush off. Colonel stays behind to sniff the bags.

Meg picks up one of the folders and some papers fall out - medical records, dental records, a will, and **re-enlistment** forms with blue ink scribbled in almost every open section.

A bit stunned, she studies them.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

The coffee pot bubbles and hisses as it fills to the brim.

Meg, still in her robe, is perched on the counter, sipping her coffee and reading all the papers in the folder.

Henry joins her, already dressed in regular clothes and ready for orders.

MEG
Morning, sunshine.

HENRY
Is it always this crazy?

MEG
You've just been around grown-ups for too long. For me, it's a Tuesday.

She grabs another mug out of the cabinet, pours a cup of coffee for Henry.

HENRY
Just black please.

MEG
(who is this man)
Since when?

HENRY
Our fridge always died on base. Creamer kept going bad so I got used to drinking it black.

She hands him his mug, goes back to the folder, genuinely curious.

MEG
Hey, so, this fell out of your bag.

HENRY
Oh, the army has a tendency of losing all my important paperwork. I print out extra copies and keep them for myself. This way they can't dick me over later.

MEG
Ah...so what's this one?

She hands him the re-enlistment forms.

HENRY
Yeah, we talked about that.

MEG

We said we were going to talk about it. I thought your contract wasn't up for another year.

HENRY

Well, they "gently" ask you to re-up usually about a year out.

MEG

So what does this mean?

HENRY

Nothing, I haven't signed anything yet --

MEG

But you filled it out?

HENRY

Yeah, well, I think I wanna do it.

MEG

I thought you were done after you deployed --

HENRY

That was before they offered me \$20,000 to stay.

MEG

I'm sorry, what?

She grabs the paperwork. There it is, in black and white.

HENRY

If I re-up for another 6 years, there's a sign on bonus of \$20k.

MEG

But this means you could deploy overseas again, doesn't it?

HENRY

Not likely, but yeah, it's possible.

She hesitates.

HENRY

Look, my next paycheck isn't going to have B.A.H. or hazard or separation pay or any of that anymore now that I'm stateside.

(MORE)

HENRY (CONT'D)

Whatever we have in savings we'll probably burn through within six months, a year if we're lucky, unless something changes.

(she's not convinced)

Meg, it's \$20,000.

MEG

Couldn't you just go back to work? I thought they were supposed to hold your job at the store for you.

HENRY

C'mon, Meg, we were just scraping by on my commission before. You hated my hours. If I re up, I can go to a badge school for air assault, means I'll get a promotion which is more pay, hell, maybe even transition to AGR, and you'd get to stay home with the kids instead of having to go back to work too.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Tommy stands quietly against the wall, his ear as close to the threshold as he can get it without being spotted.

MEG (O.S.)

I just - I don't want to have to think about you leaving again, already.

HENRY (O.S.)

I'm not leaving again. They can't touch me for another six months, and we're pulling out anyway. The only time I'll be leaving is if I get to go to badge school.

MEG (O.S.)

Can I think about it?

HENRY (O.S.)

Yeah, of course. Just have to let them know by the time I go back to drill in three weeks.

DEACON

(to Tommy, whispering)

Tommy, c'mon, the match is starting.

Tommy grabs his game controller and jumps in front of the TV with Deacon.

EXT. THATCHER HOME - BACKYARD - LATE AFTERNOON

The sun hangs low, creating cotton candy skies.

A red, white and blue sheet cake with "Welcome Home SSG Thatcher" scrawled on it is missing a dozen or so slices.

Crews sits in the grass devouring a piece of cake, wearing more icing than he's eating.

Kids are playing. Adults are mingling, drinking.

Henry, a beer in one hand and his head on a swivel, is trapped in conversation with JON, TRAVIS, SHANE and MARJORIE.

Meg looks down from the deck, makes eye contact with him and tilts her head - *you okay?*

He nods, lying.

She smiles, then grabs what's left of the sheet cake and carries it in to -

INT. THATCHER HOME - KITCHEN

DAMA (30s) and AUDREY (30s) - Meg's two best friends - move about the house like they live there, nursing their drinks and helping Meg gather up garbage.

DAMA

And it's like yeah, I get it, it's a business trip and it's just for the weekend, but I'm just so sick of all the traveling, leaving me home with the kids to fend for myself for 48 hours. Meg gets it, right Meg?

AUDREY

(to Meg)

Honestly, Meg, I don't know how you did it.

MEG

(go-to answer)

Lots of caffeine.

DAMA

And the perfect pinot noir, I'll bet.

MEG
Definitely didn't hurt.

AUDREY
I can barely survive two days
without Travis. You were a single
parent for a whole year and you're
still relatively sane.

MEG
Not single, just flying solo - solo
parenting.

DAMA
Homecoming must have been fun -
tag, you're it honey, they're your
kids now.

AUDREY
Bet it's nice finally being back to
normal.

FLASH MEMORY as she remembers images of Henry -
- scared at the airport
- snapping at the kids
- slamming the door

She shakes it off quickly before they notice her concern.

MEG
Yeah, no, everyone's good.

AUDREY
The boys seem excited to have him
home for the rest of summer.

MEG
Tommy has so many plans for the two
of them before Henry goes back to
drill.

AUDREY
Oh, I thought he was done?

MEG
Deployment is done, but his
contract isn't up for another year
so he still has drill and trainings
and whatnot. And if he re-ups he'll
have to TDY for a few months so,
yeah, never a dull moment.

DAMA
Glad you understand all this, I
think I'll stick with medicine.

AUDREY
Re-up?

MEG
Oh, uh, it means re-enlist. Like a
new contract.

AUDREY
And you're okay with that?

DAMA
You know, I heard a TEDTalk once
that war is like a drug. They just
keep going til, you know...

The screen door opens. Henry walks inside, ill-at-ease, and
grabs a couple beers from the fridge. Meg watches, trying to
remember how many he's had so far.

DAMA
How's it feel to be back, stranger?

HENRY
Like I never even left.

AUDREY
That's because Superwoman here had
it all covered.

He and Meg smile, embarrassed. He gives Meg a kiss on his
way out.

MEG
Can you try to get Crews to eat a
hot dog or something? If that kid
eats any more sugar we won't sleep
for a week.

HENRY
Check roger.

He holds the door open as Tommy and ADAM (9) to come racing
through.

TOMMY
Mom, where are the rest of the
balloons?

MEG

Check the cabinet in the basement,
buddy -

He takes off.

MEG

- and don't touch the safe!

TOMMY (O.S.)

I know!

AUDREY

You still have the gun?

MEG

I needed something to protect us
while he was away.

DAMA

I thought that's why you got the
dog. You should get rid of it now
that he's home.

MEG

Colonel's not going anywhere.

DAMA

That's not what I meant and you
know it.

AUDREY

How do the kids feel about him
deploying again?

MEG

If he deploys again. They can't
touch him for another six month he
said.

DAMA

And then what?

AUDREY

I don't think you should make them
go through all that again, you
know, they didn't sign up for this.

MEG

Neither did I. Henry wasn't G.I.
Joe when we got married. He was
just Henry. Tommy was still an
infant when he got laid off from
the electronics store.

(MORE)

MEG (CONT'D)

The economy was crap and we needed health insurance. That first paycheck while he was in basic kept this roof over our heads and that roof now needs to be replaced and we need a bigger car. They're going to give him \$20k to stay. How am I supposed to say no to that?

DAMA

Is that what you're going to tell your kids when he comes home in a box?

AUDREY

Dama -

DAMA

C'mon, Audrey, We've been friends since first grade, I think we can all be honest with each other, can't we?

TOMMY (O.S.)

Mom?

Shit.

TOMMY

They weren't down there.

Meg shuffles through some drawers in the kitchen, finds an open bag of balloons and hands them to him.

MEG

Here, Tommy, take them outside please.

(back to Dama)

No more army talk. He's home, he's safe, that's all that matters.

AUDREY

Amen to that.

The three of them clink glasses.

Adam runs to the back door. Tommy, however, backs slowly out of the room, still listening to the grown-ups, a wave of fear creeping across his face.

Meg shoots him a little smile - *nothing to worry about.*

She turns back to her wine, the same wave of fear now hanging on her face.

EXT. THATCHER HOME - BACKYARD - LATER

The party has thinned out a bit and settled down.

The adults sit in lawn chairs or on blankets. The kids run around playing with all the balloons Tommy and Adam blew up.

Henry watches, take a long gulp of his beer.

TRAVIS

What branch did you say you were?

HENRY

Army National Guard.

TRAVIS

Ah, a weekend warrior.

SHANE

Weekend warrior? Why do they call you guys weekend warriors?

HENRY

One weekend a month, two weeks a year.

SHANE

Ah, that makes sense.

JON

So are you like, not real army?

Henry pretends he didn't hear that one, turns his attention to the kids. Meg stands behind him, her hand on his shoulder.

MEG

Well, he really deployed, Jon, that makes him "real" army. He's just not active duty, there's a difference. Fun fact: national guard doesn't deploy as often as active duty, but when they do go, it's for a lot longer. Ask me how I learned that one.

Jon shrugs. Marjorie shakes her head, helluva way to learn.

Crews, Deacon and some other kids punch some of the balloons into the air, playing a game where they can't touch the ground. So far, everyone is getting along.

SHANE

So what'd ya do over there?

HENRY

Operations mostly. Managed flight ops, medi-vac, troop movement, stuff like that.

MEG

I thought you did chemical stuff.

HENRY

I was attached to an aviation unit, gotta just go where they tell me.

JON

See any action?

HENRY

Some, yeah.

This is news to Meg.

JON

Kill anyone?

SHANE

Dude, what the hell kind of question is that?

JON

The man was at war! It's not an unreasonable question. So how many?

