

IRIS

A play by
Kevin Kautzman

from IPHIGENIA 2.0
by Charles Mee



info@kevinkautzman.com
www.kevinkautzman.com

IRIS

CHARACTERS

AARON	M 40s	A Military Leader
IRIS	F 18	His Daughter
LILLIAN	F 40s	His Wife
MANNY	M 40s	His Counselor
BRIAN	M 20	Iris' Fiance
OLD MAN	M 60s	An Old Soldier
GOVERNESS	F 60s	Old Man's Wife, Ph.D
YOUNG SOLDIER	M 18	A Young Soldier

SETTING

A wedding at the end of history.

ACT I

War's Wall

SCENE 1: Like a Virgin
 SCENE 2: Marriage!
 SCENE 3: Imperial Dreams
 SCENE 4: War
 SCENE 5: The History Lesson
 SCENE 6: Headlights + Deer =
 SCENE 7: Love at the End of History
 SCENE 8: Hegel Is Dead
 SCENE 9: The Bridal Shower
 SCENE 10: Blood & Guts
 SCENE 11: Rules of Engagement
 SCENE 12: Small Talk

ACT II

Love's Wall

SCENE 1: Preparations
 SCENE 2: Drills!
 SCENE 3: The Locksmith
 SCENE 4: Angry Americans
 SCENE 5: Nails on Every Floor
 SCENE 6: Irides

IRIS

IRIS premiered at Red Eye in Minneapolis, Minnesota on October 8th, 2010. The cast and crew were as follows:

Aaron	John Lilleberg
Iris	Celeste J. Busa
Lillian	Melanie Wehrmacher
Manny	Bruce Abas
Brian	Cody Sorensen
Old Man	Robert Hammel
Governess	Miriam Must
Young Soldier	Eric Powell Holm
Direction	Steve Busa
Costumes & Sets	Liz Josheff
Lights / Tech	Ron Albert
Choreography	Laura Holway
Music & Sound	Eric Mayson
Dramaturgy	Sarah Slight
Stage Manager	Ben Yela
Operator	Nich Ochs
Publicity	Shelly Fischer, FischerMireault, Inc.
PR Photo	Ayve Alexandres
Box Office	Michelle Hernick

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RECOGNITION

Lavender Magazine 2010: Best Playwriting

ACT I
WAR'S WALL

SCENE 1
LIKE A VIRGIN

IRIS

Hello, everybody. Hello hello. Are your electronic doo-dads off? Awesome. Phones and electronic doo-dads are banned at my wedding. You can open them at the reception and ignore each other there to your hearts' content. Or make small talk. Or commune in the beautiful moment that is the now. It's really up to you, at the reception. But at my wedding, electronic doo-dads are one hundred percent not allowed.

Okay, now that that's over with: good afternoon! Is it evening? Oh my Gosh, time's really getting away from me. This is a very exciting day! It's my wedding day. I've been waiting for this day for a very long time. A very, very long time. I am in love.

I'm in loooooooooooooove!

I'm also a. Oh well. Yes, I am a virgin.

Like a vir-ir-ir-ir-gin, touched for the very. Ha ha ha ha ha.

I'm so excited.

Sorry. Umm. God, I laugh like my mother sometimes. My mother is such a goober. What was I saying? Ahh yes. Virginitly.

Now I realize these days it's not altogether usual for a young, and let's just come out and admit it, sexy young woman like myself to remain a virgin until her wedding day. But I'm not altogether usual. It's not that I'm religious. Yuck. I just want it to be special, so I've waited, and here it finally is.

When I start to think about it, my heart kind of jumps into my throat, and I get this spectacularly buzzy sensation. Now you can't tell me if I'd been sleeping with different guys since I was fourteen I'd feel the same way now. So it's going to be special. I can just tell.

But I'm not here to tell you about the state of my hymen. Ha ha ha ha ha. I'm here to warn you about my father. My father's real name is Agamemnon. Let's try to say that together. Everybody now:

Ag-ahhhhhh-mem-non.

That's a Greek name. But nobody calls him that, so you can put it out of your head now. Most people just call him "General." Those who are lucky enough to really know him, call him "Aaron," which is easier to say than "Agamemnon." God. What a horrible name.

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

IRIS
(cont.)

I just call him Daddy when I need to get something from him, which is often, because he is a very powerful and very stingy man. He didn't even want to allow this marriage! He wanted it to wait until after the war he's planning! Like my life should stop for some dumb war. Over my aunt Helen, by the way, but why should I be miserable just because she had to get into the sack with some Trojan? That doesn't seem fair.

Don't get me wrong. I love my father. He's a good, good man. He fought in the last war. And now he's a general, and a good one. Just mention the word "war" and his brow furrows. He looks like a big old bear when he does that, those wrinkles. I tease him about that. I say, "Daddy, don't make that face. You'll frighten the help."

And my mother laughs and laughs and laughs. Ha ha ha ha ha! She laughs like that, and sometimes I do too. Like I said. Yuck. When I do it I hate it. But when my mother does it... I don't know. It comforts me.

And wow, my mother loves to laugh. She's a very nervous woman. I think the laughter is like a release valve for her.

And my father is so, so serious.

I can hear him now. He's coming to lead me down the aisle, or rather to start that process, which means our little time together is about to end, for now.

Please feel welcome, and before/

AARON
(off.)

Iris! Where are you hiding?

IRIS

Here, Daddy. I'm in here.

Oh yes! Before I have to go. Welcome again to my wedding! My name's Iris. Iris like the part of the eye that gives your eye color, or the flower. I was named after the flower.

Oh oh oh! Tonight there is going to be dancing! I'm so excited. And for food we'll have real game venison for the meat-eaters, and for vegetarians we'll have-

AARON
(off.)

You're in where?

IRIS

Here!

IRIS
(cont.)

What a silly goose.

Actually Iris isn't my name on paper, but that's what everybody calls me. My real name is something of a monster too. Iphigenia. Everybody now. Come on. This is supposed to be a party:

Iffy-gen-eye-ahhh!

Yuck.

If I was a boy, my name would be Charles, and I suppose people might think it would be all right to call me Chuck. Which it would not be.

Chuck. What a ridiculous-

AARON
(entering)

What are you doing in here? You're not supposed to be here until much later. The bride is supposed to hide on her wedding day. Hide from the groom. You must get to hiding, Iris. A woman must go into her marriage like men go to war. Consciously, with much planning, and then with great regret. Come now.

IRIS

I was just greeting our guests.

AARON

Ahh, yes, of course.

IRIS

Say hello, Dad. Don't be rude.

AARON

Good evening.

IRIS

It's already evening?

AARON

It's after six.

IRIS

OhmyGod OhmyGod OhmyGod! I have to get ready.

AARON

Go ahead. I'll come get you in a few minutes.

IRIS

All right.

I love you, Dad. Thanks so much for doing this. I know you didn't. With Brian. You know.

AARON

I know. But I love you. And I want you to be happy. Go on now.

IRIS exits.

AARON

She thinks we call her Iris her after the flower. Really, we call her that after her eyes. They're her strongest feature. Even as a baby, you could tell. Eyes you could swim in, those.

Forget how cruel the world is
and forget that we
are so very much
a part of that cruelty.

End Scene

SCENE 2
MARRIAGE!

A flurry of activity in preparation for the wedding.

LILLIAN

Hello.

I'm the mother. Clytemnestra. I won't even ask you to pronounce that, since everyone calls me Lillian anyway. Our family has a very serious problem with overlong names. Just one of our many problems.

We're very traditional, and at the same time we're not. Sometimes I can't even tell what year it is, or what country we live in.

Well here we are, anyway. And who really believes in borders anymore? Borders are so fluid, and if you have money some days it's almost like they don't exist at all!

Just listen to me go on. You don't want to hear my prattle. You should listen to Aaron go on and on and on about war. The glories of war. The necessity of war.

I just don't know what got into Helen. Going to Troy. She doesn't think. God.

Family. Can't live with them, can't shoot them! Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha.

Well welcome to my daughter's wedding! This is a very, very busy day for me. Extremely busy. I have guests to greet. I'm doing that now. Check. I have to make sure the bride does not come into contact with the groom before they meet at the ceremony. That would be very bad luck.

I have to keep myself from crumbling into a tiny little ball on the floor and crying my eyes out. Which is what I feel like doing right now.

When things get out of control, I like to read the encyclopedia.

Don't laugh. I'm not kidding! Knowledge is important.

I love the encyclopedia. See. W. W-e. Wed. Wedding.

"A wedding is the ceremony in which two people are united in marriage or a similar institution."

Or a similar institution?

Like what? Like a kind-of wedding? That's ridiculous. You're either married or you're not. I mean really!

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

LILLIAN
(cont.)

Ha ha ha ha ha.

“Wedding traditions and customs vary greatly between cultures, ethnic groups, religions, countries, and social classes. Most wedding ceremonies involve an exchange of wedding vows by the couple, presentation of a gift (offering, ring(s), symbolic item, flowers, money), and a public proclamation of marriage by an authority figure or leader. Special wedding garments are often worn, and the ceremony is followed by a wedding reception. Music, poetry, prayers or readings from Scripture or literature also may be incorporated into the ceremony.”¹

Hmm.

There’s not a single use of the word *love* in that description.

Love. My daughter thinks she’s in *love*, which is as good as being in love. She’s not my little pumpkin anymore. She’s grown up.

I feel old. But I’m not old. Not really. Do I look old? No. Of course I don’t.

God, I really am having a panic attack here. I have to breathe. Breathe, Lillian!

