

A small gravestone is situated downstage C., the area around it illuminated by a small spotlight. Kneeling in front of it, facing downstage, is DAD, his eyes fixed on the inscription that faces him. After a few moments he begins to speak.

DAD

Hello son

(Beat)

Not sure what I'm supposed to...well, to say in this kind of a...situation. Never was very religious, as you know. So I'm not really sure how this works. So if I miss something out...you know...sorry about that. Guess I'll just start off with the basics. So...well...hello son.

(Beat)

I, um...I meant to come by before. Long before. But...well, you know how it is...what with your mom falling apart like she has – completely understandable, though, and I'm not complaining, but...well, it does make it harder – and work's been piling on the overtime like no one's business, and sometimes I hardly seem to get a minute to think. So what with one thing and another, it's been really hard to find the time to come by.

(Beat)

And I suppose...I suppose if I was being honest, I've been...well, I've been putting it off a bit, too. Been thinking about you quite a bit, see, son. Quite a bit. But not here. I don't like to think of you here. I think about you how it used to be...such a short time ago. Seems like forever now. But coming here...it makes it real. Makes me face it. And the truth is, I haven't been doing all that well with this myself. Have to try, see, 'cause of your mom. But that's why you haven't seen me. Been avoiding it, I guess. But...well, here I am...and there it is...the plain truth – carved in stone.

(A light slowly illuminates the figure of a young man, staring straight ahead, standing some distance behind DAD. After a moment he speaks)

ROBBIE

No flowers?

(DAD looks up and straight ahead. For the duration of their conversation, DAD remains kneeling, ROBBIE standing some distance behind him, both looking out at the fourth wall, neither one ever looking at the other. Pause.)

DAD

Sorry son?

ROBBIE

I said, no flowers? You didn't bring me any flowers.

DAD

No, I...I guess I didn't.

ROBBIE

Jeez! You finally manage to drag your sorry ass down here to see me, and when you do you can't even be bothered to bring any flowers.

DAD

Sorry about that, Robbie. Never gave it a thought. Didn't know you were that big on them, to tell you the truth.

ROBBIE

I'm not, but it's not the point. It's traditional. It's what you do when you come to these places – you bring flowers and try to brighten the place up a bit. It's like a gesture. Take a look around – they've all got 'em. Some nicer than others, but they've all got 'em. Even that slimy bastard Sammy Pearson's got flowers, and no one ever had a good to say about that lowlife ass wipe.

DAD

Easy, son. You shouldn't really speak ill of the dead, you know that.

ROBBIE

Uh, Dad...when you're one of them...*it's okay.*

DAD

Ah...yeah, I guess you gotta point there.

(Beat)

Anyway, I'll try and bring some next time, but don't hold me to it. It's just not me, see, to go paradin' around town holdin' a big bunch of flowers like some kinda Dapper Dan. Never bought flowers before in my life. Not even for your Mom.

ROBBIE

(Incredulous)

Not even for Mom?

DAD

Nope, never. She understood, though.

ROBBIE

You think so, huh? Jeez, poor Mom. Man, and I thought Marines were macho.

DAD

Like I say, it's not me, but I'll try.

(Beat)

So uh...so anyway...what's it like?

ROBBIE

What's what like?

DAD

You know...over there. Pretty decent, is it? They treatin' you okay?

ROBBIE

Ah...uh...mmm...I was kinda hopin' you wouldn't bring that up. It's not something I'm authorized to talk about, see? I'm not supposed to discuss it.

DAD

Oh right, I see...military, is it? Government stuff?

ROBBIE

Don't be a spazz, Dad. The government don't have dibs on you on the other side – though I'm sure they wish they did. No, this is more about only being privy to what goes on once you're actually here. Sort of a 'members only' thing.

DAD

Ah, yeah, I see, I see. Kinda like the mafia?

ROBBIE

Well...yeah, kind of, I guess. Only without the protection rackets and revenge killings.

DAD

Got it, got it – right. Won't ask again. Mom's the word.

ROBBIE

Talkin' of which, how's Mom doing these days?

(Beat)

DAD

Well, I won't lie to you, son. She'll never be the same. She's broken. Guess we all are really. Nothing can ever be the same. When you were born we were like two little kids...we couldn't believe what had happened to us. And now...now we can't again. She buried her child. Don't get much worse.

ROBBIE

I'm all right, Dad...really I am. Know that. Tell Mom.

DAD

Maybe you are...wherever you are. I hope so. But us...we're still living with it. Trying to make sense of it. And that...the trying to make sense of it...that's the hard part.

ROBBIE

It's not that hard really. I fought and I died. And I did it for the country I loved.

DAD

I know you did, son. And we're all very proud of you.

(Beat)

For your dedication, at any rate.

ROBBIE

"At any rate"? What the hell is that supposed to mean?

DAD

Nothin'. Nothin' really – nothin' at all. Just that in that sense – the patriotic sense – we're very, very proud of you.

ROBBIE

No, no, no...come on, you're not bein' upfront with me. Either you're proud of me or you aren't – there's no "in that sense" to it. It's black or it's white. So what are you tryin' to say?

DAD

Nothin' – really, son.

ROBBIE

C'mon, Dad, level with me.

DAD

It's not important now. It doesn't matter. You're gone...you're gone and nothing I do or say is gonna change that. Best just let it be what it is.

ROBBIE

'Course it matters. It was my fuckin' life for chrissakes. It matters a whole lot to me, even if it's no big deal to anyone else. And I died protecting my country and protecting our freedom and our way of life – and it sure as hell don't get much more important than that!

DAD

No...no, you're right.

ROBBIE

'Course I'm right. I don't know why you're talkin' like that. What the hell's gotten into you?

DAD

I don't know.

(Beat)

Let's just drop it. Let's just agree and leave it at that.

ROBBIE

No, let's not agree. Let's not drop it. I'm telling you – reminding you – that I died in the course of battle for the most noble cause there is: to protect my family and my friends and everything I know and love. Why I need to remind you of this I've no idea, but I'd really appreciate it if you'd stop acting all shifty eyed and shuffling your feet like that.

DAD

That's kinda hard when you're kneeling down.

ROBBIE

Don't get cute, you know what I mean. You're being all weird and evasive, as if...as if you don't believe in it.

DAD

Believe in what?

ROBBIE

(Bluntly)

What I died for.

DAD

Please, son.

ROBBIE

You don't, do you?

DAD

I told you – what does any of it matter now?

ROBBIE

It matters to me – I'm fuckin' dead!