Henry laughs politely, dodging.

MARJORIE

Did you know anyone that was killed in that attack?

Deacon swings wildly, misses his balloon and Adam lands on it. **POP!**

Henry jumps, but recovers quickly.

HENRY

Might want to be more specific than that.

MARJORIE

I just saw it on the news - Tower 22 I think they said?

Crews squeals with laughter as he plops down on two more balloons. **POP! POP!**

Henry's shoulders tense. The staccato **pops** of balloons sound more like gunfire. We stay with Henry as sweat forms on his forehead, trying to keep it together.

HENRY

Tower 22 - when was this?

MARJORIE (O.C)

Maybe a week ago? I can't remember, lemme see if I can find it on my phone.

The kids are all landing on balloons now. **POP! POP! POP!** mixed with children screaming. It's sounding more like a warzone than a party, at least to Henry. He shifts in his seat.

TRAVIS (O.C)

Oh yeah, I read about that one. I heard there were some casualties.

SHANE (O.C.)

That's a damn shame.

JON (O.C.)

They knew what they signed up for when they went over there. Not like they were drafted or anything. All's fair in love and war.

MARJORIE (O.C.)

Oh here it is!

Marjorie hands Henry the phone.

INSERT: PHONE

CNN - US SOLDIERS KILLED IN TOWER 22 DRONE ATTACK

He frantically scrolls through the article, hands shaking. Meg peers over his shoulder, trembling.

Behind him balloons and children are flying around, but instead of happy laughing, all we hear are the sounds of battle - bullets flying, C-RAMS firing, walls crumbling, soldiers yelling for cover...

Crews SCREAMS in frustration. It's an ear piercing wail, like a siren.

MEG
 (to kids)
 Hey, no more balloons guys, okay?

Tommy lands on one more balloon - **it sounds like an explosion.**

Meg spins back towards Henry just as he leaps out of the chair, knocking it backwards and spilling his drink.

TRAVIS
 Hey man, you good?

The sounds of light pop music and laughing children take over. The color has drained from Henry's face.

MEG
 Henry?

HENRY
 Yeah, I'm good, just a - bug or something.

Crews and Deacon fight over the last un-popped balloon. They're both in tears.

Meg goes to Henry; he brushes her off.

HENRY
 I'm fine, really.

Her eyes flit between Henry and the boys. Crews lets out another scream, making her decision for her.

Henry starts typing a message on his phone to SSG BALASKAS - "Hey man, just checking in, wanted to make sure you all were okay."

He waits.

SSG BALASKAS - "Thanks Thatcher. We're good here, prolly won't get mail for like a month though."

Henry types - "Have you talked to Coleman or Rodriguez yet?"

SSG BALASKAS - "Rodriguez is good, haven't heard from Coleman but the internet is shit so idk."

Henry swallows hard.

Meg scoops up Crews as she watches Henry's head lower.

INT. THATCHER HOME - LIVING ROOM - DAY

A kids show plays on the television just for noise because Deacon and Crews aren't watching anymore - they're building castles with blocks and magnet tiles.

Tommy slowly and deliberately moves his chess piece to an open spot on the board, questioning his decision to move at all. Henry observes, his knee bouncing under the table.

Tommy fixates on him.

TOMMY

Adam said his dad said you killed people when you were away.

Henry looks up with his eyes and meets Tommy's.

TOMMY

Did you? Kill anyone?

HENRY

The only thing I killed were bugs. With a salt gun. Looked a lot like your Nerf guns, just full of salt.

Tommy looks relieved.

HENRY

I'd never seen bugs so big and nasty. One was as big as my hand.

Henry cringes, pretends to barf. Tommy lets out a giggle.

HENRY

You don't gotta worry about that, Tommy, but what you do gotta worry about is me taking your knight.

Tommy's shoulders sink, he realizes his mistake as Henry scoops his knight off the board.

A tower of magnet tiles CRASHES to the floor. Deacon groans.

DEACON

CREWS!

CREWS

Oops. Sorwy.

DEACON

YOU DID THAT ON PURPOSE!

Crews melts into a puddle of loud TEARS. Deacon plops face first into the sofa and SCREAMS. The kids show gets annoyingly louder...

Henry drops his head, squeezing his fists and eyes closed, then taps his palms on the table - the chess pieces wiggle.

HENRY

Hey, hey, hey, what's going on?

DEACON

(in between breaths)

He broke my tower! I worked so hard on it, and now it's RUINED!

CREWS

I said sowry!

INT. BASEMENT

Meg pulls a load of laundry out of the dryer, listening.

HENRY (O.S.)

Deacon, calm the fuck down okay? He said it was an accident. Just rebuild your tower.

DEACON (O.S.)

I don't wanna rebuild it. I wanted that one. He shouldn't have even touched it.

HENRY (O.S.)

Crews, help Deacon rebuild the tower.

CREWS (O.S.)

I don't wanna.

DEACON (O.S.)

I don't want his help, he'll just wreck it again.

HENRY (O.S.)

Or I just take all the blocks away and you both sit in time out.

CREWS + DEACON (O.S.)

NO!

INT. LIVING ROOM

Meg stands at the top of the stairs, trying to gauge the right moment.

HENRY

Get control of your emotions, all right? We got the TV on, we got toys everywhere - might as well throw them all away since all we're going to do is cry. If you can't play nice then you can't play at all.

Meg grabs the remote and turns off the TV. Everyone stops.

MEG

What's going on?

Crews turns the tears back on full blast, runs over to Meg. Henry throws his hands in the air.

Henry's phone rings, he mutes it.

DEACON

He wrecked my tower.

MEG

Deacon it was an accident, okay? Let's take a break to calm down. Why don't you guys play outside with Colonel before it gets too hot.

All three boys start putting on their shoes, Deacon struggles with the laces.

HENRY

I had it.

MEG

Didn't look like it.

HENRY

They need a time out.

MEG

We don't do time out anymore.

She starts tying everyone's shoes. His phone rings again - he mutes it.

HENRY

Since when?

MEG

I read an article.

HENRY

When were you going to tell me?

MEG

Well, I'm telling you now. Just -
let me handle it.

HENRY

We're supposed to be a team.

MEG

We are a team, but while you were gone I had to choose my battles with them carefully. They fight every 5 seconds and it wasn't worth the choppy phone call and the eight hour time difference to "get on the same page." This is what worked for us. Now that you're home we can - find what works for all of us.

He shakes his head.

HENRY

They walk all over you, you know that right?

MEG

They're kids, Henry, not soldiers.

His phone chimes - a text message.

INSERT - HENRY'S PHONE

SSG BALASKAS - "Thatcher, I'm so sorry."

There's a link to a news article -

CNN - SOLDIERS KILLED IN DRONE ATTACK IDENTIFIED

With shaky fingers, he clicks the link. Three official army portraits appear under the headline. He focuses on a young blonde woman, a small smile on her face - SPC. LAUREN COLEMAN.

HENRY

No no no no...

MEG

What is it, what happened?

The phone rings again. Henry answers as he races out of the room, SLAMMING the bedroom door behind him.

Meg jumps.

Then silence.

They all stand there, the boys staring at Meg, ankle deep in the magnet tile tower ruins, not sure where any of them belong.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Meg and Henry lie in bed, the light from his phone illuminating their faces. He scrolls through some photos of his base during a rain storm.

HENRY

When it rained, the whole base would flood. We had these little makeshift bridges to get us from one building to another. When it was dry it was worse. It'd get all in your lungs, like you were sick, just coughing up sand. We called it the crud.

Next picture - his hand next to a bug for scale.

HENRY

Tommy didn't believe me, but look at how big these fuckers were. Like they were out of a horror movie. Used to shoot them with salt guns.

Meg gags and turns away. Next picture - JOHNSON and Henry working out at the base "gym" made out of whatever they could find.

HENRY

This was our prison gym.

They both laugh.

He breezes through some more:

-a convoy

-Henry at the chow hall flanked by his buddies TRUJILLO and CALLAS

-their office on base with Callas setting up an Elf on the Shelf

-the three of them in full battle rattle (combat gear)

-helicopters, sunsets, selfies in a tank...

He stops at a photo of him in the back of a helicopter with a dozen other soldiers, Trujillo and Callas included, and Lauren Coleman. She's holding a stuffed fish, making its fin wave to the camera.

Meg gazes up at him, recognizes the sadness in his eyes.

HENRY

This was our last morale flight. You could bring anything you wanted and it would get a certificate for being flown. Coleman brought her son's fish. That thing went everywhere with her. She'd send him pictures of all their adventures together.

He continues swiping:

- Henry being pinned by Callas at his promotion ceremony in country
- Coleman and Johnson pranking Henry while he's sleeping
- Christmas in the chow hall with all of them gathered for a "family photo"
- Coleman and another FEMALE SOLDIER sitting in a humvee...

Meg rests her hand on his.

HENRY

She was one of my E4s. Everyone acted like she was a piss poor soldier, thought she was too sensitive to handle war, but she knew her shit. Just had bad leadership. We were training the new rotation to take over. These guys couldn't handle the pressure. One time, we were getting attacked, needed to make a decision fast. The lieutenant disappeared, found him chain smoking out by the bunker.

(don't cry)

She only had two months left.

MEG

Henry, I'm so sorry.

HENRY

Coleman should have never been in that situation, I should never have left my soldiers in that situation. That team needed me.

She stares at him, a mix of sympathy and despair.

MEG

We needed you too, babe.

HENRY

Not according to Audrey,
"Superwoman."

Stings.

MEG

The first month or so you were gone they invited us over for pizza once a week. Then it was every other week, then they stopped inviting us at all. Some friends would offer to help or watch the boys, but you could tell in their faces they were relieved when I said no, I'm fine, like loneliness was contagious and I was a lonely leper. So I stiff armed it out of necessity. Doesn't make me super at anything.