Just ignore me. I’m a total wreck right now. Please get comfortable. In our family weddings are a long, involved affair. We don’t go in for this half hour New-Agey crap. We go for broke, so please settle in for a bit of a show.

She’s my only daughter! My only child. Today has to be perfect.

I need to go to the library!

End Scene

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wedding>

SCENE 3
IMPERIAL DREAMS

OLD MAN enters and begins to prepare for the wedding, with many irises. AARON dresses for the wedding with the help of a mirror.

AARON

I must decide
Whether to send my brave, willing soldiers
To war

Certainly
Some will
Die

And as I prepare for
My daughter's "wedding"
In this mirror

I see that there are acts
that will set an empire on a course
that will one day
bring it to an end.

Because, we see from the histories of empires
none will last forever
and all are brought down finally
not by others
but by themselves,
from the actions they take
which they believe are right or good
or necessary.

Sometimes they are brought to ruin
by no more than the belief
that something must be done
when in truth
doing nothing would have been the better course.

Ruin, it would seem,
is seeded in the nature of empire.

And someone must lead this destruction
This ruin, this decay

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

AARON
(cont.)

He must put his hands
Upon the stems of authority
Upon the petals of control

And crush the thing between
His fingers

Inhale
Exhale
Inhale the fragrance
The fumes of blood

Get drunk on the
Incense of spilled blood
Til'
Our eyes widen

And we might imagine
Again, like a child does
With our eyes so wide open
We are blinded by this,
imagining we are in
control

When in reality.

What?

No control at all. Just the
appearance of it.

To lead is to die, slowly
Day by day, by
Small cuts

Should I do nothing
Or send my men to war?

This misgiving that I have
can only, finally,
save us all from devastation.

Old man.

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

Yes, Sir?
OLD MAN

Was that message sent?
AARON

Yes, Sir. Hours ago.
OLD MAN

Hours? Has it been hours?
AARON

It has.
OLD MAN

Then we must send another.
AARON

Sir. I don't mean to speak out of station... but... well. Would that be wise?
OLD MAN

Yes, damn it! I think it would be wise.
AARON

I'm sorry.

It's all right, Sir.
OLD MAN

May I ask you what was in the message? I mean precisely. I have the sense/
OLD MAN

No. No you may not ask me any such thing.
AARON

I beg your pardon, Sir. I have a grandson. He's of soldiering age.
OLD MAN

I want to know simply this: will there be a war?
AARON

You ask a lot of questions.
AARON

Only because I desire to know, Sir.
OLD MAN

AARON
We are a warlike people.

There will be war.

OLD MAN
I am glad to hear it.

AARON
You are?

OLD MAN
Oh yes.

It's a chance for my grandson to prove his manhood. He was never very good at sports. That made it difficult for him. We come from a sporting family. I don't look like much now, but I used to be a powerful wrestler. I took on opponents from all the neighboring cities, and I only lost once.

My grandson's a crack shot with a rifle, and he has excellent stamina. He can run five miles without tiring. This will be his chance to shine.

AARON
I'm glad.

He might die, you realize.

OLD MAN
Oh yes. Of course.

But all men die, Sir.

It's simply a matter of when, and in what fashion, is it not?

AARON
You should focus on painting the wall. Look. You've missed a spot. Here.

OLD MAN
I will, Sir. Focus. Thank you.

AARON
No, thank you.

OLD MAN paints the wall. AARON watches.

AARON
(cont.)

Were you a soldier?

OLD MAN

I was. As you said: we are a warlike people.

It's in our nature to make war.

AARON

And was your war just?

OLD MAN

Just?

AARON

Was it justified?

OLD MAN

I don't know about justified, Sir.

But I believe it was necessary.

AARON

Do you ever talk about it?

OLD MAN

About the war?

AARON

Yes.

OLD MAN

Oh no, Sir.

AARON

But you remember?

OLD MAN

Oh yes. The memories are seared to my brain. They might as well be shown upon this wall here. They are so clear to me.

And you?

AARON

The same.

OLD MAN

I do not envy your position, Sir. Having to choose to send people to war. It is not an easy choice.

AARON

No. It is certainly not.

OLD MAN

This is going to be a beautiful wedding.

A beautiful, beautiful wedding.

I just love weddings.

It's about the anticipation
the anxiety, the waiting, the wondering
*Will it work and do they really love one another and
What will the bride wear and... Ahh yes.*

And all the preparations!
Preparing for that long campaign.

No...

OLD MAN
There's nothing like a
Wedding

AARON
There's nothing like a
War

IRIS, LILLIAN and GOVERNESS perform a keening wail as THEY see AARON, OLD MAN, BRIAN, and MANNY to war. The men move to battle with a combination of bravado and sluggish acceptance, dread and buoyancy, sexual charge and authentic, and justifiably existential, dread. THEY move through shadows and fog, underneath sun and moon, across history and into the abyss of the dark night of the soul. THEY arrive at a place inside the cracked mirror of humanity's darkest nature, where THEY discover THEY are their own enemies, and THEY fight, OLD MAN and BRIAN against MANNY and AARON, who are victorious and come to sit, bloody and blasted and damaged.

End Scene

SCENE 4
WAR

IRIS, LILLIAN and GOVERNESS moan over the bodies of the dead, beating their hands and fists against the ground, tearing out their hair. MANNY and AARON smoke a cigarette.

MANNY

Death in war is certain for some.

AARON

It is.

MANNY

Is that an ear?

AARON

Yeah. It's an ear.

MANNY

You cut off his ear.

AARON

I cut off his ear. He turned his head at the last moment. I had my knife in his throat already, and he jerked to one side. I think he meant to protect himself. He just drove the blade deeper, and gave me this souvenir.

You know. I have an appetite. I could eat.

MANNY

You're very brave.

AARON

I don't feel very brave.

MANNY

But you are.

AARON

Then you are brave too.

MANNY

You'll be a great leader one day. You'll lead men by action, by doing. I can just tell.

I'm honored to know you.

AARON

And I am honored to know you.

What do you aspire to do, when this war is over?

MANNY

Oh man. I hadn't really thought about it.

AARON

You will come and work for my family. Come and be my counsel.

MANNY

I don't have any experience.

AARON

You will gain experience.

MANNY

Can I see that? The ear.

AARON

Here.

MANNY

You think he can hear us?

In the land of the dead?

AARON

No.

Of course not. That's absurd.

MANNY

I wish he could. Maybe he can.

Maybe he hears the screams of his grieving women. Maybe he hears us talking now, planning our futures, and is jealous.

AARON

These are strange thoughts.

MANNY

Yeah, well. Sometimes strange thoughts are the most true.

AARON

Something is either true or it is not. Something cannot be most true.

MANNY

I'm going to say a prayer for this dead soldier. For this dead enemy. I will whisper it into his ear, and maybe he will hear it in the land of the dead.

AARON

Perhaps.

MANNY

What should I pray?

AARON

Pray him a song.

MANNY

What song?

AARON

How about some Bob Dylan?

MANNY

I love Dylan. But what song?

AARON

I don't know.

MANNY

Don't worry.

We sit here long enough one'll come to us.

Here's the ear back.

Man, do you ever think we'll be able to forget this?

AARON

Forget what?

MANNY

This war.

AARON

Oh no. No. Why would we want to forget it?

MANNY

I don't know.

Oh I got it.

Give me the ear
and I will sing this poor dead enemy
a song

End Scene

SCENE 5
THE HISTORY LESSON

GOVERNESS

Charles, now sit still.

IRIS

For the last time! My name is Iris! Not Charles!

GOVERNESS

Why do I keep thinking your name is Charles?

IRIS

Because if I was a boy my name would have been Charles, but I'm a girl, and my name is Iris.

GOVERNESS

Iris like your eyes?

IRIS

Iris like the flowers.

GOVERNESS

Oh. Well you have stunning eyes, Charles.

IRIS

You're a terrible tutor.

GOVERNESS

Now don't be cruel.

IRIS

Well you are. You can't even get my name straight.

GOVERNESS

Now just relax.

IRIS

You're teasing me.

GOVERNESS

I am a bit.

IRIS

You know my name.

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

GOVERNESS

Maybe I don't! Maybe I forgot!

I don't have a PhD in Name-e-ology. I have a PhD in Cultural Studies.

IRIS

What does that even mean?

GOVERNESS

It means I've studied cultures! Exhaustively! My thesis was on the pervasive influence of Greek Drama and Literature on the American Psyche.

IRIS

Wow. That sounds really, really boring.

GOVERNESS

Oh it was! That's precisely why it was so well received, and why I am now privileged to tutor the spoiled children of the ruling elite. Such as you.

IRIS

The ruling what?

GOVERNESS

The ruling elite. Oh come on now. Surely you know not every girl is as privileged as you, dear.

IRIS

I don't feel elite.

GOVERNESS

Oh believe me, you are. Your father controls armies. His smile is a scythe, his finger a whip, his tongue a blade. His ear is the ear of Moses, of thunderous Zeus, of Chairman Mao. Men bleed and die for five minutes of your father's time.

IRIS

I get it.

GOVERNESS

Where is that spectacular lout we call Brian?

IRIS

I don't know. And don't call him a spectacular lout. He's my spectacular lout.

GOVERNESS

He's your boyfriend, and of elite heritage himself, and so he thinks he can get away with murder, which is a bit of hyperbole, but I don't like when my students are late. And if he thinks he can just keep us waiting all day, he has another thing coming.

IRIS

He has a guitar lesson before this. Maybe it went long. Maybe they've moved from folk to progressive rock. Those songs are long. Have you ever tried to listen to King Crimson?

GOVERNESS

Well, we're going to get started.

Pop quiz.

IRIS

Oh no.

