

THE NURSE OF NORMANDY

A Play By:

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PERUSALLAMA



dramallama

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The Nurse of Normandy. A Play by David Abbinanti

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ABOUT the SHOW

Set in the shadow of D-Day, *The Nurse of Normandy* follows a group of American army nurses stationed just behind the front lines in France. At its heart is Liz Baker, a whip-smart and emotionally resilient nurse whose unexpected talent for codebreaking leads her to uncover a chilling secret: one of the wounded soldiers she's treating isn't who he claims to be. As her bond with the charming but mysterious Daniel deepens, Liz is faced with an impossible choice between her heart and her duty. Alongside her quick-witted friend and fellow nurse, Joanne, Liz navigates the brutality of war, the power of sisterhood, and the cost of telling the truth.

This gripping WWII-era drama blends high-stakes espionage with intimate human moments, capturing both the unsung heroism of frontline nurses and the moral gray zones of wartime. With sharp humor, emotional depth, and a final act full of tension and hope, *The Nurse of Normandy* is a moving tribute to the women who served with courage, compassion, and strength in one of history's darkest hours.

CHARACTERS

17 Characters. 8 F, 9M

Can be done with as few as 11 actors with doubling

LIZ BAKER

A strong, sharp, and morally grounded army nurse. Skilled in codebreaking. Faces a heartbreaking betrayal when she uncovers the truth about a man she has feelings for. Promoted to Lieutenant by the end.

JOANNE RUSSO

Liz's witty and no-nonsense best friend, a fellow nurse from Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. Protective of her brother and deeply loyal, with a tough exterior and a heart of gold.

DANIEL TAYLOR/HENRY KRUGER

A charming but secretive patient posing as a sergeant. Actually an American-born German spy, forced into espionage under threat of family disgrace. Ultimately caught.

FRANK RUSSO

Joanne's brother, a soldier in the 4th Infantry. A source of comic relief and warmth, he writes heartfelt letters from the front.

TONY CAFIERO

A soldier with a flirtatious streak and budding romantic interest in Joanne. Goofy but good-hearted.

MICKEY

Tony's buddy, quick with jokes and sarcasm. Part of the group of soldiers who hang out at the quiet room table.

CHARLIE

Quiet and recovering from trauma. Becomes more talkative as he heals. Crucial in revealing Daniel's suspicious behavior.

CAPTAIN HARTMAN

Gruff and dismissive commanding officer. Resistant to input from nurses but ultimately acts on their intel.

M.P. GUARD

Brief role guarding Daniel after his capture.

SECOND LIEUTENANT PARKER

A soldier treated by Joanne. Unwittingly reveals a key inconsistency in Daniel's backstory.

FRANK'S UNIT OFFICER

Brief role, confirms Frank is moving out toward Cherbourg.

GLORIA

New nurse taken under Joanne's wing.

VARIOUS NURSES (3-5)

Deliver powerful closing monologues as they write condolence letters to families of the fallen.

ACT 1

PROLOGUE

(In darkness, we hear the following speech)

GENERAL DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER

June fifth, nineteen forty-four.

Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force

You are about to embark upon the Great Crusade, toward which we have striven these many months. The eyes of the world are upon you. The hopes and prayers of liberty-loving people everywhere march with you.

In company with our brave Allies and brothers-in-arms on other Fronts, you will bring about the destruction of the German war machine, the elimination of Nazi tyranny over the oppressed peoples of Europe, and security for ourselves in a free world.

Your task will not be an easy one. Your enemy is well trained, well equipped and battle-hardened.

I have full confidence in your courage, devotion to duty and skill in battle. We will accept nothing less than full Victory!

Good luck! And let us all beseech the blessing of Almighty God upon this great and noble undertaking.

– Dwight D. Eisenhower

SCENE 1

NORMANDY, FRANCE—1944. MAIN TRIAGE UNIT

(Distant shots and explosions are heard in the darkness. Then, lights up on a makeshift hospital. Multiple nurses tend to wounded men. It's chaotic and messy. Nurses are running all over trying to tend to all sorts of soldiers with all sorts of wounds. One nurse, LIZ BAKER, is opening crates of medical supplies. As quickly as she opens a crate, she's handing supplies to nurses who need them. One nurse, JOANNE RUSSO, seems calm and collected amidst the brutal scene.)

NURSE 1

(wrapping a tourniquet around a wounded soldier's leg)
Morphine, someone! I need morphine.

JOANNE

(walking by quickly but nonchalantly)
Good luck.

NURSE 3

(speaking to her patient as she works on him)
It's not that bad. Really, I've seen worse on some of the boys in Montecasino.

SOLDIER 1

(alone on a bed)
Ahhh...Nuuuurrsee!?!

NURSE 1

Liz! Leave that! Get him!

(LIZ drops the supplies and runs over to SOLDIER 1)

LIZ

What do you need?

SOLDIER 1

My side. It's my side!

(LIZ reaches to tend to his side. He winces. She feels his forehead.)

LIZ

Yeah. You're running hot and the wound is weeping. It's become infected.

(running to one of the crates)
You need penicillin—fast!

SOLDIER 2

Ahhh...damn, it hurts!

(JOANNE heads over with a needle while LIZ frantically searches the crate for penicillin)

JOANNE

(to SOLDIER 2)

You got shot twice in the same leg, Lieutenant. What did you expect? Now hold still, I've only done this once before...and it was on a turkey.

(JOANNE administers a shot into SOLDIER 2's leg. He quickly calms down and actually smiles.)

JOANNE

Thank you. Tips are greatly appreciated.

(LIZ heads back to SOLDIER 1 who has died. She stares for a second and then takes a big sigh.)

LIZ

Tag him!

(The other NURSES look. Two orderlies come right in and wheel the deceased soldier out. JOANNE stand next to LIZ.)

LIZ

I thought I had him. Dammit.

JOANNE

(using humor as her mask)

Well, one less letter to write.

VARIOUS SOLDIERS

"Nuuuurrsee!?! "Ahhhghh". "Help me!"

(The NURSES, including JOANNE and LIZ do their best to tend to everyone)

JOANNE

Calm down, Private. If you can scream that loud—you ain't dyin'.

HEAD NURSE

(entering)

Make room! Incoming casualties!

LIZ

(to JOANNE)
Make room?!

JOANNE

Misery loves company.

(Three new soldiers are brought in on gurneys. LIZ heads right over to each one and barks orders to other nurses)

LIZ

(She approaches the first gurney and looks. To NURSE 4—)
Shrapnel. Stop the bleeding and find the entry points!

(Second gurney. To NURSE 5—)
Second-degree burns on the chest—he's going into shock. Get fluids and morphine.

(Third gurney. To herself—)
Unresponsive. Blank stares.

(to NURSE 2)
It's not his body—it's his mind. He's not here anymore.

NURSE 2

Shell Shock?

(The SOLDIER mumbles something. LIZ is taken aback)

NURSE 2 (CONT'D)

What did he say?

LIZ

Nevermind. Get him into the quiet room and find Doctor Prescott.

(NURSE 2 wheels him offstage. JOANNE approaches LIZ.)

I can take the screaming, Jo. It's their silence that I hate. Their voices and their eyes.

JOANNE

You'd be quiet too...if your mind thought it was still under fire.

(They share a look. Then—)

SOLDIER 3

NUUURRSEEE!!!

(Lights slowly fade as explosions continue and then fade out as well)

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SCENE 2

THE QUIET ROOM

(A more peaceful place with a few soldiers resting in beds. Soft lighting. One of the soldiers is the man LIZ sent here. LIZ enters and approaches him. She looks at him. Feels his forehead, then his cheeks. No fever. She adjusts his blanket so that he's more comfortable. Then just sits in the chair next to the bed. The soldier is DANIEL TAYLOR. After a moment, DANIEL breaks the silence.)

DANIEL

So, what do I got?

(LIZ is startled)

Sorry. Didn't mean to—

LIZ

No, no. It's okay. You just startled me. How umm...how are you feeling?

DANIEL

A little better. A lot embarrassed.

LIZ

Embarrassed? Embarrassed for what?

DANIEL

They don't give Purple Hearts people who freeze up.

LIZ

You didn't freeze up. It's shell shock and it's a real thing.

DANIEL

Huh. The guys I fight with would call it cowardice.

LIZ

Well, that couldn't be further from the truth. I mean it. I've seen more shell shock these past 2 ½ years than amputations. And I can assure you that bravery has nothing to do with it. Plenty of those men had a lot more fruit salad than you.

DANIEL

Fruit salad?

LIZ

Yeah.

(pointing to his chest)

Medals.

DANIEL

(with a little laughter)

Fruit salad. I'll have to remember that one.

LIZ

I'm surprised this is the first you're hearing of it.