He meets her gaze in the dark. It's new, vulnerable. A side of him she's hasn't seen in a while, maybe not ever.

HENRY

You did great.

She smiles, admiring him.

He goes back to the picture on his phone. She watches as he scrolls through them, a hint of longing in his eyes.

MEG

You really want to stay in, don't you? Why?

HENRY

Life was...simpler. I knew what to do, and I was good at it, really good. Who gives a shit about quarterly sales goals, I had to worry about maybe dying any given day. I hated every single minute I was away from you, but I hate the idea of going back to retail more. If it means I can provide for you guys like I'm supposed to, then I'll take that risk, and do something that actually matters.

MEG

You do matter. You matter to me, to the kids. You're important to us.

HENRY

That's not -- Sorry I shouldn't
have even said anything.

He shuts off his phone and turns away from her.

She sits there in the dark, searching for the right words. A
flicker of an idea in her eyes.

MEG

You said something about school?
Like army school?

HENRY

Badge school. For air assault.

MEG

What does that involve?

HENRY

Means I'd go to Ft. Campbell for a
few months, get trained more on the
helicopter, stuff like that. Would
make me eligible for another
promotion.

MEG

And you wouldn't deploy overseas
for a while?

HENRY

It's not likely.

She takes a leap of faith.

MEG

I think I could do it again. It's
just a few months, not a whole
year, and you're not in a war zone.
I know what to expect with this
whole solo parenting thing now.

He sits up.

HENRY

Are you sure?

MEG

(not really)
We're a team, right? Let's talk
about it more in the morning.

He smiles, a genuine smile that she hasn't seen since the
airport. He kisses her. They linger there for a while.

EXT. PICNIC GROUNDS - DAY

A "Welcome Home Echo Company" banner dangles from the pavilion.

Crock pots and covered dishes take up an entire picnic table. A boombox in the corner blares indistinct country music. No balloons in sight.

Meg stands close to Henry and his friends - the guys from all the pictures - JOHNSON (40s), TRUJILLO (30s) and CALLAS (40s).

HENRY

So then I got this message from Deverau just saying, hey, watch the monitors, we're gonna take em out, shit's aboutta go down, and I kid you not, as soon as I looked at the monitor **BOOM!** Fucking leveled, a flash and no more secret enemy base.

TRUJILLO

Was that the first one or the second one?

HENRY

That was the...third I wanna say.

CALLAS

Man, I wish I coulda seen that real time.

HENRY

It was wild.

JOHNSON

Callas, you missed the one Dakota got on intelligence -

TRUJILLO

Oh yeah! I forgot about that one!

JOHNSON

Yeah man, so she sends us an email on the SIPR, subject just says 'look what I did' and all it was was a picture. Totally normal dead guy with his turban and whatnot up top - just a fucking halloween decoration on the bottom.

Meg tries to hide her horror. She looks around to gauge reactions - everyone else is un-phased, just another day at the office.

She taps Henry on the shoulder, motions she's going to get another drink.

She grabs a beer from the cooler and looks back over at Henry - he looks relaxed, enjoying himself for once. She makes herself comfortable at a table, alone.

JESSICA CALLAS (30s, all-American badass babe) and her daughter ABBY (9) approach the coolers.

JESSICA

We're only staying for a few more minutes, Abby. Now's not the time to be a brat. Go play or go sit in the car, those are your options.

Jessica hands her a water bottle. Abby furiously chugs some water and runs off.

Jessica notices Meg saw the whole exchange. She sighs.

JESSICA

I swear, these mandatory fun events bring out the absolute worst in my kids.

Meg smiles, been there.

JESSICA

I don't think I've met you before - I'm Jessica, Neil's wife.

MEG

(no idea who Neil is)
Oh - I'm Meg.

JESSICA

Are you guys new to the unit?

MEG

No, Henry's been in for... almost five years? But this was our first deployment.

JESSICA

Oh no way, what did he do over there?

MEG

I, uhm, I'm not even sure really. It kept changing, but I think he said he was ops - flight ops - he's thinking about going to school for it now.

JESSICA

Oh, that was Neil's unit.

MEG

(still no idea who Neil is)

Is this your first deployment too?

JESSICA

Sixth, actually.

MEG

Wow...

JESSICA

Yeah, we're done though, this - this was the last time. Neil's about to hit his 20 years so the plan is for him to retire, finally, and we're going to open a coffee shop. It's been my dream for years. Just took this last deployment literally for the money, you know, so we don't need a loan for the business.

MEG

That's exciting.

JESSICA

Yeah, it is.

MEG

I barely survived the one deployment...I don't know that I could do six...

JESSICA

(shrugs)

What else are we gonna do, right? I just think of it as my job is to make sure he has a home to come home to. Have you gone to a Yellow Ribbon event yet?

MEG

No, I don't think so.

JESSICA

It's like a rah-rah event for reintegration, they give you a bunch of resources and whatnot which are great, don't get me wrong, but those things are kind of like a one size fits most. Every time they come home it's different, and what those events don't tell you is reintegration is sometimes worse than the deployment itself.

MEG

(oh thank God)

I thought it was just me, I mean doing all the things, the birthdays, Christmas, all that sucked but this...he used to be, I dunno, affectionate? But now - sometimes he shudders when I touch him, or the kids scream and he freaks out. It's hard.

JESSICA

It's really fucking hard. Your husband isn't the same person he was a year ago, YOU aren't the same person you were a year ago, neither are your kids.

Meg doesn't chime in, embarrassed that she overshared. She lets the conversation sink into an uncomfortable lull.

JESSICA

You guys should come over sometime, bring the kids.

MEG

Yeah?

JESSICA

Of course! I remember what it was like being brand new to this life. Hard to make friends in the guard when none of us live on base. We've got a pool, Neil can grill, your boys will love it.

Meg cracks a smile.

MEG

Yeah, sure. Sounds like fun.

Henry and Callas approach the pavilion, each grabbing another beer from the cooler. Callas is handsome, a quiet despair in his eyes.

CALLAS

Jess, you ready to head out?

JESSICA

Yeah, just gotta round up the kids.

(to Meg)

Neil, this is Meg, Henry's wife.

CALLAS

Nice to meet you, Neil Callas.

MEG

(oh that's Neil...)

Oh so you're...Sorry, Henry's always just called you Callas or Major Callas, I never -- It's nice to finally meet you, Neil.

CALLAS

It's all good. So, Thatcher tells me he's gonna re-up, wants me to swear him in before I put in my retirement packet.

Meg forces a smile, trying to hide her shock at this decision being made for her...and failing.

CALLAS

We got that Black Hawk exercise coming up at drill, perfect time to do it.

HENRY

Yessir, that would be perfect.

JESSICA

Oh, that'll be nice!

MEG

Yeah, well...we still have a little while to turn in the paperwork though, right babe?

A CHILD SCREAMS -- the men turn, instinctually.

It's Crews -- over tired, over stimulated, and he's just tripped face first into some mulch.

HENRY
 (to Meg)
 Is that ours?

MEG
 Yup.

Henry chugs his beer as they both walk off towards Crews, who's being helped to his feet by Tommy.

INT. KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Tommy, Deacon and Crews are crowded around a cluttered table with Colonel lurking beneath. Their dinosaur shaped grilled cheese sandwiches engaged in combat.

Meg hunches over her phone, scrolling through Jessica's social media page. Her eyes light up.

It's flooded with images of the ideal army life - the Callas family on vibrant vacations, Neil's promotions where his daughters pin his new rank to his army jacket, Jess and Neil kissing, Jess smiling next to a vacant storefront holding the sign for Liberty Beans Coffee Co.

Crews shoves a grilled cheese dinosaur missing its head in her face, breaking her focus.

CREWS
 Mommy, I done.

TOMMY
 Yeah, I'm full, can I be done too?

DEACON
 (still chewing)
 Me too?

MEG
 Okay, just put your plates in the sink, Colonel can have your crusts.

One by one, they drop their plates into the sink and run out into the backyard, the screen door SLAMMING behind them.

LATER

Meg hand washes dishes in the sink, her phone leaning against the counter on speaker as she talks to her MOM.

MEG
 Well, no, he wouldn't be deploying again, at least not for a while I don't think.
 (MORE)

MEG (CONT'D)

He did say he could go to an army school.

MOM (O.S)

Oh, that would be good. You'd get to have him around more.

MEG

Well--he'd have to go to another base for a few months, but it's just a few more months, nothing like this last year.

MOM (O.S.)

So soon?

MEG

I don't actually know.

MOM (O.S.)

Hmm -- how'd it go at the funeral?

MEG

I'm not sure, he's not back yet.

MOM (O.S.)

He's holding up okay?

MEG

He's not really talking much. He told me a little bit the other night but, he acts like it's all okay. I just, I don't know, I feel like he's trying to protect me from something.

MOM (O.S.)

That's his job, isn't it? To protect his family?

MEG

Yeah, but it's kind of driving me crazy, ya know? Like...we used to tell each other everything, and now -- I just don't want to push him away.

MOM (O.S.)

Well then maybe he shouldn't go back.

MEG

Mom --

MOM (O.S.)
I'm serious. Just stand your
ground, tell him no, you're not re
enlisting.

MEG
That's not --

MOM
You're his wife, you outrank him.
He can find another job. And what
about your career? Haven't you put
your life on hold enough?

MEG
(lies)
Oh shoot, I gotta go mom, the kids
are fighting again, I'll call you
later, love you.

She hangs up. Finishes washing the last dish in peace.

It's finally quiet in the house, for the first time in more
than a year. She takes a breath.