GOVERNESS

Oh yes!

IRIS

I'm not prepared.

GOVERNESS

That's the idea! It's a pop quiz.

It's one question.

IRIS

Ahh! I hate pop quizzes.

GOVERNESS

What year is it?

IRIS

What?

GOVERNESS

What year is it?

IRIS

It's. It's. OhmyGod. OhmyGod! I don't even... what? Repeat the question, please. I'm just. I've been so distracted preparing for the wedding, and/

GOVERNESS

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

What. Year. Is. It?

IRIS

Oh oh oh oh oh. I know this. Wait. No. Ahh! It's on the tip of my tongue. Oh. I wish Brian was here.

GOVERNESS

He is not, though.

IRIS

I don't know. I just don't know what year it is.

GOVERNESS

Congratulations. You get an A.

IRIS

I do?

GOVERNESS

Yes. You do. An A plus.

BRIAN enters with a guitar.

Ahh, well. The young prince blesses us with his presence.

BRIAN

Hey, check this out.

I learned a new Dylan tune.
Here, listen, it's great. It's all about
War
And the people who
Wage
It
And how it tears them
apart

End Scene

SCENE 6
HEADLIGHTS + DEER =

OLD MAN paints. MANNY watches. There may be the dimmest flickering of memory upon the painted wall, and a humming noise.

MANNY
Hey, do you hear that?

OLD MAN
I'm sorry, no I don't.

MANNY
Oh.

Upon the newly painted white wall, images of war might appear, seared into the memory of these two men.

Insects.

I fought with Aaron in the last war. He was very brave. His bravery verged on madness. He could look a guy in the eye and cut his throat, then eat an egg thirty minutes later like it was nothing. I think it was his upbringing. He was expected to be strong like that. Mine was different. I've always had trouble with that shit. I was too normal to be brave.

OLD MAN
You must have stories.

MANNY
Of course. But mine never have any goddamned punchlines. They don't go anywhere. They're all just this, like this sensation.

OLD MAN
For me it was the same. No great stories.

MANNY & OLD MAN
There was a camp, this one camp where I was stationed, and it had civilians.

MANNY
They depended on the soldiers based in the camp.
It was very strange, all these women

OLD MAN
and children
in the camp all day,

OLD MAN
(cont.)

then gone
POOF
at night, like insects.

MANNY

The bunkers weren't
anything at all,
they were just
... holes.
Dirt.

OLD MAN

Sandbags.
They leaked.
And there were

MANNY

cockroaches
and rats.

It was no way for people to live.

OLD MAN & MANNY

No way at all.

MANNY

And that's my war story. No punchline. Just insect people, women and children,
underground as the sky explodes in the dark night above them. Their eyes like glittering
caverns of black ice. Their men who knows where?

OLD MAN

This is the fate of all men. You should take such things to your father, if he is still with
us. Your father will know.

OLD MAN vanishes as GOVERNESS appears.

MANNY

I never knew my father.

There was this one night
My mother had told me
she'd considered aborting me
to spite my father

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

MANNY
(cont.)

I had a crisis

What you could call
A crisis of soul
Or of being

Or a panic attack

I was home for some
Winter holiday
I can't remember which
Anymore – just that it was winter

What holiday it was hardly matters

The weather was terrible
And it was late
And my animal response
My instinctive fight or flight

This revelation
That all that I am
Was nearly never allowed to be
triggered that, and since there was nothing
to fight, really, I fled

I got into my car and began
Driving, driving across the snowy

Highway, through fog

I shouldn't have been driving,
It was so, so dark and
I was the only car on the road, the
Only car for miles
Me and my crisis
Of being
and my cheap
Foreign automobile

I nearly died that night
A story, my mother's story
Nearly killed me

MANNY
(cont.)

Through the windshield I could see
Fog, and darkness
I could see maybe ten feet
In front of me

And all I could think of
Were those ten feet

Three dimensions
Became two dimensions
Against that fog

I was almost blind
And still I drove

Until I smashed into
A lump in the road

My car spun round three times
And I stopped, my car
Angled across the median

I had run over the carcass
Of a deer, lost control

I sat there, breathing

I looked out my window
And there
In the fog
Was a doe, milky white
Under the low, pale-gloaming sky

I put the car in reverse
Moved to the side of the road
Turned back to look at the highway
Again

And the doe
Was gone

And upon the road
Nothing

MANNY
(cont.)

No lump of flesh
Nothing to hit
Just the fog
Shifting left to right

My mind
Created the doe
Or it had been there
A lump of flesh
And somehow
Miraculously
It rose and walked away

“Which is more miraculous?”
I sat there and thought.
For hours I stared at the road
looking for the doe
or a sign of the doe

But none came
And I saw no sign

Until from the east
Came slowly the dawn

I sat there
staring
As the sun rose
As the fog
Melted into the air

And to this day
I have no idea
What any of it means

End Scene

SCENE 7
LOVE AT THE END OF HISTORY

LILLIAN

Scriptures. A reading for the wedding. I love the library! I'm in heaven. All these books.

I've been busy. Look what I found. Love. Defined. This is from the dictionary:

"Noun. One. A profoundly tender, passionate affection for another person."

That's so sweet. I like that. A profoundly tender, passionate affection for another person. That *is* love.

Mmm. "Seven. Sexual intercourse; copulation." That's not so romantic...

Oh yes. Ha ha ha ha ha. Look at what I found. Some academic thinks history has ended. Listen.

"The triumph of the West, of the Western idea, is evident first of all in the total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives to Western liberalism. In the past decade, there have been unmistakable changes in the intellectual climate of the world's two largest communist countries, and the beginnings of significant reform movements in both. But this phenomenon extends beyond high politics and it can be seen also in the ineluctable spread of consumerist Western culture in such diverse contexts as the peasants' markets and color television sets now omnipresent throughout China, the cooperative restaurants and clothing stores opened in the past year in Moscow, the Beethoven piped into Japanese department stores, and the rock music enjoyed alike in Prague, Rangoon, and Tehran."²

Beethoven is heard.

GOVERNESS

What are you doing there, dear?

OLD MAN

I'm painting this second wall white. See, I've already painted this one. And look at it. Just perfect. It's drying.

GOVERNESS

All this for the wedding?

OLD MAN

All this for the wedding, yes.

² <http://www.wesjones.com/eoh.htm>

It's all so abrupt. GOVERNESS

Yes. OLD MAN

I love weddings. GOVERNESS

I do too. OLD MAN

Can I get you anything? GOVERNESS

No, I'm all right. OLD MAN

Shouldn't you be wearing a mask for the fumes? GOVERNESS

For the fumes? OLD MAN

Yes. GOVERNESS

Ahh. I suppose so. I am a bit light headed. But then I'm usually light headed whenever I do a bit of work. I'm not a young stud anymore! OLD MAN

I'll get you a mask. GOVERNESS

That would be nice. OLD MAN

Do you remember our wedding? GOVERNESS

Like it was yesterday. OLD MAN

It was yesterday. GOVERNESS

OLD MAN

Oh yes.

Of course.

If you say so, love.

SHE kisses him, places a hand on his shoulder.

GOVERNESS

I just love weddings.

OLD MAN

You know when I fought
In the war. I thought about
Putting a bullet into my brain

I often thought of this.
It was a
Consolation
I imagined putting the gun
Into my mouth
Imagined kissing the barrel
Imagined your lips there
And it made me feel so
Guilty

I felt
Weak

I never told you this.

You are the reason I didn't
Pull the trigger

GOVERNESS

I'm glad you didn't.

OLD MAN

I am too.

GOVERNESS

I'll go get you that mask. You just sit here. Just relax a spell.

Is that Beethoven?

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

Yes.

OLD MAN

Nice choice.

GOVERNESS

I didn't choose it.

OLD MAN

I wonder who did.

GOVERNESS

SHE stands with her hand on his shoulder. THEY listen.

AARON and LILLIAN enter.

LILLIAN

Oh, it's really lovely. Look! Look at the flowers!

AARON

I knew you'd approve.

LILLIAN

Is that Beethoven?

AARON

I think it is, yes.

LILLIAN

Oh come on! So serious. Relax.

Here. Dance with me. We always used to dance.

THEY dance, AARON distractedly.

What is it?

Is it the war?

AARON

Yes. It's the war. It's all I can think about.

LILLIAN

But what? I mean what exactly are you thinking about?

YOUNG SOLDIER appears.

AARON

This young soldier I met today. A young man. This look in his eyes said:

YOUNG SOLDIER

“I am afraid. I don’t want to die, but I will die for this cause. I believe in your leadership. I believe in this country. I believe that this matters, and that this is a war we can win.”

AARON

He’s hardly even lived, and he’s already prepared to die. How can that be possible?

LILLIAN

He loves his country.

AARON

Is that love?

LILLIAN

It’s a kind of love.

AARON

He’s probably a virgin, and he wants war for a mistress.

LILLIAN

Remember when you were his age. You felt the same way, didn’t you?

AARON

Yes.

LILLIAN

Come over here. You should relax. Just for today. Here, sit down here.

AARON

I received this letter yesterday. And I read it a dozen times.

YOUNG SOLDIER

“A few days ago another Marine in our platoon, who is just a junior Marine and hasn't even been in the corps for a year was hit by an IED. He practically walked right over it when it blew up. He wasn't very far away from me when he was hit. He was hit by shrapnel in his neck and his eyes. The shock wave from the blast broke his femur bone in his right leg. The heat from the explosion melted the contacts in his eyes. Now, he is permanently blind in one eye and lost the other eye from the shrapnel. He is only eighteen years old!”³

³ <http://txsoldiersangels.blogspot.com/2007/05/soldiers-letter-from-iraq.html>

AARON

And that's just one paragraph. The letter goes on and on. And it's just one letter.