DANIEL

(changing the subject)

So, what's my treatment, doc?

LIZ

Just rest. Fluids. Unfortunately, it's probably not a ticket home. Orders are usually to get shellshocks back to the line as soon as possible. Especially now with the invasion underway. Heck, they'd even make a one-legged blind man limp back to the line these days. They'd just point him south and hope for the best.

(they share a laugh)

DANIEL

You're funny. I like you.

LIZ

(With sadness. Hard to remember what being funny and laughing was like.)

Funny. Huh.

DANIEL

So, uhh. Are you assigned to this room now?

LIZ

No. I just got off my shift and came in to you know...check and see how you were doing.

DANIEL

Check on me? Okay. Can I ask you something—

LIZ

Liz.

DANIEL

Liz. So...Liz. What makes me so special?

LIZ

What do you mean?

DANIEL

Well, you came in to check on me. Just me.

LIZ

I don't care for what you're implying, Sergeant.

DANIEL

I'm not implying anything. I think it's a fair question. Your shift is over. Why aren't you back at your camp? Resting up. There'll be more waves of soldiers tomorrow, you know.

LIZ

I'm sure of that.

DANIEL

So then, what? If you don't tell me, I'll order you to.

(he smiles)

LIZ

Well. No it's stupid.

DANIEL

No. Come on.

LIZ

Ok well...when I was diagnosing you, you said something that made me think you knew me or something.

DANIEL

What was it?

LIZ

I didn't get all of it but it was something like—the shadows are falling, Liz. Something like that. I don't know. It was weird. So, I wasn't sure if we knew each other.

DANIEL

Huh. Well. I certainly don't remember saying anything like that. But I assure you, it had nothing to do with you, Liz. My mother's name is Liz. I must have been seeing her in a dream or something. In my state, you know.

LIZ

Huh. Yeah, that does make sense. Now I feel stupid.

DANIEL

No don't.

LIZ

No, I do.

DANIEL

Well..you shouldn't. Now, go get some rest.

LIZ

Aren't I supposed to be telling you that.

(They smile as LIZ gets up and DANIEL settle in bed. As LIZ reaches the door, she turns to DANIEL.)

It's a real thing. Shell Shock. Don't let anyone steal your courage.

(She exits. Lights out.)

SCENE 3

THE NEXT DAY – “NON-EMERGENCY” TRIAGE BEHIND THE HOSPITAL

*(JOANNE is making the rounds to “non-emergency” wounded soldiers. Sprained ankles and wrists, minor burns, bruised ribs, etc...She approaches the soldiers. *NOTE: Although we’re using numbering of SOLDIERS like Scene 1, these should be different SOLDIER 1, SOLDIER 2, etc...from Scene 1. Same actors are fine but they are different soldiers. Among them is TONY. JOANNE begins wrapping his wrist)*

TONY

You sure you’re not an angel?

JOANNE

Angel? Please. I wear boots, not wings.

(she looks)

And you’re still bleeding so I can’t be that good.

TONY

Ehh..it’s nothing...

(motions with his head toward the hospital)

...compared to those guys.

JOANNE

The battle of Antietam was nothing compared to those guys.

(beat)

TONY

Yeah, well...so why are you out here today? With the “hardly wounded” like us? Did it get too gruesome in there?

JOANNE

Not for me, sweetie. For Sheila. Our head nurse. After a major triage like we had yesterday, she tries to give the girls who were really in the blood and guts a lighter next day.

(acting tough)

It’s stupid.

TONY

Actually sounds like a smart idea.

JOANNE

(relenting)

Yeah. It helps—a little.

(she continues tending to his wrist)

TONY

So, where you from, doll?

JOANNE

Ok. First off, private...it's Nurse Joanne. Secondly, Raggedy Ann is a doll. Not me.

TONY

Gee..a little touchy. Ok, ok. I apologize.

(A beat, then JOANNE smirks)

JOANNE

Brooklyn.

TONY

Get out of here! What a coincidence!

JOANNE

You're from Brooklyn.

PRIVATE ARRONS

Long Island.

(JOANNE rolls her eyes)

JOANNE

I'm sorry to hear that, Private.

TONY

What part?

JOANNE

Bay Ridge. 75th and 3rd. A block from the A&P.

(TONY nods like he knows)

JOANNE (CONT'D)

You don't know Brooklyn, do you?

TONY

Yeah...not really.

JOANNE

So, why'd you ask me what part?

TONY

I don't know. It's just what you do. Bet you can't guess what part of Long Island I'm from.

JOANNE

I don't know, the dull part?

(LIZ enters for her shift, greeting and acknowledging the soldiers and carrying a letter)

LIZ

Morning. Hey Jo.

JOANNE

(to TONY)

Sit tight for a minute, private.

(LIZ hands JOANNE the letter)

LIZ

Here. Mail call for you. Clerk knew I was going your way.

(JOANNE looks at it as they both walk to another patient)

JOANNE

Thanks. Think it's a dishonorable discharge?

LIZ

You should be so lucky.

(JOANNE opens it)

JOANNE

It's from Frank.

LIZ

Sinatra or your brother?

(They share a smile. JOANNE hands it back to LIZ.)

JOANNE

Here. Read it to me. I gotta wrap this leg.

(JOANNE tends to another SOLDIER while LIZ reads)

LIZ

Dear Bo-Jo. Bo-Jo?

JOANNE

(rolling her eyes)

Bossy Joanne. Just keep reading, please.

LIZ

Last letter from mom said you were stationed inland from Utah Beach. Those poor G.I.'s who have fallen under your care. I feel for them. Well, you might be in luck soon, sis. We're hearing rumblings that we'll be moving inland soon and it just might bring me near your ugly mug. Worst wishes, Frank

JOANNE

So, now you see where I get it from.

LIZ

(smiling)

Little brothers. They never grow up.

(beat as they move to a quiet corner)

So, remember my shell shock from yesterday? The guy who I moved to the QR?

JOANNE

Did we lose him?

LIZ

No. He's fine. He was way better last night.

JOANNE

What'd ya check on him?

LIZ

Yeah.

JOANNE

Baker—

LIZ

No, I know.

JOANNE

You can't get close to these guys.

LIZ

Yeah, I know.

JOANNE

Patch 'em up, send 'em out. That's the job.

LIZ

I know, Jo. But this was different. He said the weirdest thing. And used my name. Well, his mother's name. I don't know.

JOANNE

They all say weird crap here, Liz. The second you get emotionally involved, you forget this place was built to break you.

(beat)

LIZ

You're right.

JOANNE

Of course I'm right. I'm older, meaner and louder. Now help me with these poor saps.

LIZ

(she humorously salutes her)

Yes sir, Bo-Jo

JOANNE

Shut up.

SCENE 4

INSIDE THE QUIET ROOM

(Lights up on two cots. DANIEL is sitting up writing. He seems pretty well-adjusted and sane for someone who experienced shell shock the day before. CHARLIE sits on the foot of his cot playing with his dog tags. DANIEL bounces back and forth between writing and looking over at CHARLIE. He finally speaks to CHARLIE but CHARLIE does not react at all to him.)

DANIEL

You ever been to Coney Island, Charlie?

I was.

Once.

My family took a trip one summer from Philly to visit my Aunt Greta in Staten Island.

Or is it on Staten Island?

Anyway, one day, we went across the river to that beautiful park.

They have this roller coaster there—The Cyclone. It's only twenty years old but loud as a bomb shell. You know what my dad used to say about The Cyclone?

He said it's the only time a man can scream and still feel like a man.

(DANIEL laughs a little. CHARLIE doesn't acknowledge at all. Then DANIEL continues, a little more to himself than to CHARLIE.)

I wish I could go back.

Just once.

Just...stand in line.

Smell the salty sea air.

Listen to people scream, knowing that it was all alright.

You know?

For fun.

(Beat. Then finally CHARLIE speaks in a raspy, haven't-spoken-in-a-few-days kind of voice.)

CHARLIE

Did you scream?

DANIEL

(surprised and happy that CHARLIE is talking)

Every time.

(long beat)

CHARLIE

I uhh...I saw the inside of a man's head yesterday. Didn't mean to. Just turned at the wrong time. I umm..I didn't know his name so don't ask.

(DANIEL shakes his head 'I won't')

I wonder what his name was.

(DANIEL examines him)

DANIEL

Names. A name is just a word people give you before they know you. Some of us spend a lifetime trying to live up to it. Others spend trying to run from it.

(CHARLIE looks up at DANIEL)

CHARLIE

You talk like a preacher.

DANIEL

A preacher? Me? No.

CHARLIE

Yeah. Like preachy...but quiet.

DANIEL

(returns to writing)

Yeah well...I think I've just learned to carry noises on the inside.