She eyes what's left of Crews' sandwich still on the table -
when did she last eat?

She takes a bite; cold yet satisfying.

SMASH!

The window next to her SHATTERS as a baseball careens
through it. Meg SCREAMS.

She looks through the hole in the window, sees Tommy and
Deacon, equally stunned.

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Tommy sweeps the glass remnants into a dustpan.

Deacon helps Meg cover the window with cardboard and tape it
in place.

Meg picks glass pieces up off the table.

She runs the vacuum in the kitchen trying to get whatever
shards are left on the floor. She shuts it off, and sighs.
Knew it was too good to last.

Her phone chimes - a text from Henry.

INSERT - MEG'S PHONE

A picture of Henry, Neil and Trujillo with Lauren's son, who's clutching the stuffed fish and a folded American flag.

HENRY - "Funeral was nice. Family is having a thing after, then we'll head back."

She types back - "Okay, see you soon." *Hope he's okay.*

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Another kid's show on the TV, but no one is watching. No one is even in the room.

Meg slinks in, her eyes flitting around the space, and ducks behind the sofa, emerging with a nerf gun.

MEG

I see you....

A nerf bullet WHIZZES by her ear. She fires.

Across the sofa, all three boys fire - a barrage of bullets and belly laughs.

She charges them, scooping up Crews and pretends to use him as a shield. Colonel, barking as usual, tries to catch the flying bullets in his mouth.

INT. HALLWAY - EVENING

Meg walks towards the bathroom and knocks on the door.

MEG

Crews? You all done?

She opens the door to the -

BATHROOM

Where Crews is standing on a stool, horrified at the sight of Meg, the toilet overflowing onto the floor.

LATER

Meg jams a plunger into the toilet. She looks at it, quizzically.

She reaches in reluctantly and pulls out a fully saturated pull-up. She continues plunging when -

It finally flushes, all the water disipating from the bowl.

LATER

Meg and Crews, standing on towels, shuffle around the bathroom mopping up what's left of the water on the floor.

MEG

Where do pull ups go when we're done with them?

CREWS

In da trash, not da potty.

MEG

Right, good job.

Meg checks her phone, no new texts from Henry.

She types - "Hey, you on your way home?"

She waits. No response.

MEG

I see some water over there, get that water over there Crewsy.

INT. BOYS BEDROOM - NIGHT

Meg sits on the bottom bunk reading a book while Tommy hangs upside down from the top bunk, Crews is clearing out his sock drawer, and Deacon struggles tying his shoes, getting more agitated by the moment.

MEG

Tommy, I'm not driving to the ER tonight, please get down and stay down.

TOMMY

Why isn't dad home yet?

MEG

I don't know, but even if he were we'd still be going to bed now.

TOMMY

Why can't I stay up til he gets home?

MEG

Because I don't know when he's getting home and you're not staying up all night.

TOMMY

That's not fair.

MEG
(more for herself)
You're right, it's not.
(to Deacon)
Put your shoes away please, you can
practice some more tomorrow. It's
time for bed.

CREWS
But I want daddy...

MEG
Well daddy will be home after
bedtime.

Crews dissolves into whimpers.

TOMMY
But it's the weekend, why can't we
stay up late on the weekend?

MEG
You are up late, it's already past
bedtime, Tommy, quit arguing with
me.

TOMMY
I'm not arguing!

MEG
Deacon, shoes. Now please.

Deacon delicately weaves one bunny ear through the hole, but
it falls apart in his hands.

With tears in his eyes, he throws his shoe across the room
and it lands with a BANG on the dresser right next to Meg.

Everyone stops.

DEACON
I'm never going to get it! I can't
get the stupid bunny ears through
the stupid hole and I'm just always
gonna be the stupid kid who can't
tie his stupid shoes!

CREWS
(softly)
Stupids bad word...

MEG
Deacon?

She gets down on the floor with him, wipes his tears with her sleeve.

DEACON

Why does it have to be so hard?

MEG

You're right, it is hard. It's hard right now because it's new, and we're tired, but we can do hard things, right? We've done a lot already with daddy being gone, and we got through it because we did it together. Let's try again tomorrow, together, okay?

He nods and climbs into bed, turning away from her as he nestles into his blankets.

She clicks off the light and turns on the stars nightlight.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Meg empties what's left of a bottle of wine into her glass, places the empty bottle in the already full recycling bin. The sink is full of dishes, again.

She looks at her phone - it's 10:17pm - no new texts from Henry.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Meg, dressed in sweatpants and a T-shirt, paces around the room, occasionally glancing out the window, Colonel following dutifully behind her. She checks the clock again - 12:13am.

She notices Henry's bags, in the same spot he left them when he came home. Annoyed, she grabs one and attempts to drag it to the basement door when -

Headlights appear in the window.

A car door shuts, then another. Colonel erupts into barking.

She opens the front door to see -

I/E. THATCHER HOME - NIGHT

- Neil helping Henry to the door, his suit disheveled and he's a bit wobbly on his feet.

CALLAS

Home sweet home, Thatcher.

Henry, through half closed eyes, sees Meg standing in the doorway, a delicate cocktail of relief and disappointment on her face.

HENRY
(to Callas/loud whisper)
She looks pissed.

CALLAS
(to Meg)
Sorry we're late. Didn't want him driving.

Henry stumbles across the threshold and plops onto the sofa.

CALLAS
Think you can take it from here?

MEG
Yeah, I got it. Thanks, Neil.

He nods, heads back to his car. Meg shuts the door.

Henry lies on the sofa, his arm draped over his face.

MEG
How'd it go?

HENRY
Fuckin' sucked. Service was nice, just...yeah.

MEG
Thought you'd be back a while ago.

HENRY
Tried to make sure everyone was good before leaving, then had a few drinks with the guys.

MEG
The kids kept asking about you.

HENRY
Didn't realize I needed to check in, Lieutenant.

MEG
Well, yeah, I mean...we were waiting for you. Could've used your help around here today.

HENRY

Look, her kid is only like Deacon's age, and he's taking it really hard. I think he needed the help more.

MEG

I'm not saying--I can't imagine what he's going through, but I also don't see why it needed to be you.

HENRY

She was my soldier.

MEG

But aren't there like...military people for that or something? Bereavement or I don't know, something?

HENRY

We're the people for that.

MEG

It's just--we finally have you home like...I just, we just want you home, with us.

HENRY

...I am home, but just because I'm home doesn't mean my duty stopped.

MEG

Your duty is to us now, not the army.

HENRY

Not according to my contract.

MEG

So where do we fit in? Are we just supposed to sit on the sidelines for everything?

HENRY

Yes, you are, that is your job.

MEG

What about everything we sacrificed this year? All the stuff we went through by ourselves?

HENRY

- you don't understand.

MEG

I do understand. All the kids want to do is spend time with you, you've missed so much with them --

HENRY

You're acting like a real fucking dependa right now.

MEG

I'm trying to be patient and supportive and sympathetic but I really think --

He throws one of his shoes, much like Deacon did, but with more force and distain behind it.

HENRY

I buried my family today, Coleman was my family, that unit, *that's my family!*

Sudden silence.

MEG

(don't you dare cry)
No Henry, we're your family.

She brushes past him.

MEG

All I wanted was a phone call.

She starts crying as soon as she's up the stairs.

INT. BOYS BEDROOM

Tommy lies in bed, listening to Meg try to stifle her tears as she makes her way to her bedroom.

EXT. CALLAS HOME - BACKYARD - EVENING

Dusk begins to settle in pinks and purples across the sky.

The pool water is still like glass, with toys still floating in it from earlier. The kids - Tommy, Deacon, Abby and GRACE (11) - still wrapped in their beach towels, are roasting marshmallows over a small fire that Neil and Henry tend to.

Meg, with Crews curled up asleep in her lap, watches them all attempt the perfect s'more.

Jess takes a seat next to her, also watching.

MEG

Thanks for having us. It was nice to - have a normal day. Seems like forever.

JESSICA

You're more than welcome.

MEG

I can't remember the last time I saw Henry this at ease, really just enjoying the moment. Not since before deployment I don't think.

JESSICA

It takes time. Neil's the same way, You know, always comes home with this like - nervous energy, like a bottle rocket about to go off, needing something to do.

MEG

Why is that, you think?

JESSICA

Well, for Neil anyway, operation tempo is like...120mph, 24/7, for 365 days or however long he's gone, and then, bam, 30 days leave. It's almost like he's lost. No one telling him what to do or what needs done. This time though, I think I figured him out.

Meg smirks - *oh?*

JESSICA

I may or may not have accidentally - on purpose - broken the toilet right before he came home just so he had something to do.

They both laugh.

JESSICA

At this rate, we're going to end up with a remodeled house he's so...wound up.

Jessica sits with that for a second, her gaze shifting back to Neil and the girls by the fire. Meg notices.

MEG

How do you do it?

JESSICA

(go-to answer)

Lots of caffeine, hence why I'm opening a coffee shop.

MEG

Seriously, though. I mean, you have it all. This beautiful home, your incredible girls, you're starting a business and somehow, you've managed to work out and stay sane. Meanwhile I'm over here in a house we outgrew two kids ago, looking like Rocky after twelve rounds with the Russian. I just - I want the next one to be easier.

JESSICA

Give yourself some credit, Meg. He's home, the house didn't burn down, the kids are all alive. You can't go back to the way it was, that life doesn't exist anymore. I wish I had the answers for you, but honest to God it doesn't get easier, you just get stronger. You get to write the next chapter, now. What does that look like?

Mg looks over towards Henry at the fire, helping Deacon smush his graham crackers together, chocolate and marshmallow oozing out the sides, both genuinely happy.

She shrugs.