LILLIAN

That's horrible.

AARON

It is horrible. So when I say, "Come, let's go to war!" it has consequences. Boys go blind from my decisions before they've seen anything more than their village. That's why I don't relax. I can't. I shouldn't. I must not.

LILLIAN

Look at me. Here. Look.

AARON does. HE closes his eyes. YOUNG SOLDIER disappears.

Will you smile for me, just once?

AARON does.

See, was that so hard?

AARON

No. For you, no.

LILLIAN

I love you. I love you despite the fact you work too much. And think too much. And wear your work in the lines on your face. I love you even though you don't know how to relax.

AARON

I'm relaxed. Look at me. Ahh.

LILLIAN

Ahh.

AARON

Ahh.

LILLIAN

When I fell in love
With you
You were so young
And the world

LILLIAN
(cont.)

When we first met
Vanished
Disappeared for a moment
I looked around and thought

How can this be?

I waited, and the moment
Became a minute

You were dressed
In your uniform
I remember
And we were at a function
With wine
But I hadn't touched any
I remember that
That I was so
So lucid

You were making small talk
And you didn't seem to know
That the world had disappeared

And when the world came back
it was so bright, it almost hurt
all that light cascading in

I couldn't stop looking at you.

Do you remember, we danced the night we met?

AARON

I remember.

LILLIAN

Love is so strange.

AARON

It's a mystery, isn't it?

AARON takes LILLIAN's hand.

The two couples, AARON and LILLIN and OLD MAN and GOVERNESS, sit in the room and listen to the music as it plays. BRIAN and IRIS appear. THEY are on a dinner date.

That was a lot of fun. BRIAN

I know. It was! So much fun. IRIS

I loved it. BRIAN

I thought I'd hate it. IRIS

Really? BRIAN

Yes. IRIS

Then why'd you go? BRIAN

You. Duh. IRIS

Oh. BRIAN

I'm sick of *dating*. I want to get married. IRIS

Sometimes I wonder why you're. Why me? BRIAN

Here. You've got something on your ear. IRIS

What is it? BRIAN

I think it's. Yeah. It's a piece of gunk. IRIS

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

Gunk? BRIAN

Gunk. IRIS

It's fine now. You have beautiful ears.

What? BRIAN

I like your ears! IRIS

How can ears be beautiful? BRIAN

They just are. Come on. Ears can be beautiful. For instance: yours! IRIS

I like your eyes. BRIAN

I know you do. IRIS

HE stares into her eyes. THEY are in love.

What were you saying?

I was saying "why me?" Why do you love me? BRIAN

Oh you know why. Don't ask silly questions. IRIS

Remind me. BRIAN

Because I love you. IRIS

I know. But why? BRIAN

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

I just do. IRIS

That's not an answer. BRIAN

It's an answer! It's just not the answer you want to hear. IRIS

That's not true. I don't know what I want to hear. BRIAN

Precisely! IRIS

We're talking in circles. BRIAN

We are. IRIS

Ahh. I just want to get married *now*.

So do I. BRIAN

You just want sex. IRIS

What's wrong with sex? BRIAN

I don't know. IRIS

You know I don't know. I'm a *virgin*.

Like a virgin, touched for the very first time! Like a vir-ir-ir-ir-gin. You know.

I repeat: what's wrong with sex? BRIAN

I'm sure something's wrong with it. Otherwise why is everybody so hung up about it? IRIS

BRIAN

Power frightens people. Sex is powerful. Sex is life. Sex is. Well it's not exactly death, but it's powerful.

It's also fun. Or it can be.

IRIS

I'm sure. I'm just waiting to find out. With you. Once we're married. Once my dad *allows* it. Maybe soon. We'll see. It's this stupid war.

BRIAN

I know.

You know I will have to go and fight.

IRIS

I know.

BRIAN

I could die/

IRIS

Don't even say it.

You'll be fine. You'll do your duty. You will be brave, and strong. And you will come back, and we will make babies.

BRIAN

You know how old fashioned that is, that you don't want to have sex before we get married? You're not even religious, really.

IRIS

No, not really.

I just want it to be special.

BRIAN

It would be special if we did it now.

IRIS

No it wouldn't. If we did it now we'd get kicked out of the restaurant, silly.

BRIAN

You know what I mean.

It'd be special if we went back to my place and, you know. Did it in the shower.

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

IRIS

That doesn't sound very special.

BRIAN

A wedding is going to make it more special? Some ceremony?

IRIS

Yes. A thousand times yes!

Anyway, I don't want to talk about that right now. Over dinner. Over *fish*. It seems awful, talking about... that. At dinner.

BRIAN

All right.

IRIS

Oh, don't pout.

Come on. Hold my hands.

BRIAN

You have beautiful hands. And your eyes. I just get lost in them.

IRIS

I know you do.

BRIAN

And I have beautiful ears.

IRIS

Yes.

Yes you do.

End Scene

SCENE 8
HEGEL IS DEAD

Thesis. LILLIAN

Antithesis. YOUNG SOLDIER

Synthesis. AARON

Thesis LILLIAN

Antithesis. YOUNG SOLDIER

Synthesis. AARON

GOVERNESS

Where the heck is everybody? This is no way to prepare for a wedding!

There should be music. And dancing.

Who the hell dragged Hegel into this? This isn't a graduate seminar.

This is a wedding.

And none of the young people even know what *year* it is!

Come on now, everybody. Music! Dance music! This is a wedding. We need to practice. Here we go now.

A waltz or other spritely dance. GOVERNESS instructs everyone to partner up. THEY dance, repeating the “thesis, synthesis, antithesis” declaration as they go, until the lights fade or we transition into the next scene. The men may use this dance to change into drag.

End Scene

SCENE 9
THE BRIDAL SHOWER

In this scene the men might be in drag.

LILLIAN

“A bridal shower is a gift-giving party held for a bride-to-be in anticipation of her wedding. The custom originated in the 1890s and is today most common in the United States, Canada, and by American influence, in Australia. Showers are usually coordinated by the bride's family who invite guests to offer gifts for the upcoming home of the bride and groom as a married couple. The history of the custom is rooted not necessarily for the provision of goods for the upcoming matrimonial home, but to provide goods and financial assistance to ensure the wedding may take place.”⁴

Ha ha ha ha ha. I'm so excited! I love parties.

And thank God we can get away from the men for awhile, right, ladies?

God. Aaron is so wonderful. Such a tough guy. So serious. But sometimes he just gets on my nerves.

What, I admit it! It's not easy being married to the General. Sometimes I'd rather be married to the Grunt.

God, just listen to me go on and on, like this is a party for me.

Isn't she beautiful!

BRIAN

OhmyGod totally. She is totally beautiful.

YOUNG SOLDIER

Totally.

IRIS

Oh I'm blushing. This is so fun. I'm so happy.

OLD MAN

We are going to be so fat after all this food.

LILLIAN

Oh hush, don't say that!

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bridal_shower

BRIAN

It's true!

Fat fat fat fat fat!

GOVERNESS & YOUNG SOLDIER

Fat fat fat fat fat!

YOUNG SOLDIER

You're going to need a bigger dress!

IRIS

Do you really think so?

LILLIAN

Shut up! You're going to make her even more nervous.

GOVERNESS

Oh relax, Lillian. You're so uptight!

IRIS

Mom! I am not nervous. You're saying I'm nervous is going to make me nervous.

LILLIAN

I'm not uptight! And of course you're nervous. You've never had sex. You're a virgin, and/

OLD MAN

You've really never been with a man before?

GOVERNESS

How old-fashioned. What year is it?

LILLIAN

Okay, we're not going to talk about this/

IRIS

Oh come on, Mom. We're all adults.

LILLIAN

I'm just not comfortable talking about...

YOUNG SOLDIER

About what?

BRIAN

She just doesn't want to talk about Brian's piece.

YOUNG SOLDIER

Talking about cock makes her uncomfortable!

LILLIAN

I need more wine.

IRIS

Ahh! I am. I'm really nervous. I didn't even realize.

LILLIAN

Glug glug glug.

Who wants some?

OLD MAN

Me me me me me.

IRIS

Ahh! I'm freaking out now. Thanks, Mom. Thanks a lot.

GOVERNESS

Oh you're going to be fine, dear. I'm sure he'll be very gentle.

IRIS

But maybe he won't. Maybe he'll be a beast. Maybe he'll slip and... you know... go in the out hole.

OLD MAN

Oh, you could be so lucky.

LILLIAN

La la la la la la.

BRIAN

Have you even seen it? I'm just going to say it. His cock?

LILLIAN

Okay this conversation is over/

IRIS

No no no. This conversation is not over! No, I've not seen it. I touched it once.

It was kind of spongy. And it sprung up.

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

MANNY

Wait wait wait. Are you saying you've never even? You know.

LILLIAN

No, she doesn't know!

MANNY

You've never even. Umm. Well.

YOUNG SOLDIER

Just say it! She's never even jerked him off!

BRIAN

Poor, long-suffering Brian.

MANNY

You've only touched it once?

YOUNG SOLDIER

How long have you been dating?

BRIAN

Poor, poor Brian. No wonder he's so touchy.

YOUNG SOLDIER

How big was it?

IRIS

I don't know. Big.

YOUNG SOLDIER

Big like a roll of quarters, or like a catsup bottle, or what?

LILLIAN

La la la la la la.

Ha ha ha ha ha. We are so hilarious.

Let's play a game!