(Lights fade as DANIEL rips a page out of his notebook and puts it in his pocket)

SCENE 5

MAIN TRIAGE UNIT

(There's chaos and agony again as NURSES do their best to calm screams and save lives. LIZ and JOANNE are back in the Main Triage Unit. They are each tending to badly injured soldiers.)

LIZ

(to NURSE 1)

I need more plasma and a tourniquet, now!

NURSE 1

We're out of tourniquets.

LIZ

Improvise, dammit!

(NURSE 1 grabs a bed sheet of another gurney and helps LIZ wrap the soldier's leg)

Stay with me, stay with me...come on

(JOANNE's soldier screams out)

SOLDIER

Ahhhhhh, not so high!

JOANNE

Listen, you want sympathy or stiches 'cause I'm fresh out of the first.

(JOANNE delivers a shot of morphine and the SOLDIER immediately calms down)

SOLDIER

Ahhh...hey...you're kinda cute.

JOANNE

You've got charm. I'll give you that. Too bad I'm immune.

(JOANNE heads over the medical supply crates. Back to LIZ.)

LIZ

Coommmeeeee onnnnnn....

NURSE 1

Liz...

LIZ

Coommmeeeee onnnnnn....stay//with me

NURSE 1

//Liz!

(completely out of breath, LIZ looks and finally realizes she lost him)

(long beat)

LIZ

Of course!

(yelling at the body)

OF COURSE!

(She slams some gauze down and walks away to catch her breath. Other NURSES wheel the slider off. JOANNE notices and goes over to LIZ and looks at her. After a moment, LIZ notices JOANNE)

LIZ

I know, I know.

(off JOANNE's sympathetic look)

How many before it gets easier?

JOANNE

It doesn't, Baker. You know that. And if it did...you'd be no use to anyone.

(JOANNE gets closer)

Remember—don't count the ones you lose, count the ones you save. That's how you sleep.
You just fight the good fight.

LIZ

(half-agreeing)

Yeah.

(beat)

Yeah.

JOANNE

Go take five. There'll be more coming.

(JOANNE hands LIZ half a Hershey bar)

Here.

(LIZ takes it and goes outside the tent. She sits on a crate, breaks off a piece of chocolate and eats it. A tiny bit of normalcy. After a beat, DANIEL enters.)

DANIEL

Smoke?

(LIZ looks up. Then back down.)

LIZ

I don't smoke.

DANIEL

Neither do I.

LIZ

So, why were you asking?

DANIEL

I wasn't. I was asking if you were gonna smoke.

(LIZ looks at him confused)

Because if you were, I couldn't join you. I'm allergic.

(LIZ gets it now)

LIZ

Are you allergic to chocolate?

DANIEL

No.

(LIZ offers the Hershey to him. DANIEL sits next to her and takes a piece. He doesn't eat it yet.)

LIZ

Feelin' better?

DANIEL

I feel good. Real good. Thanks to you, of course.

*(LIZ accepts that but isn't in the mood to hear "what a good nurse she is."
Not right now)*

Yeah. I want to get back to my unit but they said I need to stay under evaluation for at least a few more days. They don't need anyone 'nervous in the service' on the front lines. Certainly not at this point.

LIZ

Standard protocol.

DANIEL

I guess. So, now I just sit around all day, waiting until the next time they allow me to take a walk. The exciting life of a soldier.

LIZ

I've had enough excitement.

(Beat as DANIEL takes that in. Then he bites the chocolate.)

DANIEL

You know Milton Hershey's a genius? War breaks out, they start rationing sugar, and somehow he convinces Congress that morale depends on chocolate. Next thing you know, we're getting bars in our kits, and he's got lifelong customers in every foxhole.

(he bites into the chocolate)

Now that's a business plan.

LIZ

You seem to know a lot about him. Is he your uncle or something?

DANIEL

(light chuckle)

No. But I'm from there.

LIZ

Hershey?

DANIEL

Pittsburgh.

LIZ

(less impressed)
Oh.

DANIEL

Yeah. It's funny. When I'm in Pittsburgh, Hershey seems really far away. But over here, it's like they're right on top of each other.

LIZ

(interesting)
Hmm.

DANIEL

Now what about you?

LIZ

What about me?

DANIEL

Well, aside from not smoking and liking chocolate, what can you tell me about yourself? Where are you from?

(LIZ smiles)

No wait! Let me guess. Let's see. You're educated so could be Boston. Pretty—which makes me think Los Angeles. Even Hollywood, maybe.

LIZ

(charmed)
Colder.

DANIEL

Hmmm. Well, it's gotta be some place special. To turn out a highly educated, skilled professional with eyes like that. New York City?

LIZ

Plainfield—Indiana.

DANIEL

Okay then. Way off.

LIZ

Not very exciting.

DANIEL

Nonsense! Plainfield! Home to...

(he's got nothin')

...corn?

LIZ

Some corn. Mostly it's the town you pass through to get to where you're going. Farms, diners. Same faces every Sunday. The kind of place where a girl will do anything to get out of and experience something else out of life.

DANIEL

(not knowing what to say)
Sounds nice.

LIZ

It's not. It's dull and boring.

(beat)

I miss it.

(lights fade)

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SCENE 6

NURSES' BARRACKS

(A separate tent has cots and some desks. A bunch of nurses, including JOANNE are sitting and writing as a newly arrived nurse, GLORIA, reads a book.)

NURSE 1

I think if I write anymore of these, I'm going to need morphine for my wrist.

NURSE 2

I've got at least fifteen more to go.

JOANNE

You think writing one is bad, imagine getting one.

NURSE 3

No, I understand. But shouldn't this be left up to the War Department? You know, the ones back home sitting at comfy desks with actual typewriters?

(the other nurses agree)

JOANNE

Have you ever seen one of those letters? They're form letters. Cold, lifeless telegrams meant to give you as little information as possible. It's like they rationed emotion up on Capitol Hill or something.

NURSE 2

Well, maybe that's better, ya know? I mean, sometimes just getting the information you need straight is best.

(JOANNE stops writing and looks up)

JOANNE

Imagine for a second, that you're a mother of some nineteen-year old kid that's never left his hometown. All of a sudden he's ripped from your home and dragged halfway across the world and thrown into the most horrifying scenes the world has ever seen.

What do you think goes through that mother's mind every minute of every day? If it's not filled with worry and dread about her baby, it's inundated with all the happy memories they've had together.

JOANNE (CONT'D)

Walks they took.
Books they read and laughed through.
Songs they sung.
Bedtime kisses.
Now she pictures that same baby screaming for her on some far -off beach or battlefield.
Non-stop.
Like a pounding her guts.

And when she sees that car pull up to her house. And gets handed that Western Union telegram, knowing full-well that her life will never be the same. What does she read?

“The Secretary of War desires me to express his deep regret that your son, was killed in action.”

And that’s it. There’s your comfort.

I tried early on in the war to get these women out of my mind. It never worked.
I don’t even know them.
But I do.
And if I was the last one to comfort their child.
To hold them.
To smile at them.
If I was the last face they ever saw, I want these women to know that.
That he wasn’t alone.
That through all the confusion, all the chaos and all the fear—that someone was gently stroking their baby’s head as he drifted off and closed his eyes. For the last time.
I can’t help but think it helps.
Just a little.

(All the NURSES look at JOANNE. JOANNE returns to her writing. Then all the NURSES follow suit. GLORIA puts her book down and approaches JOANNE.)

GLORIA

I uhh...I lost one today.

(JOANNE slides some paper towards her and a pencil)

JOANNE

Here. Sit.

(Lights fade)

SCENE 7

SMALL TABLE OUTSIDE THE QUIET ROOM

(DANIEL and two other G.I.'s—MICKEY O'CONNOR and TONY CAFIERO are playing cards and talking about home)

TONY

(throws two cards down)

Two.

MICKEY

(handing TONY two cards from the deck)

Tony takes two. Obvious bluff.

TONY

Keep runnin' ya mouth, Mick, and you'll be paying for all my dinners next week.

MICKEY

(MICKEY throws a card and takes one)

Dealer takes two. Payin' for your dinners? They gonna start chargin' us now for this slop? Wouldn't surprise me in the least.

DANIEL

(throws three cards down)

Three.

(DANIEL hands him his cards)

TONY

(to MICKEY)

No, you dumb leprechaun. I got a 3-day pass for next weekend. Gonna head into Bayeux. Drink some wine, meet a nice French girl to show me around, eat some real food for once.

DANIEL

(knocks on the table)

I knock.

(TONY drops three cards and MICKEY gives him three)

MICKEY

Aww, there ain't no real food here. Just because Bayeux's been liberated doesn't mean the wine's already flowing and the pastry carts are back out in the streets. You'll probably just be eating British rations with more butter.