MEG

I honestly never gave it much thought. With the army I don't have much control over anything.

JESSICA

But you don't have to be sitting in the backseat watching life happen around you, either. What'd you do before Henry enlisted.

MEG

(remembering fondly)

Marketing, graphic design. Used to work for an advertising firm, back when I didn't know what it meant to be tired.

JESSICA

You know, I have some money built into our coffee shop budget for marketing - I don't have a creative bone in my body. Think you'd be interested?

Meg shifts in her seat, deep in thought. *But how -*

JESSICA

You could work from home, keep your kids' routine the same. Whaddya say, wanna get in the driver's seat?

Meg smirks.

MEG

Yeah, that would be great.

Jessica smiles.

ABBY

Mom! Come here, we made you a s'more!

Jessica stands, starts walking to the fire.

JESSICA

I'll send you the business plan in the morning. You got this, Meg. I'm excited for you.

Jessica high fives Henry as he walks past her towards Meg.

Meg watches, as Jessica nestles into the same chair as Neil. They share a s'more and a kiss.

HENRY

You ready?

Meg nods, and with an umph, she stands with Crews still in her arms.

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - HALLWAY - AFTERNOON

The Thatchers meander down the hall, brave faces all around, it's still summer for a few more days.

MEG

Okay Deacon, just have to find your classroom then we can all get ice cream in the cafeteria.

DEACON
What class am I in again?

MEG
You have Mrs. Warble, 1B.

DEACON
(to Tommy/whispers)
Is she the mean one?

Tommy nods.

CREWS
Ooo! I see it! I see 1-B!

MEG
Good job, buddy!

HENRY
Since when do you know your letters
and numbers?

CREWS
I big boy, daddy.

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - CLASSROOM

Rainbow carpet on the floor and desks decorated with each student's name. A few other CHILDREN and PARENTS are moseying about, finding their spaces or playing with toys.

Meg and Deacon approach MRS. WARBLE (60s) standing at the front of the room, wearing a broad smile and a bright pink shirt.

MRS. WARBLE
Helloooo! And who might we have
here?

MEG
This is Deacon, Deacon Thatcher.

MRS. WARBLE
(on his level)
Hellooo Deacon! I'm Mrs. Warble.
It's so nice to meet you! Are you
excited for first grade?

DEACON
I'm excited for ice cream.

Meg laughs nervously.

MRS. WARBLE
(doesn't miss a beat)
Me too. My favorite flavor is
strawberry - what's yours?

DEACON
Chocolate.

MRS. WARBLE
That's a great choice, Deacon. So,
can you tell me about who all you
brought with you today?

DEACON
I brought my mommy, my brothers,
and my daddy. He just got home from
a big sleepover with the army.

Her eyes widen as she stands up.

MRS. WARBLE
Oh isn't that nice!
(to Meg)
How long was he gone for?

MEG
About a year.

MRS. WARBLE
My goodness, you must be so happy
to have him home to help you, looks
like you've had your hands full.

Stings more than she expected.

MEG
Yes, well, we're just glad he's
home.

MRS. WARBLE
And how is everyone adjusting?

MEG
We're doing okay, I think.
We're...adjusting as well as we
can.

MRS. WARBLE
(quieter)
Have you noticed any behavioral
changes since he's come home?

MEG
 (yes. Wait -)
 In - my husband?

Mrs. Warble motions towards Deacon.

MRS. WARBLE
 Sometimes young children don't do
 well with big emotions and drastic
 changes in their routine.

Meg's eyes flit over to Deacon, who's found his desk and
 wrestles with Tommy to see who can sit in the chair first.

MEG
 I mean, he has had - some
 outbursts, you know, middle child
 struggles, right?

MRS. WARBLE
 (placating)
 Of course.

Mrs. Warble spots Henry holding Crews and showing him the
 different colors on the bulletin board. She approaches him,
 her hand outstretched.

MRS. WARBLE
 You must be Mr. Thatcher. I'm Penny
 Warble, thank you so much to your
 service to our country. Our school,
 and I'm sure your family, are all
 so very appreciative of your
 sacrifice.

HENRY
 Thank you for your support, ma'am.

MRS. WARBLE
 It was nice to meet you Deacon!
 Make sure you get yourself a big
 scoop of chocolate ice cream and
 I'll see you in two weeks!

MEG
 (to Deacon)
 Say thank you.

DEACON
 Thank you.

Tommy and Deacon race out of the room into the -

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - HALLWAY

Meg, Henry and Crews follow after. Crews squirms out of Henry's arms.

MEG
Thank you for your support?

HENRY
I never know what to say when
someone says that - first thing
that came to mind.

MEG
It's not bad.

HENRY
Yeah?

MEG
Yeah, it works.

Henry's phone RINGS. He narrows his eyes as he looks at the number on the screen.

HENRY
You guys keep going, I'll catch up.
I - gotta take this.
(into phone)
Sergeant Thatcher...Yessir, I'm
good sir, how are you?

He turns to walk the opposite direction.

TOMMY
But the cafeteria is this way.

MEG
He'll find it, Tommy. Let's go save
him a scoop.

They make their way down the hall, Meg looks back to see Henry engrossed in his conversation. *Is this bad news?*

INT. ELEMENTARY SCHOOL - CAFETERIA - LATER

The space is filled with the dull hum of clean pop music, casual conversations, and sugared up students.

Meg and the boys have a table all to themselves. Crews has a large napkin draped over this chest as he sloppily scoops his ice cream all by himself. Deacon and Tommy are racing to see who can finish first.

Still no Henry. Meg looks around the room, checks her watch.

TOMMY

Hey mom? Can I go play with Jacob?

DEACON

(mouth full)

Me too?

MEG

Sure, but in here only please. Do not go outside.

The boys take off. She wipes a drip from Crews' mouth and looks towards the door one more time.

She spots Henry, grabbing an ice cream sandwich from the table of choices. She waves to him. He walks over.

MEG

Hey.

CREWS

(mouth full)

Hi daddy.

HENRY

Hey buddy!

MEG

Everything good?

HENRY

Yeah yeah, everything's good. What happened to the other two?

MEG

They're over there, playing with Jacob.

HENRY

Who's Jacob?

MEG

Tommy's classmate from last year, his best friend.

HENRY

Oh...

She waits for him to bring up the phone call, he doesn't.

MEG

Who was that? On the phone?

HENRY

My new first lieutenant - they're uh...disbanding my old unit so I was rolled into a new one. They were having an NCO call - thought I should be included since I'll be there soon.

(rip the bandaid)

They're on standby. To deploy.

A real gut punch. Meg's not even sure she's still breathing.

MEG

But I thought...

HENRY

Just getting ready to get ready, that's all.

(to Crews)

How's that ice cream, buddy?

CREWS

Is yummy.

All the sounds start to blend together into a high pitch squeal. Meg tenses up. She looks over to Henry, he's sitting up straighter, shoulders relaxed, his legs are still. *How is he so calm about this?*

She looks down at her ice cream - it's completely melted.

INT. CAR - EARLY EVENING

All three boys are asleep in the backseat, leaving Meg and Henry in an uncomfortable silence.

MEG

Standby.

HENRY

Mmm-hmm.

MEG

I thought they couldn't touch you.

HENRY

In theory, they can't. We get dwell time when we come home. But the catch is they rolled me into a new unit, and it's their turn to go, so...

MEG

Where?

HENRY

Middle East again, probably. Horn of Africa is another possibility.

MEG

-- how, what are you feeling about, all this?

HENRY

(shrugs)

Well I know nothing will have changed much.

MEG

I'm sorry about the furniture.

HENRY

It's not just the furniture, Meg.

MEG

I know it's been hard - I'm not asking you to coach the tee ball team or join the PTA or whatever - but maybe, we should slow down a bit - don't you think we're rushing back into this? You know, talk to someone about -

HENRY

(knee bouncing)

I'm not broken. I'm fine. Don't need to lay on a couch and pay someone a buncha money we don't have to tell me that.

MEG

No, you're not broken, but your also not doing us any favors by not talking about it.

Tommy stirs in the backseat, listening.

HENRY

You said it yourself, you know what to expect now, so do the kids.

MEG

Is that why you haven't unpacked any of your bags yet? You were just -- waiting for an opportunity to get away from us again?

HENRY

C'mon, Meg...

MEG

You c'mon, Henry. We had a plan.
Why can't you just say no?

Meg's phone rings.

HENRY

Because I'll be known as a shitbag
soldier for the rest of my career.
This is part of the job.

MEG

(into phone)

Hey Jessica...Wait, wait, wait,
slow down...what?

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

A casket, draped with an American flag, emerges from the back of a hearse carried by Henry and five other SOLDIERS in formal military dress.

JESSICA (V.O.)

I will never understand why God, or
fate, gave me everything I wanted,
just to take it all away.

They place the casket onto the metal framework over the grave, flanked by a large formal military portrait of Neil Callas, and begin folding the flag, stoic, methodical.

A decorated COLONEL strides ceremoniously towards Jessica, Grace and Abby. His stance softens as he bends to hand them the folded flag. He speaks softly, something just for them to hear, and ends with a salute.

JESSICA (V.O.)

I always thought we had more time,
that it would get better, that I
could fix him somehow.

Jessica stands, walks towards the casket with her girls. She leans over and wraps her arms around it, her tears staining the wood.

JESSICA (V.O.)

Nothing prepares you for this.
Nothing. "You knew what you signed
up for." "You knew this could
happen." It's all bullshit.

Tears escape Meg's eyes as they flit between Henry, standing at attention, and Jessica weeping.

JESSICA (V.O.)

He was more than just a gold star.
That's how they refer to us now, as
a gold star family, like it's some
fucking prize, something to be
proud of.