OLD MAN

OhmyGod! Was it big like a zucchini?

IRIS

This is so embarrassing.

YOUNG SOLDIER

Oh come on now. You have to tell us.

GOVERNESS

You can't string us along like that and not tell us!

IRIS

Not as small as a roll of quarters. Not as big as a catsup bottle.

And it jumped when I touched it.

Like a little frog.

OLD MAN

Like a little frog!

GOVERNESS

Ribbit! Ribbit! Ribbit!

LILLIAN

Okay. That was fun.

Who wants dessert?

Who wants more wine?

Who wants to play a game?

Let's play first kiss.

I want everybody to think about their first kiss.

Iris, you've kissed Brian, haven't you?

Tell us that story. Tell us about the first time you kissed Brian.

End Scene

SCENE 10
BLOOD & GUTS

GOVERNESS

Brian, I'm glad you finally made it.

You can play something from Mr. Dylan for us later.

Right now it's a pop quiz.

BRIAN

Oh Jeeze.

GOVERNESS

Your girlfriend here already answered the question.

She did an outstanding job. She got an A plus.

BRIAN

What was the answer?

GOVERNESS

Hey! She can't tell you. That would be cheating.

BRIAN

Oh come on. We're going to get married soon. She should be able to share the answer with me.

GOVERNESS

You are so young.

BRIAN

Yes. And you are so old.

GOVERNESS

Here's the question.

What year is it?

BRIAN

What year is it?

GOVERNESS

Yes.

You mean right now? BRIAN

Yes. GOVERNESS

Oh wow. BRIAN

Umm.

Can I give him a hint? IRIS

No! GOVERNESS

It's. BRIAN

It's nineteen forty four.

We're in England.

And General Patton is giving a speech.

Right? Am I right?

If you say so. GOVERNESS

MANNY, OLD MAN and YOUNG SOLDIER
enter and join BRIAN to listen to the Patton speech.

AARON
Men, this stuff that some sources sling around about America wanting out of this war, not wanting to fight, is a crock of bullshit. Americans love to fight, traditionally. You are here today for three reasons. First, because you are here to defend your homes and your loved ones. Second, you are here for your own self-respect, because you would not want to be anywhere else. Third, you are here because you are real men and all real men like to fight. When everyone one of you were kids, you all admired the champion marble player, the fastest runner, the toughest boxer, the big league ball players, and the All-American football players. Americans love a winner. Americans will not tolerate a loser. Americans play to win all of the time.

AARON
(cont.)

That's why Americans have never lost nor will ever lose a war; for the very idea of losing is hateful to an American.

We don't want yellow cowards in this Army. They should be killed off like rats! If not, they will go home after this war and breed more cowards. Kill off the Goddamned cowards and we will have a nation of brave men.

One of the bravest men that I ever saw was a fellow on top of a telegraph pole in the midst of a furious firefight in Tunisia. I stopped and asked what the hell he was doing up there at a time like that. He answered, 'Fixing the wire, Sir.' I asked, 'Isn't that a little unhealthy right about now?' He answered, 'Yes Sir, but the Goddamned wire has to be fixed.' I asked, 'Don't those planes strafing the road bother you?' And he answered, 'No, Sir, but you sure as hell do!' Now, there was a real man. A real soldier. There was a man who devoted all he had to his duty, no matter how seemingly insignificant his duty might appear at the time, no matter how great the odds.

And you should have seen those trucks on the rode to Tunisia. Those drivers were magnificent. All day and all night they rolled over those son-of-a-bitching roads, never stopping, never faltering from their course, with shells bursting all around them all of the time. We got through on good old American guts!"

BRIAN

Wait wait wait! I'm not sure. Hold on.

GOVERNESS

You're not sure?

BRIAN

No. Can I change my answer?

GOVERNESS

You may. Once.

BRIAN

Oh Jeeze.

It's. Wait.

Is it/

LILLIAN

(from the encyclopedia)

“An improvised explosive device (IED), also known as a roadside bomb due to contemporary use, is a homemade bomb constructed and deployed in ways other than in conventional military action. One may be constructed of conventional military explosives, such as an artillery round, attached to a detonating mechanism...”

YOUNG SOLDIER

“The bomber, Reem al-Reyashi, twenty-two, said in video released after her attack that it was always my wish to turn my body into deadly shrapnel against the Zionists and to knock on the doors of heaven with the skulls of Zionists. Ms. Reyashi left behind a son aged three, and a year-old daughter.”⁵

I read the Tamil Tiger women will stick grenades up their vaginas.

How do you fight that? That strength of belief?

Insanity. Desperation. Such/

LILLIAN

“IEDs may be used in terrorist actions or in unconventional warfare by guerrillas or commando forces in a theater of operations. In the 2003-present Iraq War, IEDs have been used extensively against coalition forces and by the end of 2007 they had become responsible for approximately 40% of coalition deaths in Iraq. They are also the weapon of choice for insurgent groups in the 2001-present Afghanistan War.”⁶

BRIAN

Wait! I know the answer.

It's the present day, isn't it?

The year is today, is that right? It is right, isn't it?

IRIS

God, Brian. You need to study harder.

GOVERNESS

No, no he's right.

The year is today.

And today is the year.

You get an A.

⁵ http://bigpicture.typepad.com/writing/2004/01/quote_of_the_we.html

⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Improvised_explosive_device

IRIS

Wait wait wait. How can we both get A's with totally different answers?

GOVERNESS

All right now, Chuck. No need to get worked up. You're both dismissed for today. Go on now.

IRIS

I'm not worked up! I'm just really confused.

BRIAN

Whatever. Come on, let's go.

I'm hungry all of a sudden.

I'd kill for a burger.

End Scene

SCENE 11
RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

MANNY

You cannot change your mind now.

AARON

I was wrong, I made a mistake, and I've changed my mind. I cannot do this. I simply cannot do this. When I think about it, I literally start to black out. I don't know if I'm not breathing or what it is, but my vision narrows to a pin. I have to stay near furniture to steady myself. My hands never shake, and now. Look. Look at me.

MANNY

But this is what the soldiers demand.

YOUNG SOLDIER

It is true.

AARON

Who the hell are you again?

MANNY

He represents the soldiers.

AARON

Aren't you a little young for that?

YOUNG SOLDIER

Yes, but they must have chosen me for a reason.

MANNY

He's very popular.

YOUNG SOLDIER

It's true. I am. People enjoy being around me.

AARON

Well whatever the case, I have changed my mind.

MANNY

You can't. Iris is already on her way. She will arrive any moment now.

The guests are already here. Look at them, sitting there waiting. They are here to see a wedding, which we know will not be a wedding. And now they know it too. Some knew before they even arrived.

YOUNG SOLDIER

Why should we continue to pretend?

AARON

I can send her back.

MANNY

And then the soldiers too will go home.

YOUNG SOLDIER

You will be left defenseless.

MANNY

Only your closest aids will remain, and even they will begin to feel the panic, the dread of defenselessness. You will be naked, and these walls will be as glass.

Your own wife's sister, Helen has been taken captive in Troy. Say her name. Say her name and feel your throat clutch, your lips quiver. Your fingers tremble.

AARON

Helen.

MANNY

Taken captive. An insult to your family. A terror to our nation.

AARON

Taken captive or seduced?

MANNY

You know what Helen means to the people. To your family.

AARON

I am to trade the life of my own daughter for that of Helen?

MANNY

Yes. That is what the soldiers demand.

AARON

Is this true?

YOUNG SOLDIER

It is.

AARON

And do you feel the same?

YOUNG SOLDIER

I am only a messenger.

AARON

But you must have some *opinion* on the matter.

YOUNG SOLDIER

With respect, Sir: I think it only fair that you should sacrifice something in return for the loyalty of the soldiers. The soldiers see this great house. Your beautiful women. Your fine wine, and they say, "It is only fitting this man, who seeks to lead so many of us to die, should give something in return."

AARON turns on the YOUNG SOLDIER.

What? This is what they say? I am only the *messenger!*

AARON

You impudent little *fuck*, I've given my life-

MANNY interrupts.

MANNY

Aaron! These are beautiful flowers.

Are they Irises/

AARON

They want me to sacrifice my only child?

My daughter?

MANNY

That's what they want.

AARON

Why?

MANNY

The soldiers had a meeting.

I made notes.

Here is what they said:

YOUNG SOLDIER

"To let the world understand

YOUNG SOLDIER
(cont.)

no one of our citizens
may be held unlawfully.

That we will defend each other.

No one of us stands alone
to face the threats of the world by himself.
We have made a compact with one another.

And within our own home
we are safe to live our lives.”

MANNY

They want you to taste the blade
Here, in your breast
Before they will fight
This they feel
Is your duty

AARON

Duty.

MANNY

Duty, yes.

The soldiers say:

YOUNG SOLDIER

“If you won't accept the duties of leadership
it could be
we should find another leader.”

AARON

That is really what was said?

MANNY

Yes. It was.

AARON

What father could murder his own daughter?

MANNY

I don't know. The stone rolls down the hill and rests at your feet. It's fate.

MANNY

(cont.)

Come on! This is not the worst thing in the world. I have seen you slay men. I have seen you stare a man in the eye and watch the life slip from him. I have watch you breathe his last breath, breathe in the words

YOUNG SOLDIER

“Mother”

MANNY

and

YOUNG SOLDIER

“God”

MANNY

and

YOUNG SOLDIER

“Please. I’m afraid. I don’t want to die.”

MANNY

And

the names of lovers

of the men you killed.

AARON

But never my own flesh and blood!

Never that.

MANNY

And that is why the soldiers demand it.

AARON

I can’t do this.