(dropping two cards and taking another two)

Dealer takes two.

TONY

Why couldn't we have liberated Italy? I'd be sitting in some old café in Naples, eating some steak pizzaioli *(pronounced pits-eye-ohl)*. Some linguini on the side.

DANIEL

I'm calling.

(they all reveal their cards and DANIEL takes the cash on the table)

MICKEY

You meatballs with your pasta obsession. I've eaten pasta. I don't get it. If you ask me// I'll always go with

TONY

//Lemme guess, corned beef and cabbage?

(TONY and DANIEL laugh)

MICKEY

Noooo...wise ass.

(beat)

Ham and cabbage...and potatoes.

TONY AND DANIEL

(ad lib.)

Of course, potatoes/Obviously.

MICKEY

What about you, rookie? If you could trade your K's for any meal, what would it be?

DANIEL

Oh, I don't really know exactly. I guess egg noodles and cheese.

(TONY and MICKEY are grossed out)

What?

TONY

Okay, that's disgusting.

DANIEL

Oh sorry...macaroni and cheese.

MICKEY

That's better.

TONY

But why you gotta phrase it like that. Plus, that still sounds awful.

DANIEL

Ehh. It's the same thing

TONY

Trust me, it's not. It may all be the same ingredients but the shape makes all the differences.

(They all laugh. TONY grabs the cards.)

I'm dealin'.

(lights fade)

SCENE 8

MAIN TRIAGE UNIT

(It's fairly calm. LIZ and other NURSES attend to patients, JOANNE is wrapping a SOLDIER's leg. The scene is not at all chaotic.)

SOLDIER

Ugggh. Do you need to be so rough?

JOANNE

You want gentle, go to a spa. You want to live, sit still.

(she finishes)

There we are. All wrapped up and nowhere to go.

(as LIZ finishes with her patient they meet D.S.C.)

LIZ

(wiping her hands)

It's the breathers that unsettle me more than the chaos, Jo. These quiet times, when you know that any second...

JOANNE

Yeah well...all the noise gives us something to do. The quiet just makes you think.

(The door swings open. LIZ and JOANNE fear the worst and look. FRANK enters limping a bit.)

FRANK

Hey, I'm looking for the biggest pain in the ass Nurse in Normandy.

JOANNE

Frankie!

(they hug each other)

FRANK

Hey, sis!

JOANNE

Oh, it's so good to see you!

(the hug ends and she smacks him in the head)

And that's for you, big mouth!

FRANK

Why didn't I expect anything less.

(tips his hat to LIZ)

Hiya.

LIZ

Hi, Frank. Liz Baker.

(they shake hands)

Liz has told me so much about you, I feel like I have a little brother now.

JOANNE

Don't do that to yourself, Baker.

(to FRANK)

So, what's with the limp?

FRANK

Oh, nothing to lose sleep over.

JOANNE

I wasn't.

FRANK

(FRANK makes a face at JOANNE. JOANNE smiles)

Just a twisted ankle. Don't worry, I found a good nurse to take care of it.

JOANNE

(to LIZ)

Probably fell into a foxhole. Listen, we should take our break now that's quiet.

(to FRANK)

Well, gimpy, can ya hobble yourself to the coffee tent with us?

FRANK

As long as your fat butt isn't in front of me.

(FRANK, JOANNE and LIZ exit and continue talking)

JOANNE

I'm surprised to see you, actually.

FRANK

Didn't you get my letter?

JOANNE

I did but it said "a few weeks" and was posted three days ago.

FRANK

Yeah well, to be frank//

LIZ

(laughing)

Ha. Good one!

FRANK

To be honest, I wanted to give you a heads up that I was coming but I can't write down exactly when. Anything gets intercepted, you know.

(They grab some coffee and sit. DANIEL enters and makes a cup for himself.)

LIZ

When did you land?

FRANK

We hit the beach around 7:30. It was already a mess by then. Nothing you two haven't seen.

(JOANNE and LIZ agree. DANIEL spots them.)

DANIEL

Oh, hi. I was just grabbing some coffee.

LIZ

Hey. Why don't you join us?

DANIEL

Oh, ok. Sure. If it wouldn't be a bother.

FRANK

Well, it wouldn't bother me,

(re: JOANNE)

But this one bothers the crap out of everyone.

(JOANNE kicks his bad ankle)

FRANK

Oww!

DANIEL

You must be Frank.

FRANK

Yeah. Frank Russo. 4th Infantry.

DANIEL

Dan Taylor, 22nd. Glad to know ya.

(they shake hands)

LIZ

Daniel got in a few days ago.

FRANK

What for?

DANIEL

Well, my nurse here calls it shell shock. But I think that's the army's nice way of calling you "chicken."

LIZ

I told you, it's real and there's no shame in it.

(DANIEL appreciates that.)

DANIEL

So, until they okay me to head back to the line, I'm shining a cot with my ass.

FRANK

Well, pal...I say enjoy it while you can. There'll be plenty more to scare us straight soon enough.

JOANNE

(sarcastic)

So, Frankie, how long until you leave? I mean, how long will we be lucky enough to have you?

(FRANK sticks his tongue out at JOANNE, she returns the gesture)

FRANK

Well unfortunately for you, sis, I'm only here for a day. I'm setup at camp just down the path a bit. Rumbings are that tomorrow night we start heading south toward Cherbourg.

DANIEL

Cherbourg? That's a trek.

FRANK

About twenty five miles. But it'll be twice as long any normal march. There's hardly any roads that lead that way and the ones that do are very narrow. We'll cover five miles a day of we're lucky.

DANIEL

Five miles, huh?

(beat)

I don't envy you, my friend.

JOANNE

No one does.

(JOANNE smiles at FRANK. GLORIA pokes her head in.)

GLORIA

Liz, Jo—incoming.

(GLORIA exits. LIZ and JOANNE jump up. LIZ exits. JOANNE gives FRANK a quick hug.)

JOANNE

If I don't see you before tomorrow night, you be careful, you big jerk. Wouldn't want you to get another twisted ankle or anything.

FRANK

I will. You too, Bo-Jo.

(JOANNE exits. FRANK and DANIEL sit back down to finish their coffee. DANIEL raises his coffee cup as a toast.)

DANIEL

To Cherbourg.

(They “toast” and sip their coffee. Lights fade.)

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SCENE 9

OUTSIDE THE QUIET ROOM

(CHARLIE is sitting on a crate trying to fix his radio. TONY enters.)

TONY

Is this crate taken?

(CHARLIE looks up, then back down to his radio. TONY sits on a crate.)

(re: the MAIN TRIAGE UNIT)
It's too loud in there.

CHARLIE

It's loud everywhere.

TONY

Well, that's true I suppose.

(beat)

I've seen you around. You here for that mental thing, right?

CHARLIE

Shell shock.

TONY

Yeah, that's it.

CHARLIE

And you?

TONY

(holding up his wrist)

Shrapnel. Right through the wrist. Trigger hand too. So, I'm here for a while. Might get me a Purple Heart but it ain't gonna get me a ticket home. Not with the invasion underway, I can tell ya that.

CHARLIE

Hmm.

TONY

You don't talk much, do ya...

CHARLIE

(looks up at him, beat)
Charlie.

TONY

Charlie.

CHARLIE

Most people call me Chuck.

TONY

Chuck.

CHARLIE

Chucky

TONY

Okay...Chucky, then.

CHARLIE

It's a Boston thing.

TONY

See, now you're talking.

(beat)

You good with fixing radios, huh?

CHARLIE

(shrugs)

I can fix anything really. Been like that since I was a kid. Well, almost anything.

TONY

Aww, you'll be on the march in no time. Heck, if Ike were here he'd probably drag you to the front lines personally. Those old-timers think the cure for battle fatigue is to get you back up and shootin'. Good thing you got nurses like that Joanne that know better.

CHARLIE

Jo? Oh, I don't know about that. That's one tough cookie.

TONY

Well, whattaya expect, Private? That's exactly what's needed here. You can't be bringing in a bunch of proper and demure housewives. They'd wanna clean the blood off the floor before patchin' up the men.

(beat)

No, no. I like Joanne.

CHARLIE

Well...I suppose there's a lid for every pot.

(beat)

TONY

So, what's the story with your bunk mate? He's an interesting guy.

CHARLIE

He's weird. Talks like a preacher. And talks a lot. Man, can he talk.

TONY

Maybe that's why you talk so little.

CHARLIE

Maybe so. But I don't know. There's something screwy about him. He seems to have recovered pretty quickly. Way more quickly than most.

TONY

Well, that's not surprising.

CHARLIE

Why's that?

TONY

Well, it's the most common thing to hide, really.

(off CHARLIE's look)

I don't mean you, pal. Just in general. I think that's why Ike doesn't like it too much. Shell shock, battle fatigue...it's just easier than faking a head wound.