INT. CALLAS HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Jessica sits on the sofa, her eyes swollen from crying.
Grace and Abby curled up on her lap, asleep.

JESSICA

I was always proud of him. He was
so much more than the army.
(nods to her girls)
He was ours. I just wish that was
enough.

Meg rubs Jess' shoulder, searching for the right words to
comfort her.

MEG

How are you holding up?

JESSICA

I'm...mad. Mad we're here, that he
left us with such a mess. Mad that
we will spend the rest of our lives
missing him and picking up the
pieces. Mad that we have to make
new memories without him. I'm so
mad at myself. God, I should have
seen it coming.

MEG

Jess, c'mon, don't beat yourself
up. You couldn't have known.

Jessica looks into Meg's eyes with a sense of urgency.

JESSICA

But I should have, Meg. I should
have. Just because he was home
didn't mean he was safe.

She scoops Abby into her arms and wakes Grace enough to walk
her to bed.

Alone on the couch, Meg watches Henry in the kitchen as he
stares off into space blankly, picking at his cuticles. One
of them starts to bleed. He keeps picking.

Meg's jaw clenches.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Meg lies on Henry's chest, memorizing the sound and rhythm of his breathing, both of them staring into the darkness.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - MORNING

The room is drenched in airy, early morning light.

Meg wakes to Crews SQUEALING down the hall, then the playful giggles of Tommy and Deacon, followed by the deep rumble of Henry's voice.

She slides out of bed, looks at the time - 6:58am

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Meg tiptoes down the hall. She stops at the threshold and peers into the -

INT. LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

All the boys, including the dog, are lined up against the window, trying to stifle giggles.

Henry marches in front of them in his boxers and a t-shirt.

HENRY
(overly dramatic)
Now see here, soldiers...

Deacon tries to swallow a giggle.

HENRY
What's that private? Did I say
something funny? Am I funny like a
clown private?

He tickles him, Deacon erupts into laughter.

HENRY
Quit that laughing, get back in
formation. Time for a uniform
inspection.

Crews is laughing so hard he's barely standing upright.
Henry spins him around.

HENRY
What's this private, what is this?
Jammies? You thought you should
wear your jammies to a formation?
AND you pooped? You are all "ate
up" this morning.
(MORE)

HENRY (CONT'D)
Get back in formation, private
Stinky.

Tommy struggles to keep a solid stance with a straight face.

Henry bends down to his level.

HENRY
Is something the matter there,
solider?

TOMMY
No, sergeant!

HENRY
That's what I thought, now let's
take a look at ya. Mmhmm, looking a
little shaggy with that haircut
there, solider.

TOMMY
Your mom said she likes it,
sergeant.

Henry tries to hide his laughter.

HENRY
Looks like we got ourselves a
comedian! Drop and give me 10
private smart-ass!

Tommy drops to the floor and pumps out some sloppy push ups.
Deacon and Crews start running away, baiting Henry to catch
them.

HENRY
Hey! Where do you two think you're
going! Don't make me get the MPs!

He playfully chases them, then looks up to see Meg, smiling.

HENRY
FAMILY! Atten-SHUN!

He snaps to attention and salutes her. Tommy attempts to do
the same, Deacon and Crews have lost it entirely.

Meg laughs quietly to herself and salutes back. She and
Henry share a smile.

INT. KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Tommy and Henry sit at the table, in the middle of another chess game.

Tommy grabs his knight to move it. He goes to put it down, Henry shakes his head.

Tommy rethinks his decision, chooses another spot, Henry shakes his head. Tommy stops, thinks again.

He slowly places the knight down, looks up at Henry and sees he's nodding. He places it down confidently.

HENRY

Hey Tommy, I need to talk to you about something.

TOMMY

Okay.

HENRY

Do you know what my job is?

TOMMY

You're a soldier. In the army.

HENRY

That's right, but besides that. What's my job?

Tommy shrugs.

HENRY

Besides being a soldier, I'm your daddy, and I'm a husband. Those are two very important jobs, and to be good at those jobs, it means I need to provide for our family. I do that by being a soldier in the army, got it?

Tommy nods. Henry moves one of his pieces.

HENRY

Sometimes, it means I have to do what the army tells me to, go where the army tells me to go, so that I can provide for our family.

(just tell him)

Tommy, the army is sending me away again. I have to go back overseas to fight the bad guys.

TOMMY
But...you just got home.

HENRY
I know.

TOMMY
When do you leave?

HENRY
I don't know yet.

TOMMY
When will you get back?

HENRY
I don't know yet.

TOMMY
But that's not fair.

HENRY
I know it's not, but Tommy look,
your daddy has a very important job
helping people over there.

TOMMY
I thought you said you had an
important job here.

Stings.

HENRY
Tommy --

TOMMY
No. You can't go.

HENRY
I have to.

TOMMY
YOU CAN'T.

HENRY
Sometimes we have to do things we
don't want to do, it's part of
being a grownup.

TOMMY
...you promised.

Henry sighs, his knee bouncing, his brow furrows.

HENRY
It's your move, buddy.

Tommy shoves himself away from the table hard enough to knock some pieces over.

He storms past Meg. She shoots Henry a concerned look. *What was that about?*

Henry throws his hands up.

HENRY
I just can't catch a break.

MEG
Everything okay?

HENRY
I need to clear my head. Going out with the guys.

He takes off, slamming the front door behind him.

She lets out a frustrated sigh - *I can't catch one either.*

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

It's late. The kids are in bed. Meg sits alone on the sofa nursing what's left of a large glass of wine, staring at Henry's bags on the floor.

She stews.

FLASH MEMORY as she remembers images of Henry

- smiling with the members of his unit
- laughing with his team at the party
- then him snapping at his children
- throwing his shoe while arguing with her...

She slides off the sofa onto the floor, makes her way to his bags. She unzips one and rummages through it:

- rolled up socks and shirts
- a bag full of unit patches and challenge coins
- an electric fan
- baby wipes, bags of snacks
- more pieces of her broken mug
- a framed photo of their family

She admires the photo. The boys were all little, deployment was so very far away, they were happy.

LATER

Meg, armed with a tube of crazy glue and a now empty wine glass, sits on the floor trying to piece together her shattered mug. Definitely can't hold liquid, but it at least resembles drink ware.

Headlights appear in the window. Colonel perks up at the sound of keys in the lock.

Henry opens the door and sees her surrounded by mess. She proudly holds up her "mug."

MEG

I fixed it.

He smiles, joins her on the floor, lays his head in her lap.

HENRY

Find anything interesting in my bags?

MEG

Just needed to know what was worth going back for.

They sit there, in the still and the quiet, as she runs her fingers through his hair.

HENRY

Is Tommy okay?

She nods.

MEG

He helped me break into our bathroom while you were gone today. Deacon locked the door as he was walking out and Crews really had to go, like full blown potty dance. Tried everything, even tried to pick it with a hair pin like you see in the movies. Was all set to kick it down when Tommy suggested unscrewing the doorknob. He saved the day, our door, and our carpets.

Henry chuckles.

HENRY

That much fun, huh?

MEG

Oh that's nothing.

FLASH MEMORY as she recalls deployment

- the kids standing next to the car as she tries to start it and it won't turn over
- her and Tommy standing ankle deep in water in the basement
- trying to catch a bird that flew into the house while the kids are screaming...

MEG
Murphy's law sucks.

HENRY
Fuckin' Murph.

They laugh, then settle back into the silence.

HENRY
How come you never told me any of that stuff?

MEG
(shrugs)
You were on the other side of the earth dealing with things far more important. I didn't want you to worry, just like you didn't want me to worry about you.
(deep breath)
Look, I know I'll never truly understand or be a battle buddy or whatever, but you can talk to me. It was just us before the army, I don't want to lose that.

He sits up and looks at her like he wants to let her in.

HENRY
I know. I'm trying. I'll get there.

MEG
I know.

HENRY
I don't want the kids to remember this summer as just daddy being angry. Maybe we should go out tomorrow, one last hoorah before summer ends.

MEG
(there he is)
Sounds great.

He holds her cheeks in his hands, and sweetly plants a kiss on her lips, just like old times.

EXT. KNOEBELS AMUSEMENT PARK - DAY

A time capsule of hand crafted carousels and rickety rides where half the thrill is they might fall apart in motion.

The Thatchers march up to the one-person ticket booth. A WOMAN in line points to the large "Military Discount Available" sticker stuck to the glass as she argues with the ATTENDANT.

WOMAN

Support the troops my ass! My husband is an OFFICER, and all we get is a miserable 10 percent off? We earned more than that. I can't wait to get on the spouse facebook page and rip y'all a new one. Y'all ain't gonna get any more military families here. I can't believe this, after all we do for our country...

She storms past the Thatchers with her family, shaking her head. Henry shoots a look at Meg - *typical dependa, yeesh.*

He walks up to the booth.

HENRY

Hi there. How much for the all day passes?

ATTENDANT

Those are \$50 each.

HENRY

Even for the kids?

ATTENDANT

Well, the little one is only \$33.

HENRY

He can't even - all right so what about the tickets, do you guys still do pay per ride.

ATTENDANT

Yes, we do. You can do \$50, \$20 or \$5.

HENRY

Okay, let's do that, we'll do 3 of the \$20 ones. Can we do the Military discount?

ATTENDANT

Yessir, I just need to see your military ID.

He pulls out his wallet and fingers through for his ID and his debit card. He hands them both over, then turns to smile at the boys.

ATTENDANT

Here you are, sir, your tickets, your cards and your receipt. Enjoy your day.

She hands them all through the hole in the window. Henry hands them out to the kids, then looks at the receipt. His eyes narrow.

HENRY

'Scuse me, did we get the military discount for these?