MANNY

I understand the position this puts you in.

AARON

I fought. I paid my dues.

MANNY

This is a new war, with new dues.

You might think that time has stopped.

That history simply loops, or that, perhaps

It has ended

It doesn't loop. It hasn't ended. It's a road, and it presses forward with each new birth, each new death, love, hate, and each new war.

History does not live in a page in a book. It's here now, in your hands, Aaron. Between your very fingers. Underneath your feet. Before your very eyes.

YOUNG SOLDIER

New loves, new hates, and new wars demand new blood.

MANNY

This is what the soldiers murmur, and in their eyes I see such desperation. They need a leader.

And you need them to lead. Without them you're an empty shell. Without you, they're so many ants scattered over the earth.

AARON

And like ants the soldiers' needs are so simple.

Are they not?

MANNY

They are.

And they aren't.

AARON

God. I think I'm going to be sick.

MANNY

Be sick then. And be done with it. Listen! I hear the wedding party coming now. And your guests grow impatient.

End Scene

SCENE 12
SMALL TALK

IRIS

OhmyGod, I really hate small talk.

BRIAN

I know. I do too.

IRIS

Really?

BRIAN

Oh totally. I've always hated it. I still do.

I mean, I'll do it when I have to. You've seen me do it.

IRIS

I know. I do it too.

BRIAN

I've seen you!

IRIS

We have to. We live in a society.

BRIAN

Yeah.

IRIS

We could all just stop. Imagine! I mean, we all hate doing it, but we all keep on doing it. Why don't we stop?

BRIAN

We can't. It's part of the fabric. It's like the carpet. You can't tear up the carpet without a bunch of nails sticking up.

IRIS

I just don't know why people do it. It's so stupid.

BRIAN

I think people do it to avoid having to face mortality. We look into one another's eyes, and we see our own deaths. We face dread. And so we make small talk to banish that.

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

BRIAN
(cont.)

To cast that away.

Just to breathe beside one another
And be comforted by the moment
Of breathing.

IRIS

I think you're right.

BRIAN

It makes things safer.

IRIS

Yeah. Thanks. That makes me feel better.

BRIAN

Really?

IRIS

Yeah.

BRIAN

What about that makes you feel better?

IRIS

Thinking. People don't like to think. I hate it when they tell me it's better not to think.

Sometimes it makes me so angry. I just want to yell at somebody.

BRIAN

Me too.

Your pupils are so big. Like two black pools.

IRIS

It's a reflex.

BRIAN

I want to kiss you.

IRIS

I know. I can tell. So?

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

So? BRIAN

So why don't you then? IRIS

I'm afraid. BRIAN

Why? IRIS

I'm afraid if I kiss you, we'll both disappear. BRIAN

That's a silly fear. IRIS

I know, but it's how I feel. BRIAN

We won't disappear. IRIS

Here. I'll hold onto you.

And you can kiss me.

And if we disappear, we'll go together
to wherever the disappeared go.

Come on. Look at me.

See how the approval
Glams in my eyes?

See how you can
Read my mind
Through my eyes?

See how you can
See into my
soul?

Now just kiss me.

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

IRIS
(cont.)

I'm not going anywhere.

THEY kiss and disappear. OLD MAN stares at the second wall, which he's just begun to paint white. GOVERNESS enters, walks to his side, and hands him a breathing mask.

End of ACT I

ACT II
LOVE'S WALL

SCENE 1
PREPARATIONS

The preparations have progressed. A portion of the second wall has been painted white. There is a bustle of activity as many hands roll out a purple carpet.

OLD MAN continues to paint, at work on the second wall with his breathing mask. IRIS and BRIAN reappear, locked in their first kiss. THEY look into each other's eyes, then relax and hold one another, oblivious to their surroundings. LILLIAN addresses the guests.

LILLIAN

Look, I found this news article.

I was looking for articles about motherhood.

Sometimes I worry whether I've been a good mother to Iris. A loving mother. I want her to be happy. We've given her everything we can, and now she's going to get married. To Brian. Whose real name is Achilles, but who the hell can be bothered calling a son-in-law "Achilles"? It sounds so medical, or like the name of some serial killer.

Robert Anton Achilles, thirty-two, was convicted of forty-eight homicides last month in El Paso, after a seven-year-long investigation...

Blah. Our family and names. I don't know what it is about us!

I'm sorry we're keeping you so long. I hope you had a nice break there. That you had some wine. Made some small talk. Talked about the weather.

This wedding was a bit of a last-minute arrangement, to be honest. My husband decided to finally permit it. I think he needs something to alleviate the tension of this war he's planning.

Can you imagine having to plan a war? I mean, talk about a stresser. There's your stresser. And my biggest worry is whether the darned band is too loud.

God. All this fuss over Helen. Between you and me, just a quick word about my sister. Helen. You know what?

She is a whore. Don't believe for one minute she was abducted. Abducted my ass. If she's abducted, then a bitch dog is abducted each time she scratches the door in heat.

I really shouldn't say that, but there it is. Anyway, she's got the soldiers all worked up over her going to Troy, and they're going to follow. Like dogs. What can I say? They can smell her scent.

LILLIAN
(cont.)

Okay! Happy thoughts! I want to think about this wedding. Which has me thinking about motherhood. Specifically mine, and whether I've been a good mother.

Here's the article I found at the library, about that American mother in Italy:

“American Mother Drowns in Italy
Saving Her Son from Freak Wave

An American woman died while rescuing her 12-year-old son after a wave knocked them both off a pier in Italy. A Brazilian tourist captured the violent wave, and the woman's sudden fall, on his cell phone camera.

Anne Sharrie Duncan, who lived in Naples with her husband, was standing on a pier in the resort town of Positano with her son and a friend when she and her son were engulfed by a sudden wave and thrown from the pier. She pushed her son toward rescuers, some of whom had jumped in the water after them, before being carried away herself.”⁷

That makes me wonder
About Iris
And how much I'd do for her.

Is that love? Is self-sacrifice love? Or stupidity?

Blah. I don't know.
Anyway, thank you again so much
For coming to this wedding.

The ceremony will begin shortly
I promise.

I mean, really, you could say it has
Already begun, right? I mean
What in society isn't something of a ceremony?

Ha ha ha ha ha.
God, I'm still so nervous.

My family
Really, outwardly we look like we're very put together. Very with it.

But once you get to know us, woosh

You'll really see

⁷ <http://gawker.com/5541269/american-mother-drowns-in-italy-saving-her-son-from-freak-wave>

LILLIAN
(cont.)

We're just like

Every other family
We've got
Problems

Oh but please, please stay for the wedding
Everybody loves weddings!

And as you wait for the ceremony,
I beg you,
do not judge us too harshly

I mean, we're not perfect
But then what family is?

What I'm saying
And I don't mean this cruelly
Is that I am sure your family has its problems
Too

Am I right? Of course I'm right! A family is just one big gathering of problems, isn't it?

Ha ha ha ha ha.

MANNY

Sometimes when I get overwhelmed, I imagine that doe laid itself on the road to save me from something more horrible. To save me from the darkness. From a worse fate.

Does that sound childish?

GOVERNESS

No.

MANNY

And?

GOVERNESS

And what?

MANNY

And do you think it did?

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

GOVERNESS

Maybe it did. And maybe once it saved you
from that worse fate
it vanished
and not reappearing
was its ways of leaving you
a gift.

MANNY

What gift?

GOVERNESS

Wonder. Wonder keeps us... When we cease to wonder. Well.

MANNY

You know this wedding isn't really a wedding. Or rather, it's a wedding of sorts.

GOVERNESS

How is that?

MANNY

Iris is not really going to be wed to Brian.

I shouldn't tell you this.

GOVERNESS

It's fine.

I can keep secrets, if they are worth keeping.

MANNY

My heart is very tired. Secrets weigh so heavily.

GOVERNESS

Unburden it.

MANNY

Iris is to be sacrificed.

GOVERNESS

Sacrificed.

MANNY

Yes. The soldiers demand it.

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

GOVERNESS

I see.

Oh my... oh I *see*.

End Scene

SCENE 2
DRILLS!

MANNY

But do you remember that one time, Aaron? You know that time!

AARON

Which time?

MANNY

That time we came into a church! Remember!
there were two naked men torturing a young woman
a nun as it turned out
stripped naked and stretched out in the aisle of the church
holding her down
burning her with cigarettes
another woman to one side
already raped I guessed
and dead, bleeding
I yelled at the guys
I told them to stand up
hands above their heads
the one who had been holding down the woman
was shaking from fear
his eyes flying uncontrollably around the room
the woman had rolled onto her stomach, rocking from side to side,
moaning
I saw he'd noticed rifle lying in the church aisle
I told him not to be a fool
but suddenly he screamed and dove for the rifle
grabbing it, turning to look at me.
My first burst caught him in the face,
the second full in the chest.
He was dead before he fell over,
a body missing most of its head.
The second guy began to wave his arms up and down,
and he was looking at me
and looking as his own rifle leaned up against the pew
I screamed:

YOUNG SOLDIER

“DON'T DO IT! DON'T DO IT!”

MANNY

but he went for his rifle
and he started to swing the muzzle in my direction

AARON

KILL HIM!

MANNY

One of the guys yelled at me.
Was it you?

AARON

Yeah.

KILL HIM NOW!

MANNY

This guy was facing me now
trying to swing the long barrel rifle across his body
to align it with my chest
his eyes locked on mine.
His eyes never left mine,
not even when the rounds from my Sterling
tore into his stomach
walked up his chest,
and cut the carotid artery on the left side of his neck.
When his body hit the floor,
his eyes were still fixed on mine,
and then his body relaxed,
and his eyes dilated and went blind.