CHARLIE

Yeah, well. Like I said. Ain't none of the other guys recovered this quick. He's hanging around like lives here. Sure does have an eye on Nurse Liz.

TONY

Hey...some girls like strong jaws. Some like shaky knees.

(They laugh. TONY moves next to CHARLIE)

Here. Lemme see if I can help you with that.

(LIZ enters. She's heading back to her barracks after the recent onslaught.)

LIZ

Evening, fellas.

TONY

Tough day?

LIZ

I haven't known many others recently.

(the guys understand)

Either of you seen Sargeant Taylor around?

TONY

Yeah, yeah. We were just talking about him.

LIZ

I think he's recovering nicely.

(the guys share a look)

What?

TONY

Nothing. We were...we were just saying the same thing. How astonishingly quick Sargeant Taylor snapped out of his shell shock. Weren't we, Chucky.

(CHARLIE nods. LIZ looks at them suspiciously)

LIZ

Shell shock is a wild thing...I've seen it.

(she kind of drifts off)

Some guys get over it quick, others, well—well, some never come back.

LIZ (CONT'D)

(speaking to the guys again)

Most men don't even tell their families 'cause they're too embarrassed. Well, either way, everyone deals with it at their own pace. He may just be quicker than most.

(beat)

But one thing's for sure—he's definitely not in Pittsburgh anymore.

(CHARLIE looks up)

Okay well, I was just//

CHARLIE

Pittsburgh? He told me he was from Philly.

LIZ

Philly? No. Well, I'll go see if he's in the QR and check on him. Night.

(they nod as LIZ exits)

CHARLIE

He definitely said 'Philly.'

TONY

Yeah. There's somethin' with that guy.

(The scene shift to inside the QUIET ROOM. DANIEL looks like he just got there himself and is taking off his jacket and drapes it over the bedpost.)

LIZ

How are you feeling?

(DANIEL turns and sees her)

DANIEL

Hey. I've been feeling good. Real good.

(he looks at her)

You look like you've had a day.

LIZ

You have no idea.

DANIEL

Here. Sit.

(LIZ sits down and starts crying. DANIEL puts his arm around her.)

LIZ

I'm sorry. I don't know why I'm crying. I'm usually able to handle this. This whole...thing. Just today...I don't know.

DANIEL

Hey. Go easy on yourself. There's only so much one person can take.

LIZ

I can take a lot. I'm supposed to be strong.

DANIEL

You are strong. Come on. You just need to let it out sometimes. War is hell. And you're right in the fire.

(LIZ is still visibly upset)

Hey. Can I tell you a story?

Here. My mother had this old metal teakettle. Dented, scratched up, but still worked like a charm. She'd boil water in it every morning. It had this loud whistle when it was ready—drove my dad nuts.

One day I asked her why it made all that racket. She said, 'That whistle's the only thing keeping it from bursting all over the kitchen.' I didn't get it at the time, but later I realized—steam builds. Pressure builds. And without some way to let it out? You explode.

That kettle would whistle. But it also never blew apart.

LIZ

(blowing her nose and wiping it)

Thanks. I was feeling pretty gross, but being compared to an old, dented teakettle really helps.

(he smiles)

DANIEL

(making sure it sinks in)

Strong doesn't mean silent. Sometimes strength is knowing when to let the steam out.

LIZ

That does help.

DANIEL

Hey, Liz. Can I say...I think you're really something special.

LIZ

Yeah?

DANIEL

Yeah. The way you take care of all these men in their darkest, most frightening moments. You have such a caring, healing aura around you. It's like you give off these vibrations. And all of these men feel it. Including me. It's beautiful, really. Like you.

LIZ

(starting to flirt a little)

Now, Sargeant. Are you calling me beautiful?

DANIEL

Maybe.

LIZ

Maybe? Well, tell me. How beautiful?

DANIEL

(up close as if about to kiss)

Even more beautiful than an old, dented teapot.

(they burst out laughing)

LIZ

(playfully slapping his chest)

Oh you!

DANIEL

Listen. I think you could use a drink. I heard the break tent just got in a few cases of Bordeaux today. There might even be some left.

LIZ

No...no. I should really get some rest.

DANIEL

Come on. Just one. On me.

LIZ

Sargeant Taylor, are you asking me on a date?

DANIEL

(taking her hand)

Let's go.

(CHARLIE enters)

CHARLIE

Well, you two are off in a hurry.

(DANIEL and LIZ exit leaving CHARLIE alone in the Quiet Room. CHARLIE notices DANIEL's jacket hastily strewn across the bedpost.)

If it moves, salute it. If it doesn't, clean it.

(He goes to grab DANIEL's jacket to put in his barracks and feels the note from Scene 4 in his front pocket. He looks at the door to make sure no one's coming. Then pulls it out and reads it.)

What the—??

(lights out)

SCENE 10

COFFEE TENT

(JOANNE and LIZ sit and have coffee the following morning. All's quiet.)

JOANNE

So, you got there and there was no wine left? Yeah, I would've hit someone.

LIZ

Oh, it didn't even matter. It was one of the first times I felt, ya know...good here.

JOANNE

Oh man, here we go.

LIZ

What?

JOANNE

You got that look.

LIZ

What look?

JOANNE

You know the look.

LIZ

I don't have any look.

JOANNE

All's I'm sayin' is you better check yourself before you Florence Nightingale yourself into a mess.

LIZ

Oh, stop it. This isn't that.

JOANNE

I've seen it plenty of times, Liz.

LIZ

Well, you're wrong this time.

JOANNE

Am I?

LIZ

Yeah. It was just fun night. We danced and talked. Life felt normal for a little bit.

JOANNE

And...?

LIZ

And that's all? That's all I'm saying, I mean.

JOANNE

So, he was a good kisser?

LIZ

(smiling)
I said that's all I'm saying.

JOANNE

Oh, girl. Tsk tsk tsk.

LIZ

What?

JOANNE

You're about two winks away from requesting a transfer to this man's foxhole.

(LIZ smiles, JOANNE smiles and shakes her head. CHARLIE enters.)

CHARLIE

Hey...hey Jo, can I uhh talk to you? Alone for a minute?

(she looks at LIZ curiously. LIZ makes a face and gets up.)

LIZ

I'll go check on the girls.

(LIZ exits)

JOANNE

You ain't proposin', are ya?

CHARLIE

No. Nothing like that.

JOANNE

Good. 'Cause that would be my third one today and it's not even noon.

CHARLIE

No listen. I don't know if I'm being paranoid or not but there's definitely something batty about Daniel.

JOANNE

Daniel?

CHARLIE

Sargeant Taylor.

JOANNE

Yeah, I know who he is. What's batty about him?

CHARLIE

I don't know but, that first night he was admitted and we were both in our beds. He was very talkative. Not what you'd expect from a guy brought in with shell shock.

JOANNE

That's not that crazy. Some guys//

CHARLIE

No, there's more. Before he went to sleep that night, he ripped a page from his diary and put it in his jacket pocket. I saw. He must have thought I was asleep but I saw.

JOANNE

Yeah?

CHARLIE

He seems kinda crazy. He also told me he was from Philly—

JOANNE

Well, most people from Philly are crazy.

CHARLIE

Yeah, but he told Liz he was from Pittsburgh.

JOANNE

Charlie, I think you're reading too much into it.

(CHARLIE pulls out the paper)

CHARLIE

Am I reading too much into this?

(JOANNE looks suspiciously and then takes the paper. She unfolds it and studies it.)

JOANNE

(finally)

Okay. I have no idea what I'm looking at.

CHARLIE

Right? I know. What do you make of it?

JOANNE

It's a bunch of nonsense letters, probably some kind of word game or something. I don't know. Look, the guy is a little off but he'll be out of here in another day or two. So, I wouldn't worry.

(LIZ enters again)

LIZ

Sorry, I just need to grab—

JOANNE

Here. Liz is smart. She may know.

LIZ

Know what?

CHARLIE

Oh, nothing.

JOANNE

Charlie thinks your boyfriend is weird and he plays dumb word games.

(JOANNE hands LIZ the paper)

JOANNE

Here.

(to CHARLIE)

There you go. Problem solved. I got work to do.

(LIZ looks at the paper and after a moment she freezes. She keeps her eyes locked on the paper.)

CHARLIE

(trying to cover and not upset LIZ)

It's probably nothing. I just thought it was a little weird. Like a little funny. I thought Joanne might know what—

LIZ

Daniel gave you this?

CHARLIE

Yeah, well no. Not exactly. It was in our room.

(beat)

I'm gonna go.

(CHARLIE exits leaving LIZ alone. LIZ looks around. She sits and grabs a pencil.)