ATTENDANT

Yessir, it's there.

HENRY

I only see it on here once, shouldn't it have applied to all three?

ATTENDANT

(oh great, another one)
No sir, it was just applied to yours. It's for active duty only.

TOMMY

(to Meg)
Does that mean we can't stay?

DEACON

Aw but I wanna ride...

MEG

We're still gonna ride, Deacon, daddy's handling it.

HENRY

I'm sorry, I don't understand - I bought the tickets, I'm active duty.

ATTENDANT

Yes, but your family is not, so it doesn't apply to their tickets, only yours. You're the one serving.

He taps his knuckles on the booth, lots of restraint.

HENRY
Okay, thank you.

ATTENDANT
And thank you for your service.

He clenches his jaw. Meg grabs his balled up hand.

MEG
It's just a couple extra bucks...

He forces a smile.

EXT. KNOEBELS AMUSEMENT PARK - KIDS BUMPER CARS - LATER

The miniature cars roar and rumble across the slick floor, sparks from the metal grates above trickling down.

Tommy smashes his car into Deacon's, then pushes forward, determined to get him back. Crews' car is stuck in a corner. He whines in frustration.

HENRY
(frustrated/shouting over
the noise)
Crews! Turn the wheel! Just turn
the wheel!

EXT. KNOEBELS AMUSEMENT PARK - BALLOON RIDE - LATER

Henry, Tommy and Deacon are piled into one balloon while Meg and Crews ride in another. They smile and laugh while Henry's eyes dart around the space, watching everything.

EXT. KNOEBELS AMUSEMENT PARK - CARNIVAL GAME - LATER

Henry WHIPS a baseball at some bottles sending them CLANGING to the floor. Meg and the boys erupt into cheers.

The WORKER hands him a STUFFED PANDA, which he turns and gifts to Meg.

Deacon sees another carnival game to play and starts running towards it. Henry grabs his hand, forcefully.

HENRY
Hey. HEY! We move as a unit.

Deacon stops, nods, then shakes the pain out of his hand.

EXT. KNOEBELS AMUSEMENT PARK - PICNIC TABLES - LATER

Tommy, Deacon and Crews devour their ice cream cones while Henry and Meg share one.

Henry's phone rings. He stands up from the table, walks away as he answers. Meg watches as his shoulders tense.

EXT. KNOEBELS AMUSEMENT PARK - NIGHT

Fireworks explode in a dazzling array of lights across the sky. Tommy and Deacon are completely enthralled, Crews is completely asleep in Meg's lap.

She shifts her gaze from the sky to Henry's face, forlorn, clearly faking his enjoyment for the boys.

She reaches for his hand. Henry jumps, startled, caught with his guard down. Meg's eyes soften, begging him to let her in, but he doesn't. His gaze returns to the fireworks.

INT. THATCHER HOME - LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Henry jimmies open the front door, carrying a sleeping Crews. He stops in his tracks.

Colonel is laying on the floor, surrounded by piles of vomit. He moans in pain.

Meg shuffles in afterwards with Deacon, sound asleep, and stops in the same spot. Her eyes widen.

Tommy pushes past them and gasps.

Shit.

INT. EMERGENCY VET - PRIVATE ROOM - NIGHT

It's small and sterile. Fluorescent lights hum and flicker.

Meg sits alone, her eyes fixated on her phone.

INSERT: MEG'S PHONE

She opens her banking app and types in the password. Her active accounts pop up - the checking account is -\$221.30 after the amusement park and there's only \$883.47 in the savings account.

Her hands tremble.

An X-RAY of Colonel's stomach glows on the wall. It's a maze of twists and curves, with an odd shaped object lodged in the middle.

She walks towards the x-ray, tilting her head.

She reaches into her purse and pulls out one of Crews' pacifiers. She holds it up to the image. It matches.

Someone KNOCKS on the door.

VET TECH (O.S.)
Mrs. Thatcher?

Meg turns. The VET TECH stands at the door with a small smile and an even smaller file.

VET TECH
I'm working with Dr. Sparks on Colonel's case. He's going to need emergency surgery to remove the obstruction. He's stable now, so they want to take him back quickly. We need you to sign this authorization form to perform the surgery. In the event he stops breathing, would you like us to perform CPR?

She looks up at the vet tech through tears. She nods.

VET TECH
Okay. Once the surgery is complete, we will need to admit him for 24 hours observation, then he can go home in a day or so. I have all the charges listed for you here.
(opens the file)
Once that's signed, we can get him back into surgery.

She hands the file to Meg. The first page is a list of charges - anesthesia, surgical time, medicines administered, etc - the total cost is \$6350.56.

Meg blinks, and large tears she was holding in crash down onto the paper.

VET TECH
If you need any help paying, we have some options available.

Meg looks up at her in disbelief.

MEG

Yes, umm...yes please, I'd like to,
I think we'll need it.

INT. CAR - NIGHT

Meg stops at a red light. She's the only car in the intersection. She stares up at the light, pleading with it to turn green.

A ominous light on her dashboard clicks on - check engine.

She inhales, then unleashes everything she's held inside for the last year on the dashboard of her car until her chest heaves for lungfuls of air between her tears. She rests her head on steering wheel.

The light turns green. She picks her head up, wipes her face and keeps driving.

EXT. THATCHER HOME - DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

The green hatchback rolls into the driveway. Meg shuts off the ignition but doesn't get out. She stares at the front door, her hands still shaking. *What are we going to do?*

INT. THATCHER HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The house is dark and eerily quiet. No happy galloping to meet her, no giggling children, everything cleaned up. Even Henry's bags are finally put away.

She trudges up the stairs.

INT. BOYS BEDROOM - NIGHT

She tip toes into the room, kisses each of the boys gently on their heads.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Henry lies in bed, wide awake, waiting for her.

HENRY

How is he?

Meg climbs into bed with him, fully clothed.

MEG

They um - have to do surgery. It's a lot of money, Henry. I applied for a payment plan, but...

She rests her head on his chest.

MEG

I don't know what to do.

Her tears spill onto his shirt.

HENRY

It'll work out, babe. Everything
will be fine.

MEG

Maybe we shouldn't have gone today.
If I'd been home...

HENRY

Dogs do dumb things, Meg. You
couldn't have known.

MEG

But the money...

HENRY

Do you think the kids had fun
today?

MEG

They had a blast.

HENRY

Then it was worth it, right? We can
always get more money, can't get
more time.

She wipes her eyes and relaxes into him. He admires the way
her hair lays across his chest, stroking it behind her ear.

HENRY

Think they'll...remember? The good
stuff I mean, not the yelling or
the fighting. You think, you think
it will mean anything to them?

MEG

I hope so. It meant a lot to me.

Exhausted, she slips into sleep. He continues to play with
her hair, memorizing the lines on her face.

INT. MASTER BEDROOM - MORNING

Meg wakes slowly, surprised at how bright it is.

She checks her phone - no messages.

She rolls over towards Henry, but he isn't there.

INT. LIVING ROOM - EARLY MORNING

The boys are sitting on the floor, munching on poptarts, watching a show.

Meg, still dressed in yesterday's clothes, looks around, expecting to find Henry on the sofa, but he's not there.

Tommy rushes up to Meg.

TOMMY

What happened with Colonel? Is he okay?

MEG

He's at the vet, buddy. He ate something he shouldn't have and they had to do surgery to get it out. He's okay, but they need to keep him for a while to make sure.

TOMMY

But he's okay?

MEG

Yeah, he is. He will be.

DEACON

(chewing)

Mom, Tommy climbed on the counter to get us pop tarts.

TOMMY

Everyone was hungry and you guys weren't up yet. I promise I was super careful.

MEG

Daddy's not up yet?

TOMMY

I haven't seen him.

Meg turns to go back up the stairs - *Bathroom maybe?*

DEACON

He left.

MEG

What do you mean he left, Deacon?

DEACON

He's not here.

MEG
(why didn't he tell me)
Did he say where he was going
buddy?

DEACON
(am I in trouble?)
He said...he said he had to go get
Colonel from the doggie hospital.

A wave of relief rushes over Meg's face. Wait...

DEACON
He said you were snoring and he
didn't want to wake you up.

TOMMY
So Colonel is coming home?

MEG
I guess so. I'm going to get
changed, you boys start cleaning
up. We don't want Colonel eating
anything else he's not supposed to.

Tommy gets to work picking up random toys and socks. Deacon
and Crews keep eating and watching TV.

Meg heads down into the -

INT. BASEMENT

Piles of laundry surround the washer and drier. Meg sorts
through a basket, sniffing each piece to make sure they're
clean, and picks out some outfits.

Her phone RINGS.

MEG
Hello?

DR. SPARKS (O.S.)
Mrs. Thatcher? This is Dr. Sparks,
Colonel's veterinarian. I'm calling
to let you know Colonel is out of
surgery. You got him here just in
time - any longer and he would have
gone into shock.

MEG
That's...that's great news. Thank
you. I'm so glad he's okay.

DR. SPARKS (O.S.)
 He's resting now, a nurse will call
 you with discharge instructions in
 a few hours.

Meg stops suddenly, her shoulders tense.

MEG
 Oh, he's not...he hasn't been
 discharged yet?

DR. SPARKS (O.S.)
 No, we'd like to keep him for
 observation to make sure the
 anesthesia has worn off, see if he
 will eat anything.

Meg turns, confused.

MEG
 Oh, well my husband is on his way
 to pick him up.

Her eyes flit around the room. Her jaw drops -
the gun safe is open.

DR. SPARKS (O.S.)
 I'm sorry, but Colonel won't be
 ready to leave for several hours.
 We will call you when he is.

MEG
 O-okay, thank you.