AARON

Then I said a prayer over the body. Didn't I?

I did. I remember because he still had some breath, and he breathed a word at me. But I couldn't make out the word. I remember his breath smelled like whiskey. And cigarettes. I remember thinking, "You shouldn't drink whiskey during a war."

MANNY suddenly breaks away, like an animal, and paces all over the space. Music.

MANNY

Sometimes I wonder if these
Memories somehow control us
They come like a flood
And

MANNY
(cont.)

It's not worth thinking about
You'll go nuts thinking about it

As for war,
make no mistake,
this call of nature
longs to be tested
seeks to be challenged beyond itself.

MANNY cues a drill, which OLD MAN and
AARON perform with the YOUNG SOLDIER.

The warrior within us beseeches Mars,
the god of War,
to deliver us to that crucial battlefield
that will redeem us into the terrifying immediacy of the moment.
We pray to the war gods to guide us to the walls of Jericho
so we may dare the steadfastness and strength of our trumpet call.
We even long to be defeated in battles, to be overcome
by powers so much greater than our self
so that the defeat itself will make us larger

We seek that encounter that will empower us
with dignity and honor.

OLD MAN

Charging into the trenches
shouting and yelling
horses neighing
I saw Corporal Bolte run his lance
right through a dismounted German
who had his hands up, surrendering
and we poured into the trenches
they all had their hands up
yelling "Camerad, Camerad,"
which means "I give up" in their language
but they had to have it that's all
they had to have it
no one can change his feelings during that last rush
the veil of blood before his eyes.
He doesn't want to take prisoners,
he wants to kill.

That his life my have meaning

OLD MAN
(cont.)

As a testament to death
As a scream:

YOUNG SOLDIER

I AM HERE
AND YOU
ARE NO LONGER HERE!

OLD MAN

Proof, finally,
That we are alive, projected as a sneer upon the dead's ceasing-to-be.

IRIS

And then we kissed! It was wonderful!
It was love! Love rained down on us!
And the world
the hurtful, cruel and petty world
Really did vanish
into a fog, into a haze, into the background, far far far away

I looked around and thought
How can this be?

I wanted to sing
to scream, to say
poetry, but I had no words

And there we were, after all that struggle:
alone, together finally, and whole.
Does this sound selfish?

MANNY

Aaron,
If you decide to send your men to war
then you must go to war yourself now
to set the example for your men
to show them
how they are to behave

I will report to them
Your actions
And your words
As your faithful counselor

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

MANNY
(cont.)

For now consider me no longer

I am
Only eyes
and ears

BRIAN enters with his guitar.

BRIAN

Sir?

AARON

Yes, Brian?

BRIAN

I heard the wedding party is on its way. I brought my guitar.

I thought it might be nice if I played it during the ceremony. What do you think?

AARON

I think that's a fine idea. Very charming. What would you play?

BRIAN

Bob Dylan, maybe.

AARON

I love Dylan.

He's not always the most romantic, though, is he?

BRIAN

Actually, Sir. To be honest that's all I've learned so far. Dylan and scales.

You know, Sir. This wedding was planned so abruptly. I mean, I'm happy. I'm happy to be the groom.

AARON

As you should be.

Ours is a noble house.

BRIAN

As is mine.

AARON

Yes. That's why we'll be able to use the purple carpet there.

BRIAN

Yes.

But, Sir. I've heard a rumor.

AARON

What kind of a rumor?

BRIAN

I'm told you've lured Iris here with the story that she is to be married to me, that there have been some preparations, even a bridal shower. I'm told you have no intention of having a real wedding. I'm told instead you plan to bring her here as a sacrifice.

I have come here
Prepared in my heart
To go to war

I am honored to serve.

I am from a noble house
Well born
Well conceived
Well raised

It seems to me a privilege
to be a soldier.

But I did not volunteer
To be used as a lure

For another's innocent death
Let alone one whom I cherish

I will not be made party to a lie, Sir.

With all due respect.

What chance can an empire have
if its actions are to be based
on lies and imaginings?

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

BRIAN
(cont.)

I will not be drafted into a plot against your daughter.
I will not be conscripted into any cause

without my consent
without respect for my autonomy.

Again, with all due respect, Sir:

This is a democracy.

We ought to at least pretend
I am free to make my own decisions.

AARON

Brian...

BRIAN

No. I will not be your pawn in this.

BRIAN exits.

MANNY

Do you want me to/

AARON

Yes. Make sure he stays in the house.

MANNY

I knew you would follow through.

MANNY exits.

AARON walks to the purple carpet and stares at it.

IRIS enters in her wedding dress.

IRIS

Daddy!

Oh I'm so happy.

AARON

You look beautiful.

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

AARON
(cont.)

You shouldn't be here.

Where are your bridesmaids?

IRIS

I escaped! I snuck away. I wanted to see you. I just want to thank you before the ceremony.

AARON

Have you seen Brian today?

IRIS

Oh no! No way. I'm being careful. I'm using the back passages. I snuck through the kitchen. I forgot how big our kitchen is. I was even in the cellar!

AARON

In your dress?

IRIS

Oh no, before.

Do you know how much *wine* we have down there?

AARON

I have an idea.

IRIS

We're really rich, aren't we?

We really are elite, like the Governess says.

AARON

I suppose we are, yes.

IRIS

I'm so happy!

Oh Daddy, I love you.

AARON

I love you too, dear.

IRIS

OhmyGod!

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

IRIS
(cont.)

Is this the carpet we're going to walk on! Oh look, it's purple. Purple for nobility. Which we can do because we're noble, and Brian's noble. Purple like irises. So many flowers.

Ahh! It's wonderful. Come on, Daddy. Let's take a practice walk.

IRIS steps upon the purple carpet. AARON will not.

AARON

No, dear. I really prefer/

IRIS

Why not?

AARON

We are noble by blood.
But I am preparing a war.
War is a bloody business
Blood will be spilt

Our family
And our country
Has been cuckolded
Now, by the Trojans

I do not feel noble
And will not feel noble
Until the war is won.

To walk on that carpet now
Is to spit in the gods' faces

That I shall not do.

IRIS

Oh, Daddy. Always so serious. Mr. Bearface!

Look at me. I'm not spitting at anybody. I'm just enjoying myself.

But you'll walk down this with me tonight? At the wedding?

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

AARON

Of course.

IRIS

Oh yay!
I'm so excited.
To be married!
How come?
I mean
I love him.
And he loves me, too.
I know that.

We talked about how we would one day get married.

But we didn't think it could happen so soon.

And it seemed
he had to go with you
to this stupid war.
I mean... to be married before he goes,
oh God,
thank you, Daddy.
I'm so happy.

AARON

Yes of course.

So am I. Very happy.

You should go. Brian could return any minute. It's very bad luck if he sees you. And I'm sure the women are wondering where you are.

IRIS

Of course, Daddy. Always so *practical*. So, so serious.

Smile for me. Please smile once for me.

AARON smiles.

Was that so difficult?

AARON

Honestly?

For you, no. For anyone else, a torture.

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

IRIS

You smile for Mom.

AARON

That's different. Go. Get. No another word until the wedding.

IRIS kisses him on the cheek, exits.

Old man.

OLD MAN

Yes, Sir?

AARON

I trust it wasn't you who began this nasty rumor. About this wedding not being a wedding.

OLD MAN

Oh no, Sir. Of course not.

Loose lips ship sinks.

AARON

Indeed they do.

Indeed they do.

AARON stares at the purple carpet.

End Scene

SCENE 3
THE LOCKSMITH

GOVERNESS

So you see, my lady. Out of respect I could not help but tell you.

LILLIAN

Yes, I see.

GOVERNESS

I am trustworthy when it is worthy I should be trusted.

LILLIAN

Yes. You have always been loyal.

GOVERNESS

What are you doing there?

LILLIAN

We need the doors to our house re-keyed.

GOVERNESS

Re-keyed?

LILLIAN

Yes. One of our *guests* stole a set of our *keys*. This is what happens when you open your house to *strangers*, thinking there will be a *celebration*. This is what happens when your family displeases the *gods*. Keys get stolen!

And as you can imagine, our house has many locks and many doors.

I'm looking through the paper for a bargain.

Here's an article on the future of the global economy, whatever that is.

Here's an article about a war.

GOVERNESS

Which war?

LILLIAN

There has only ever been one war.

GOVERNESS

Oh. That's quite categorical of you. I love statements like that. They remind me of my glory days back at University, when people would say anything just to stand out in some seminar or another. I miss that.

LILLIAN

Here's what I'm looking for! A bargain locksmith.

"We offer rekeying and repair services for all types of locks. If it can be rekeyed odds are we can do it! Rekeying is the process of changing the working key for an existing lock to a brand new unique key. This makes it so all other keys that previously worked the lock will no longer, only your new key! We offer this service both through our mobile service and right at our shop. Call to set up an appointment or bring your lock right on in!

(That's right. Existing. Mobile.)

We also can repair all types of locks as well. From automotive, residential, commercial and whatever else! We carry parts for all kinds of locks new or old, and if we don't have it we can get it! Feel free to call with any questions or to set up an appointment to repair a sticky, squeaky, sloppy or just plain broken door or lock."⁸

Commercial. Existing. Mobile.

GOVERNESS

They mean commercial. Existing. Mobile.

LILLIAN

Yes, of course they mean those things. But that's not what's written here.

How can they run an ad and not use spell check?

GOVERNESS

Lillian...

LILLIAN

What?

GOVERNESS

Your husband means to sacrifice your daughter this very day.

LILLIAN

I heard you the first time.