LIZ

(studying it hard and talking to herself)

The M is really an A, the L is a D...

(She keeps deciphering letters one by one. She finishes, puts her pencil down and stares at it.)

The shadows are falling, Liz.

(blackout)

END OF ACT 1

ACT 2

SCENE 1

THE QUIET ROOM—SAME DAY

(DANIEL is up and shaving before the day. LIZ enters holding the paper. He sees her and talks while shaving. Not really noticing her demeanor.)

DANIEL

Oh. Mornin', doll. Zero-dark-thirty for you today, huh? Well, I guess in your line of—

(he turns and sees she's upset)
—what's wrong?

(LIZ holds the paper up)

LIZ

Is this yours?

(he just looks)

Is. This. Yours?

(DANIEL walks over to LIZ. He takes the paper and examines it.)

DANIEL

I, uhh...what even is it?

LIZ

You tell me.

DANIEL

It looks to me like a bunch of misplaced letters. I have no idea—

LIZ

It's code. Playfair cypher to be specific and you know exactly what it is.

DANIEL

I don't. Really. Honestly, I...Playfair what?

LIZ

It's code.

DANIEL

Liz, I swear to you. I have no idea what you're talking about and no idea where this came from. What are you accusing me of here?

LIZ

Charlie said you have been writing on it since you've been here. And it was in your breast pocket when you left it here last night to "sweep me off my feet."

DANIEL

Okay. Charlie's a nice guy but the man is rattled. He barely talks since he's been here and when he does it's half a word.

LIZ

He's been talking a lot more since he recovered. Unlike you who had a remarkably fast recovery. What was the plan, to get inside a combat zone tent, pretend to be smitten by some gullible nurse and see if you could get information on troop movements?!

DANIEL

This is absurd and you have no clear evidence of anything. I can have you Court Marshalled for such an accusation against a superior officer. I'm telling you the truth. Are you going to risk a dishonorable discharge spending the best years of your life in Alderson Prison because some kook with shell shock who doesn't even know his own name says something's true. Think about how ridiculous and crazy that is, Liz.

(LIZ looks at him for a while then sits on his footlocker)

DANIEL (CONT'D)

Look. The stress and pressure of your job can be so overwhelming, you don't even realize sometimes. It's not shell shock but there's gotta be an equivalent for you ladies. Why is it that if men see something horrifying, they get a week or two off to recover but you...you all see the same gruesome scenes every day, sometimes multiple times a day. Yet...there's no shell shock for women on the front lines. You just have to brush it aside like...like a fly. There's no treatment for you all. Why is that?

(beat)

LIZ

I don't—I don't know.

DANIEL

Well, there should be. It's just common sense.

LIZ

Nothing makes any sense here.

SCENE 2

NON-EMERGENCY TRIAGE UNIT

(Nurses are attending to various non-emergency soldiers. JOANNE is with a soldier.)

JOANNE

So, you got home hot barrel burns there on your wrist, huh private?

SOLDIER

Not exactly.

JOANNE

Okay, well what exactly caused this?

SOLDIER

I was just uhh...trying to spice up the beans.

JOANNE

Oh yum. Beans always taste better with dead skin and armhair. You'll be fine. Keep this on.

(JOANNE moves to another patient, SECOND LIEUTENANT PARKER)

JOANNE (CONT'D)

And what do we have here, Lieutenant?

LIEUTENANT PARKER

It's my shoulder. Can't move my right arm.

(JOANNE feels around)

JOANNE

Well, congrats Liutenant...you survived the Krauts, but lost the wrestling match with gravity. It's just dislocated. Stay still.

LIEUTENANT PARKER

Well, let me just get myself situate—

(no time for pleasantries, JOANNE pops it back into place)

AHHHHH!!

JOANNE

There. Good as new. Well, "army new."

LIEUTENANT PARKER

Alright, then. Time to head back home.

JOANNE

Oh yeah, where's home?

LIEUTENANT PARKER

Well, actual home is Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. But I meant back home with the 22nd Infantry. They'll be happy to see their commanding officer back. Well...some of them anyway.

JOANNE

Oh, then you must know Sargeant Taylor.

LIEUTENANT PARKER

Sargeant Taylor?

JOANNE

Dan...Daniel Taylor. He's with the 22nd too. And he's from Pittsburgh!

(to herself)

I think he said Pittsburgh.

LIEUTENANT PARKER

Sorry, ma'am. Don't know any Taylor. Not in my unit at least. Well, thanks for the tune up.

(as he's leaving)

Bedside manner could use some work.

(JOANNE, a bit surprised by this does a quick once over on the patients to make sure all is fine and then walks out to the outside of the tent. She fixes a cup of coffee and then hears a voice.)

FRANK O.S.

Hey, ugly.

JOANNE

Oh, kiss my fanny, Frank.

(FRANK enters)

FRANK

I'll pass, thanks.

JOANNE

What are you doing back? Orders change?

FRANK

Nah. I went AWOL for an hour to come bid you a fond farewell.

JOANNE

Hey, ugly?

(FRANK smiles and shrugs)

JOANNE (CONT'D)

So, it's confirmed?

FRANK

That's a 'firm. Five nights marching under cover of darkness. Hiding during the day. If all goes well, should be in Cherbourg by Sunday. Take 'em by surprise, ya know.

JOANNE

Well...good luck. I hope to see you back home.

(beat)

FRANK

Hey. You think about home often?

JOANNE

I do. I try not to but it doesn't work.

FRANK

Me too. Hey...why is it that so much back in Brooklyn seemed to be annoying or inconvenient or a bother...but when I think about it now, when I'm here, I only can remember the good stuff? The stuff I miss? Why is that?

JOANNE

It's called rosy recollection. You block out the negative while remembering the good stuff. Like editing a movie.

FRANK

I think about playing punchball with the guys, hanging on the corner whistling at girls, going to the Sons of Italy dances and ya know...

FRANK AND JOANNE

Whistling at the girls.

JOANNE

Yeah, yeah.

FRANK

It's like my brain wants to block out the other stuff. Like getting mugged.

JOANNE

It's a defense mechanism. Your brain knows that you're seeking comfort and subconsciously feeds you what you need.

FRANK

Well, what can I say...you're tougher than me, sis. Always have been.

(beat)

What? No wisecracks at my expense?

JOANNE

I do the same thing, Frank.

FRANK

What?

JOANNE

Block out the negatives. I'm not as tough as you think.

(long beat)

FRANK

Yeah ya are.

(shifting back to humor)

And I can't stand ya. So what does that say about ya?

(FRANK playfully elbows her side)

Hey. When we get back to Brooklyn the first egg cream's on me.

JOANNE

It's a deal.

(they hug)

FRANK

I'll see you at home, sis.

JOANNE

See you at home.

(FRANK exits. JOANNE goes to sip her coffee as LIZ enters, visibly shaken and something on her mind. She doesn't even acknowledge JOANNE. As LIZ is making her coffee—)

JOANNE

(clears her throat)

Trouble in paradise?

LIZ

If we're in paradise—

(she's got nothin')

—forget it.

JOANNE

Look, I'm in no mood to be someone's psychologist or matchmaker but if you got something to say, say it. Otherwise, act like nothing's wrong. At least for my benefit.

LIZ

It's nothing you can help with, Jo.

JOANNE

Liz...I'm older than you, wiser than you, I got//

LIZ

No, Jo. Not this time.

JOANNE

Is it Daniel? Is it that paper Charlie gave us? What is it.

LIZ

I feel like I'm gonna throw up.

JOANNE

Oh no. Someone get a nurse! Oh wait.

(uncomfortable beat)

You know you can tell me. And if there's any way I can help...

LIZ

You can't, Jo. You can't help with this one and if I tell you anything I'm thinking, you could get in trouble. Real trouble.

JOANNE

It's that bad?

LIZ

Like, court marshal trouble, Jo. If what I may know is really something, you, me, everyone could be done for.

JOANNE

I'll take my chances, Liz. And I trust you. Do you trust me?

(beat)

Well...do you?

(beat)

LIZ

Have you ever done a cryptogram?

JOANNE

A crypto—??

LIZ

Like in the newspaper? It's a puzzle where it looks like complete gibberish, but each letter represents a different letter.

JOANNE

So, it is about that letter Charlie found.

LIZ

I used to do them in high school and my dad would tell me how the Germans used them as code in the first war. Playfair cypher is just a variation of a cryptogram. There's grids involved and stuff but they're pretty easy to figure out once you get the formula down.

JOANNE

What did it say?

LIZ

I don't know. I started to break some of it and when I realized what it might be, I got scared and stopped.

JOANNE

Why did you stop? Who were you scared for, Liz? Yourself or him?

LIZ

What difference does that make?

JOANNE

It makes all the difference in the world, Baker. Who are you trying to protect?