Eyes fixed on the open safe, she rushes towards it.

She frantically searches through all the sundry items in
 there - no gun.

Shit.

She hurries back up the stairs to the LIVING ROOM. She yanks
 the front door open -

I/E. THATCHER HOME - FRONT YARD/DRIVEWAY

- the car is still there.

TOMMY (O.S.)
 Mom? Is everything okay?

She shuts the door. *Don't panic.*

MEG
Deacon, I thought you said daddy
left?

Meg runs to the KITCHEN - no Henry.

DEACON
He did.

Tommy runs to the window, sees the car is still there.

TOMMY
No he didn't, the car is still
here.

Meg heads back upstairs to the BATHROOM - no Henry.

DEACON
He did, I swear, I'm not lying! I
saw him go out the front door!

She comes back downstairs, grabs her phone, and dials his
number - straight to voicemail.

Don't panic, don't panic, don't panic...

MEG
Okay, uh...I need everyone to put
their shoes on.

TOMMY
Where are we going?

MEG
We are going to play a really fun
game called 'Who can find Daddy
first.'

CREWS
I wanna play I wanna play!

MEG
We are all gonna play...and how we
play is...we get shoes on and get
in the car and we're going to drive
around looking for daddy.

Deacon and Crews throw their shoes on, Deacon doesn't even
bother trying to tie them.

Tommy studies Meg's face as she struggles to hide her fear.

MEG
Everybody got shoes on? Okay, let's
go, round one starts now.

She scoops Crews up in her arms and shuffles everyone out.

INT. CAR - DAY

Meg's eyes dart all over, searching the features of every
person on the street looking for Henry.

Tommy stares intently out the window while Deacon and Crews
make each other laugh.

DEACON
Mom, what do we get if we win?

MEG
If we win what, buddy?

DEACON
The who finds daddy first game.

MEG
(totally forgot)
Oh, right - uh...you can have two
popsicles when we get home.

CREWS + DEACON
TWO?!

MEG
Yup, so keep looking.

Meg drives through town - churches, grocery stores, shopping
centers all passing outside the car windows.

She tries to keep her focus on the road while she redials
his number - straight to voicemail.

MEG
(under her breath)
Dammit, Henry, where are you?

TOMMY
What about his friend? The one that
died? Do you think...

MEG
That's a good idea Tommy.

I/E. CAR - CEMETERY - DAY

The green hatchback tears through the CEMETERY and parks.

Meg spots a fresh grave tucked neatly under a tree with a military wreath on it - this is Neil's gravesite.

Meg notices some movement under the tree.

MEG

You boys stay here, keep looking for daddy.

CREWS

I wanna come.

MEG

No. Stay here. Don't open the door for anyone but me or daddy.

(to Tommy)

Understood?

Tommy nods.

She jumps out of the car and rushes towards the tree.

MEG

Henry?

She holds her breath as she notices more movement when -

Jessica pokes her head out from behind the tree, journalling a letter to Neil. All the air is sucked out of Meg.

JESSICA

Meg? What are you doing here?

MEG

Oh...Jess, I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to intrude. I thought you were...I was just...hoping Henry would be here.

JESSICA

Just been me all morning.

MEG

Oh, okay...

JESSICA

Everything okay?

MEG

(lying)

Mmmhmm...just..

She can't hold in the tears anymore. Jessica stands and gets eye level with her, recognizing her fear.

JESSICA

Meg?

MEG

--I can't find Henry, and I don't...He has a gun and I don't know what to do.

JESSICA

Hey, hey. It's all right. We're gonna find him. You take the kids and go home, I'll make some calls to the other guys in the unit, okay?

(I promise)

We will find him and we will get him home to you.

Meg nods, wiping her tears, and heads back to the car. Jessica whips out her phone and starts dialing.

INT. CAR

Meg composes herself for the boys.

She makes eye contact with Tommy through the rearview mirror and gives a little smile. *It'll be okay.*

She starts the car.

INT. THATCHER HOME - AFTERNOON

Tommy, Deacon and Crews are parked in front of the TV, distracted by popsicles and a Pokemon movie.

INT. KITCHEN - AFTERNOON

Meg paces around the room, looking at her phone, trying to decide what to do.

She desperately dials Henry's number again and holds her breath as it rings. Voicemail.

She SLAMS her phone down on the table.

She closes her eyes, trying to keep it together, and says a silent prayer. She opens them and looks out the window to the backyard. Her eyes widen.

Sitting under a tree, with the gun in his lap, is Henry.

EXT. THATCHER HOME - BACKYARD - AFTERNOON

Meg slinks through the backyard, trying to reach Henry quickly without startling him. She gets closer to see his eyes are red and swollen from crying. She slows down.

MEG

Henry?

He looks up at her, finally ready to let her in.

HENRY

They were smart over there, smarter than I expected. They knew we'd figured out an abandoned car meant there was probably a bomb in it, so they started hiding them in piles of trash, rigged em to explode when we tried to clean it up.

She sits down on the ground beside him.

HENRY

Driving anywhere was terrifying, always looking for dirt out of place, trying to make sure you saw everything. We all had targets on our backs. By the time I left, the bounty for any US soldier was \$5000 a head. Some idiot in comms almost sold us all out by accident. Never even met them, and they wanted to kill me. Couldn't even take a shit because their drones were aiming at our latrines, not outside the wire like command kept telling us. Every time I rushed you off the phone they were attacking us. We'd run down into the bunker so often we started to think it was fake til one day I saw the C-Ram firing trying to take out a missile headed right for us. That day I prayed and prayed as I hid in that damn bunker to let me make it home so I can do it right - be the perfect husband, the perfect father. But I'm not. All I do is yell at the kids or at you, I can't hold a conversation or fucking relax. It took me 10 minutes to pick out something to wear today because I had so many choices, I have to make decisions about everything.

(MORE)

HENRY (CONT'D)

It's fucking exhausting and the only people who get it I no longer see every day. I thought coming home would be easier, but being a soldier is the only thing I'm good at...

(deep breath)

They pulled my unit from standby, we're not going back. Means I go back to being MDay and have to find a civilian job. I'm useless and that fucking terrifies me. I'm sorry. Sorry I did this to you, put you through all of this, the kids, I fucked it all up...I should've just died over there, saved you guys from me.

MEG

That's not true.

HENRY

I can't do it, Meg.

MEG

Yes you can.

HENRY

I can't.

MEG

Yes you can. I'm not giving up on you. We'll do it together right? Just you and me, but we need to get you some help, okay?

HENRY

They'll kick me out. We won't get the money.

MEG

I don't care about the army or the money, I care about you. I was prepared to lose you for another year, but not...I can't lose you for the rest of my life.

HENRY

You've done such a good job without me. I know it was hard, but you did it. You don't need me here, you don't.

TOMMY (O.S.)
I need you, Daddy.

Meg and Henry turn to see Tommy standing behind them, tears rolling down his cheeks.

TOMMY
You promised you were going to teach me how to play chess. You promised to play with me, remember? You said that would be just for us...you and me...remember? Please, daddy, stay for me. Don't leave. I need you.

Henry drops his head and sobs as Tommy joins him on the ground, enveloping him in a hug.

Slowly and quietly, Meg slips the gun away from Henry.

INT. BATHROOM - LATER

Meg scowls at the gun, sitting on the counter, like it betrayed her.

She locks the door, then picks it up, feeling its weight in her hands, the cold metal barrel on her skin. She presses the magazine release and it falls into her hand.

She unloads the bullets from the magazine one by one into the sink - *clank, clank, clank...*

She stares at them there, all pooled up by the drain, harmless now.

She squeezes her eyes shut, trying to control her breathing, as tears tumble down her cheeks.

She looks at herself in the mirror - smeared mascara, tired eyes - she doesn't recognize herself anymore.

She turns on the faucet and splashes some cold water on her face. She looks in the mirror once more - *there she is*.

She reaches for her phone and dials JESSICA.

JESSICA (O.S.)
Meg? Did you find him?

MEG
(choking on the words)
Yeah, we found him. I um...I think-
I think we need some help.

INT. PARKING GARAGE - DAY

A bright light shines at the end of the long, gray corridor.

Meg, Henry, Tommy, Deacon, Crews and Colonel, with a cone on his neck, all step into frame. Henry wheels one of his large black bags behind him.

EXT. WALTER REED MEDICAL CENTER - DAY

A bland, gray, symmetrical building, similar to the airport, with service members coming and going.

DEACON

How long will you be gone for,
Daddy?

HENRY

Only for a little while. They're
going to help me get stronger and
I'll be back before you know it.

CREWS

Bye, daddy!

HENRY

Bye my Crewsy, love you buddy.

CREWS

Luh you daddy.

HENRY

Tommy? I'm proud of you, you know
that?

TOMMY

I'm proud of you too.

HENRY

Be good to mom, okay? You're in
charge.

TOMMY

Okay.

Henry cups Meg's face in his hands. They both smile.

HENRY

I don't know how you do it.

MEG

It's easier with you.

They kiss. Tommy pretends to be grossed out.

Henry bends down to Colonel.

HENRY

Take care of my family, sir. You've
done a helluva job so far.

He gives him a good scratch, then grabs his bags and takes
another look at his family before marching inside.

Meg watches him walk through the door and waves.

TOMMY

Hey mom?

MEG

Yeah.

TOMMY

Dad's a hero, right?

MEG

Yeah, yeah he is, buddy.

CREWS

I be hero too?

MEG

Sure buddy. You all can.

They head back towards the garage.

Deacon stops and looks at his untied shoe.

DEACON

Mommy? Can you help me with my
shoes?

FADE TO BLACK.

OVER BLACK:

TITLE: DEPENDA[BLE]

THE END.