LIZ

I don't know. Both of us.

JOANNE

Listen, you've got to decode that paper. If you don't, I'm gonna find someone who can do it.

LIZ

See, this is why I didn't want to tell you.

JOANNE

Well, it's too late now, kid.

LIZ

You said I could trust you.

JOANNE

I lied. Let's go.

(JOANNE basically grabs LIZ by the arm and drags her offstage)

SCENE 3

SMALL TABLE OUTSIDE THE QUIET ROOM

(TONY and MICKEY are sitting there waiting for DANIEL to show up. MICKEY is shuffling cards, TONY plays with a pencil. Finally, TONY speaks—)

TONY

Just deal the cards. You can deal him in when he gets here.

MICKEY

Yeah sure. 'Cause flatfoot flush is always better with just two people.

TONY

Yeah well, Chucky's been talking. They think Taylor's a nutjob. Like for real, nutjob.

MICKEY

Well, Chucky should know. Guy's a ticking time bomb.

(CHARLIE enters)

CHARLIE

Hey, fellas.

(TONY and MICKEY are startled)

MICKEY

(to TONY)

See!

TONY

(to CHARLIE)

Hey, where's your roommate? We've been waiting for a half hour.

CHARLIE

That's why I came here. I don't know. I haven't seen him since last night. I was wondering if you guys had seen him.

MICKEY

Nope.

TONY

Nah,ah.

MICKEY

Well, listen. Go find him and tell him we're chomping at the bit to take his money so he better double-time it over here.

CHARLIE

No. That's what I'm saying. He's gone.

TONY

Gone? Since when? Did he go back to the line?

CHARLIE

No. I just checked with Cooper and he was never discharged. No paperwork, no nothin'. He came into the QR late last night, was up early this morning, went for coffee. All his stuff was still there. Then when I came back from chow, everything, his gear, his clothes... him. Gone!

MICKEY

AWOL?

TONY

Probably. But why?

MICKEY

My guess is, he found out he was heading back to the line and took the easy way out.

CHARLIE

I don't know. I think there's more to it.

(blackout)

SCENE 4

A DARK ROOM

(LIZ and JOANNE are in a dimly lit corner of a dark room. Private with a single lamp on the table. LIZ is deciphering the paper letter-by-letter)

LIZ

I can't believe you're making me do this.

JOANNE

I'm not making you do anything. You're doing what you know you have to do.

LIZ

Even if I think I figured it out, you know there's no guarantee that I'm right.

JOANNE

Stop making excuses for him, Liz.

LIZ

I'm just saying...

JOANNE

I'll take my chances. Keep going!

LIZ

Z...R...6th letter...H...3rd letter down...

(LIZ is writing and thinking, writing and thinking...)

JOANNE

Well...?

LIZ

Shhh. Be patient. It's complicated.

(Writing and thinking...she's done.. LIZ puts her pencil down and roughly starts translating the German.)

LIZ

(slowly, sounding out the words)

Noch keine Neuigkeiten.

No news yet.

Vertrauen wird weiter aufgebaut.

LIZ (CONT'D)

Still gain...gaining trust
Mehr morgen.
More tomorrow.

Neue Nachricht: 12. Juni June 12

JOANNE

That's today.

LIZ

4. Infanterie—
Oh no.

JOANNE

What?

LIZ

4. Infanterie bewegt sich heute Nacht.
Fourth infantry on move tonight.

Durch den Wald.
Through woods.

Ziel: Cherbourg
Target...Cherbourg.

(JOANNE's face goes blue)

JOANNE

Cherbourg!?

LIZ

Frankie.

JOANNE

Frankie!!

LIZ

(panicked)
Okay, okay. let's think this through.

JOANNE

THINK THIS THROUGH!? Are you insane!? This is my brother's life! We have information and we have to report it!

LIZ

I'm not saying we don't, Jo. But, do we know if this is real?! We could get in huge trouble! That's all I'm saying! We have to do this the smart way.

JOANNE

(grabbing LIZ by the collar)

Look at me. We're doing this.

LIZ

Let's go.

(blackout)

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SCENE 4A

FRANK'S BARRACKS

(FRANK sits alone, prepping his gear. He's in full combat uniform, cleaning his rifles and spot checking every single thing on him. An OFFICER in FRANK'S unit pops in.)

OFFICER

Russo. You ready. We're moving out.

FRANK

Yes, sir.

OFFICER

(exiting)
Come on, then.

(FRANK grabs the rest of his gear and heads out)

SCENE 5

CAPTAIN HARTMAN'S COMMAND POST

(Lights up on LIZ and JOANNE standing in front of CAPTAIN HARTMAN as he sits at his desk. He doesn't suffer fools lightly.)

CAPTAIN HARTMAN

You mean to tell me that you came all the way up here to inform me that a Sargeant in the 22nd—who's yet to even be confirmed to exist—may have left behind a coded message in German indicating a potential ambush? Who let you in here, anyway?

JOANNE

Sir, with all due respect, we know firsthand that this is real. We have witnesses who saw him writing it, Nurse Baker decoded it herself. I watched her.

LIZ

Sir, if the 4th Infantry is truly moving out tonight and into the woods, they could be walking into a deathtrap.

JOANNE

You have to warn them!

CAPTAIN HARTMAN

Missy, you are forgetting your place. I don't have to do anything. And I certainly don't take orders from some glorified candy striper.

JOANNE

Excus-

(LIZ hits her leg. JOANNE shuts up. HARTMAN gives a look like, "you're lucky you did.")

CAPTAIN HARTMAN

Now, if this man is real, are you ladies aware of the consequences that come with officially charging an officer with espionage?

JOANNE AND LIZ

(scared)

Yes, sir.

CAPTAIN HARTMAN

And you're confident enough in the information you're presenting that you're willing to take that risk?

JOANNE AND LIZ

Yes, sir.

CAPTAIN HARTMAN

You should stick to puttin' on Band-Aids. Now get out of here at once. Dismissed.

(LIZ and JOANNE exit CAPTAIN HARTMAN's office. Once outside—)

JOANNE

Well, it's out of our hands. Now we just pray.

LIZ

Huh.

JOANNE

What?

LIZ

Nothing. I just never took you for a praying person, that's all.

JOANNE

Really? I'm an Italian girl from Bay Ridge. They'd push me off the Brooklyn Bridge if I ever missed Sunday mass.

(beat)

The truth is, I'm not. Sure, I went to church and went through the motions. Keep my mother happy. But I haven't prayed in years. I don't know why I said that just now. It seemed like...just what you say, I guess.

LIZ

I used to want to be a nun.

(JOANNE is surprised by this)

It didn't take.

(LIZ smiles)

JOANNE

Why?

LIZ

I don't know honestly. When I was a kid, I just knew that they helped people. And I wanted to help people. So, it seemed natural.

JOANNE

Well, I think you found your calling. You help people now.

LIZ

Yeah.

JOANNE

Hey...

(LIZ looks at her)

You helped me. Frankie just might be saved because of what you did.

LIZ

What we did

JOANNE

(relenting)

Okay.

LIZ

Should we pray now?

JOANNE

I don't know.

LIZ

Come on. For Frankie.

(beat)

JOANNE

Okay. You start. I'll nod along and pretend I know the words.

(lights fade)

SCENE 6

SMALL TABLE OUTSIDE THE QUIET ROOM

(TONY, MICKEY, and CHARLIE are sitting around talking)

TONY

Well, if he is a spy, he certainly picked the wrong medical tent to infiltrate.

MICKEY

Yeah, how's that?

TONY

Geez, Mick. Get your head out of your ass before it sets up camp, would ya?

CHARLIE

He means that you think you got it all planned out and then you run into a nurse who speaks German and cracks codes. That's crappy luck.

(LIZ and JOANNE enter)

LIZ

Who's winning?

TONY

We're not playing cards. We were just talking.

(Beat. TONY, MICKEY and CHARLIE all look at each other. JOANNE and LIZ notice this.)

LIZ

What? What is it?

(no one wants to speak)

You fellas got something to say?

JOANNE

Whatever it is, I'm sure it's stupid. Come on, spit it out.

(beat)

CHARLIE

They caught your guy.

LIZ

Daniel?!

CHARLIE

Yeah. About an hour ago. He was heading east toward a German post just outside of Monetebourg. MP's tracked him and brought him back. Didn't even put up a fight from what I heard.

(LIZ is shaken but trying to hold it in)

LIZ

Was he...I mean, did he...?

CHARLIE

It's all true, Liz. Heard he admitted everything right on the spot.

(beat)

JOANNE

I'm sorry, Liz.

LIZ

(gathering herself)

Well...it's nothing we didn't already know, I suppose.

(LIZ exits)

JOANNE

Any word on the 4th?

TONY

Hartman sent a patrol to catch up and warn them. The second he got wind of it.

(JOANNE breathes a sigh of relief and blesses herself)

MICKEY

You ladies did good.

JOANNE

How can you tell, anymore?

(lights out)

SCENE 7

DANIEL'S HOLDING CELL

(DANIEL sits on a bench, hunched over, looking at the ground. An M.P. GUARD walks in.)

M.P. GUARD

Medical checkup.

(M.P. GUARD motions "come in" and LIZ enters with her nursing kit)

M.P. GUARD

(to LIZ)

I'm right outside the door.

(LIZ nods, M.P. GUARD exits)

(beat as they stare at one another)

DANIEL

Medical checkup?

LIZ

Standard procedure.

DANIEL

And you just happened to be in the area?

LIZ

I requested it.

DANIEL

Really? And it was approved?

LIZ

No.

DANIEL

So, what are you doing here?

LIZ

Disobeying orders.

(DANIEL nods. Beat.)

DANIEL

That could get you in a lot of trouble.

LIZ

(opening her medical kit)

Yeah well, you'd know all about that, wouldn't you?

DANIEL

Liz—

LIZ

Nurse Baker.

(beat)

DANIEL

There's a lot you don't understand//

LIZ

(whisper screaming while taking his blood pressure)

Don't you dare tell me what I don't understand! I understand more than you ever would have thought. How do you think you got caught, you traitor.

(she firmly rips the blood pressure wrap off his arm)

DANIEL

It's not like that.

LIZ

Not like that, yeah.

DANIEL

Yeah.

LIZ

Oh yeah. Then tell me what it's like, Daniel. Tell me why there's no record of you with the 22nd. No Daniel Taylor, no Sargeant Taylor. Tell me what it's like when you make me feel like a complete fool for starting to fall for you. You know...you men know that all of us nurses are in the worst possible conditions, and you prey upon that.

Thinking we're weak and vulnerable.

LIZ (CONT'D)

That our desire for companionship will...will somehow overpower our love of country?
Our sense of duty?
You think we're that weak?
Tell me what it's like when—
(she starts to choke up, then continues)
—when you can befriend a man and then just callously send him off to his death.
Go ahead, Daniel. Tell me what it's like.

(beat)

DANIEL

I did fall for you. And when I did, nothing else mattered. Not getting caught, not any sense of duty, nothing. After I lost my notes, why do you think I ran?

LIZ

To alert your superiors about the 4th. About their movements.

DANIEL

No. I never had any intention of alerting them. I couldn't find the note, figured someone found it and I'd be found out. I needed to get out of there. No one was ever told of their advance.

(she wants to believe him)

My name's not Daniel Taylor.

LIZ

(she knows)
No kidding.

DANIEL

You speak German. Ever hear the term "Heim ins Reich?"

LIZ

(LIZ starts to understand)
Home to the empire.

DANIEL

Yes.

LIZ

(realizing what he just said)
Oh...how is this possible? So, you're—

DANIEL

American. Yes.

(LIZ stares at him speechless)

My name is Henry Kruger. My parents are Anna and Friedrich Kruger. My father was from Bremen and mother from Leipzig. They met aboard and survived the Titanic, believe it or not. I was born in 1924.

LIZ

In Pittsburgh?

DANIEL

Rochester. New York.

LIZ

Not Philly?

DANIEL

(slight smile)

Neither.

(beat)

So, when this all started, I was at the perfect age. A choice was never given to me. My parents are both Volksdeutsche—pure German. Either return to the Fatherland to fight the invaders or be disowned, dishonored. So, here I am.

(beat)

I know nothing about Germany.
I couldn't care less about it.
Never been here, never wanted to even visit here.

I like hot dogs.
I read Superman.
I like the Yankees.
I hate the Red Sox.

I even planted a victory garden in '43

So, when they evaluate you as you come through the system, the ones who they think sound the most American get thrown into espionage.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

It's funny, really.
There's nothing German about me except my name.

(beat)

So, I'm born an American.
Lived as an American my whole life.
I know nothing but being American.

And I'll be killed as a German.

(long beat as LIZ soaks this all in)

LIZ

Because of me.

DANIEL

What can you do?

LIZ

This is the part of war they never prepare you for. You know you're going to see blood and death and every horrific thing imaginable. You get ready for that.

(beat)

Nothing prepares you for sentencing a fellow American to death.

(beat)

DANIEL

You'll get a hero's welcome.

LIZ

I thought it'd feel different.

(beat)

DANIEL

Maybe it will. When you get back home and Ike pins the Medal of Honor on you.

LIZ

I doubt it.

(they share a look)

DANIEL

Well...

LIZ

Well...

(LIZ grabs her medical kit and heads for the door. She stops and turns toward DANIEL.)

I'll never let them remember you as anything but American.

(She exits. Lights fade on DANIEL)

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SCENE 8

COFFEE TENT

(It's a month later. JOANNE and TONY are having a cup of coffee. They've just started seeing more of each other. JOANNE seems bored out of her mind.)

TONY

So then, I made the varsity team but they stuck me on the bench the whole season. Even though the year before I had six home runs, forty RBI's and twenty seven runs scored.

JOANNE

Madone. *(pronounced ma-dohn)* If this war doesn't kill me, your small talk will.

TONY

You asked.

JOANNE

I asked where you went to school. I didn't ask for the Tony Cafiero story.

(They share a chuckle. JOANNE likes him. This is their banter. LIZ enters. JOANNE looks at her.)

JOANNE

All packed?

LIZ

Yup. All packed. How are you two getting along?

TONY

(TONY gazes at JOANNE)

She's the angel I always knew I was chasing after.

JOANNE

(to LIZ)

And he's an idiot.

(to TONY)

But he's cute so he gets a pass.

TONY

Well ladies, I'd love to stay and chat but I gotta go take all Mickey's money again.

(he gets up, kisses JOANNE on the top of her head and exits)

LIZ

What happened to not getting involved, hmm? Patch 'em up, send 'em out?

JOANNE

Yeah, well. He needs some extra patches.

(they both smile)

JOANNE (CONT'D)

So, do I need to address you as First Lieutenant Baker now?

(they laugh)

LIZ

Don't be ridiculous. Just Lieutenant Baker is fine.

(JOANNE smiles)

JOANNE

Well, it'll be nice to be back in England, I'm sure. Away from this mess.

LIZ

Any word from Frank yet?

(JOANNE pulls a letter out of her pocket)

JOANNE

Just came yesterday.

(she opens it and reads)

Dear Bo-Jo,

As painful as it was to see your horseface for twenty-four hours, I'm actually glad we got to spend some time together. Arrived in Cherbourg as expected. We encountered some enemy fire along the way but thankfully, an allied patrol found us soon after we left you and we made it safe and sound thanks to them.

LIZ

Thanks to you.

(JOANNE gives an appreciative nod. Then continues reading.)

JOANNE

I never told you this, sis. But I'm proud you joined up. You, Liz and all the nurses there will never be recognized for what you do. When the war is over and freedom once again rings through Europe and the Pacific, many men will receive medals and accolades. But it's because of you and your fellow nurses, the ones knee-deep in guts and terror, ready to go at a moment's notice, that this war will be won. You and your colleagues define what it means to be free. And what it means to be American.

Love, Frankie.

P.S. Maybe if Hitler sees your face, he'll die from terror and we can all go home.

LIZ

He's a typical brother. But a good guy.

JOANNE

Yes, he is.

(beat)

Alright, Baker.

LIZ

Alright, Russo.

(they hug)

LIZ (CONT'D)

Keep fighting the good fight.

JOANNE

I will. You too.

(LIZ exits. JOANNE watches her leave. Then sits and takes out a pen and paper. She speaks what she's writing.)

Dear Mom and Dad,

I saw Frank a few weeks ago. You'll be happy to know he is safe and well.

(One-by-One, lights up on various NURSES—including GLORIA—penning letters to loved ones of those lost. We should hear the first line of each letter and then we move on to the next one and so on.)

NURSE 1

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Gibson,

My name is Catherine and I was beside your son the night that he gave the ultimate sacrifice for his country.

NURSE 2

I just thought that you would want to know that he was not alone in those final moments.

NURSE 3

He was comfortable, calm and cared for until the very end.

NURSE 4

He even told me about when he learned to drive and how you thought he went too fast.

NURSE 5

About the baseball games you went to as a family.

GLORIA

Your son died a hero. Defending what is right and just. I can't imagine my words will make any difference to you as you suffer the greatest loss any parent can ever imagine. I just wanted to make sure you knew...

ALL NURSES

He wasn't alone.

(Lights fade)

END OF PLAY

Spit it out — Is this show *Llamamazing* or a *Bomb-O-Llama*?





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