⁸ <http://harmarlock.com/Services/LockRepair/repair.htm>

GOVERNESS

And still you sit here cutting coupons?

LILLIAN

Ha ha ha ha ha.

I love cutting coupons. It's cathartic.

For me it's very relaxing.

GOVERNESS

You don't seem relaxed.

LILLIAN

Well believe me, I am.

I'm just going to sit here and cut coupons for a minute.

And think.

GOVERNESS

I... ahh. I'm going to go get dressed for the wedding.

Please don't tell your husband I-

LILLIAN

No. Of course. Go. You are excused.

GOVERNESS exits.

Moblie. Moblie. Mob lie?

Mob lie?

End Scene

SCENE 4
ANGRY AMERICANS

Music, to which IRIS dances wildly in front of the mirror in her dress. BRIAN strums his now-stringless guitar and sings, silently, a Dylan tune: *Masters of War*. These words may appear on the war wall. MANNY recites a poem, also silently. These words may appear on the love wall, which is almost entirely white now. Bukowski's *Bluebird*.

LILLIAN confronts AARON. This culminates in a physical battle, as SHE gathers every iris in the room and throws them against him. HE is unfazed, so SHE slaps him again and again and again until finally HE clutches her by the throat and begins to choke her, just for a moment. HE throws her to the ground.

WAR'S WALL

Come you masters of war
You that build all the guns
You that build the death planes
You that build the big bombs
You that hide behind walls
You that hide behind desks
I just want you to know
I can see through your masks

You that never done nothin'
But build to destroy
You play with my world
Like it's your little toy
You put a gun in my hand
And you hide from my eyes
And you turn and run farther
When the fast bullets fly

Like Judas of old
You lie and deceive
A world war can be won
You want me to believe
But I see through your eyes
And I see through your brain
Like I see through the water
That runs down my drain

You fasten the triggers
For the others to fire
Then you set back and watch

LOVE'S WALL

there's a bluebird in my heart that
wants to get out
but I'm too tough for him,
I say, stay in there, I'm not going
to let anybody see
you.

there's a bluebird in my heart that
wants to get out
but I pour whiskey on him and inhale
cigarette smoke
and the whores and the bartenders
and the grocery clerks
never know that
he's
in there.

there's a bluebird in my heart that
wants to get out
but I'm too tough for him,
I say,
stay down, do you want to mess
me up?
you want to screw up the
works?
you want to blow my book sales in
Europe?

there's a bluebird in my heart that
wants to get out
but I'm too clever, I only let him out

⁹ <http://www.bobdylan.com/#/songs/masters-of-war>

WAR'S WALL

(cont.)

When the death count gets higher
 You hide in your mansion
 As young people's blood
 Flows out of their bodies
 And is buried in the mud

You've thrown the worst fear
 That can ever be hurled
 Fear to bring children
 Into the world
 For threatening my baby
 Unborn and unnamed
 You ain't worth the blood
 That runs in your veins

How much do I know
 To talk out of turn
 You might say that I'm young
 You might say I'm unlearned
 But there's one thing I know
 Though I'm younger than you
 Even Jesus would never
 Forgive what you do

Let me ask you one question
 Is your money that good
 Will it buy you forgiveness
 Do you think that it could
 I think you will find
 When your death takes its toll
 All the money you made
 Will never buy back your soul

And I hope that you die
 And your death'll come soon
 I will follow your casket
 In the pale afternoon
 And I'll watch while you're lowered
 Down to your deathbed
 And I'll stand o'er your grave
 'Til I'm sure that you're dead⁹

LOVE'S WALL

(cont.)

at night sometimes
 when everybody's asleep.
 I say, I know that you're there,
 so don't be
 sad.
 then I put him back,
 but he's singing a little
 in there, I haven't quite let him
 die
 and we sleep together like
 that
 with our
 secret pact
 and it's nice enough to
 make a man
 weep, but I don't
 weep, do
 you?¹⁰

¹⁰ <http://plagiarist.com/poetry/137/>

LILLIAN looks as if she might vomit. ALL exit, leaving LILLIAN and AARON.

LILLIAN

Your own child?

You mean to kill our only child? Our sweet, dear Iris?

AARON takes the battered irises and tosses them one at a time upon the purple carpet as HE speaks.

AARON

Yes.

LILLIAN

How? I mean. No, not how. I don't want to know how. I mean... who? Who could do such a thing?

AARON

Precisely. That is precisely it. Only an excellent man. Only an exceptional man. A leader of empire. Resolute, cruel. Honest. Perfect.

LILLIAN

Insane.

And that's why all this. All these preparations? All these strangers here?

Aaron? Don't turn off now. Look at me.

AARON

Yes.

LILLIAN covers her mouth with both her hands and stares at AARON from her knees.

LILLIAN

Your own daughter.

AARON

Don't look at me like that.
I have struggled over this.
Anguished, gone back and forth
And back again, and returned
To my resolution.

AARON
(cont.)

I had thought,
as the leader of the military
to put my own personal thoughts
ahead of the common will
and the common good
I thought
I need to think of what is best for greatest number
and so I was thinking abstractly
not personally
in fact
I was not thinking clearly at all
then I thought
but how can it be the common good
if what I do is so vile in itself?
How can such a single act
still hold good?
And so I thought
I can't do this
I can't possibly do this
even though
I can't think clearly
why not?
or why?
I'm trying to follow my instinct
and yet
I don't know what's become of me.
It's taken me apart
and I'm not to be trusted any more
by anyone

Least of all you.

I have no choice now anyway.

The wheel is turning, and the stone rolls down the hill.

LILLIAN

We'll leave now.
I'll get Iris.

AARON

I don't think you can leave.

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

LILLIAN

Oh, yes, I can.
I can leave
and never ever see you again.

You've broken my heart, Aaron. I loved you.

We're leaving.

AARON

You can't. The soldiers won't let you leave. They took the keys, and we are locked in.

LILLIAN

They can't stop us. There are windows and-

AARON

Neither Iris, nor you,
will leave alive
if we don't finish what we've begun.

The soldiers have promised me that.

LILLIAN

No. That can't be.
All that will happen now
is that your soldiers won't go with you to war.
They'll go home, too, and you will be left alone with your guilt.

AARON

There is a group
determined to continue.
What's been set in motion
can't be stopped.

LILLIAN

If you kill our daughter,
I will murder you.
I will tear your hands from your arms
and your arms from your shoulders.
I will burn the flesh from your body
I will beat your bones to dust.
What you have begun will not be finished
until you are pounded back into the dirt.

If not tonight, then before I die
I will see that done.

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

AARON

Look, dear. Look here how the aisle is prepared
with irises for our Iris to walk upon.

Hers will be a wedding to infinity. In a way she should be honored. And so should you.

Today your daughter marries the noblest groom of all.

Look at this gorgeous carpet.

Why did it cause me so much anxiety earlier?

No longer!

*A mortal man to set his foot
On these rich dyes? I hold such pride in fear,
And bid thee honor me today
as god, not man!*

HE holds his foot above the purple carpet.

LILLIAN

Insane.

LILLIAN exits. AARON looks as if HE may follow her. Instead HE lingers over the purple carpet. HE steps upon it and raises his arms like a bird. HE walks along the carpet, step by step, flying to the sound of hallucinatory music and visions of war and lust and violence and love that appear upon the white walls behind him. HE pauses to stare at these momentarily. HE exits along the carpet, walking upon it like it is the thinnest of ropes, which indeed it is.

End Scene

SCENE 5
NAILS ON EVERY FLOOR

Brian. LILLIAN

Ma'am. BRIAN

Please. You must call me Lillian. LILLIAN

Lillian. BRIAN

Be careful where you stand. There are nails on every floor. LILLIAN

I don't see any- BRIAN

I said "there are nails on every floor." LILLIAN

I see. And the walls have ears, you're saying. BRIAN

Yes. LILLIAN

Where are the strings to your guitar?

The soldiers took them. As a joke. BRIAN

I play anyway. I hear it in my head.

That's lovely. LILLIAN

Or I'm losing my mind. BRIAN

LILLIAN

It could be both lovely and insane, could it not?

Were we each of us tricked? About this wedding which will not happen?

BRIAN

Yes. I didn't know either, when I arrived here.

LILLIAN

And now because of us Iris is to be killed.

BRIAN

Not if I have anything to do about it.

LILLIAN

And I suppose that's why Aaron's counselor is at the door with his gun.

BRIAN

Indeed.

LILLIAN

I see.

What do you propose to do?

BRIAN

I don't know.

LILLIAN

There is something you can do.
Something that requires courage
and great honor
and maybe self-sacrifice
the very stuff of a soldier.

You can marry Iris
and then, as her husband,
defend her against her father
and against all the others.

That is what you could do.

BRIAN

You mean marry your daughter, and fight your husband?

LILLIAN

Yes.

BRIAN

Ahh hah hah. I love your daughter, but marriage is such a huge commitment

I could defend Iris without marrying her. We could/

LILLIAN

What standing would you have against her father? The people value tradition. Unless you are her husband, what right do you have to interfere?

BRIAN

Against murder?

LILLIAN

Quiet!

Is it murder or sacrifice?

BRIAN

What difference is there?

LILLIAN

Oh a great one, I think.

Are you a coward?

BRIAN

No.

LILLIAN

Then behave like a man.

BRIAN

To marry Iris now would not be bravery. It would be suicide.

LILLIAN

I thought you loved her.

BRIAN

I will not die here, some pawn in this game Aaron's playing. I am not some petty rebel. I am a soldier, and from a good family.

Stop staring at me. I am not a coward!

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

Ha ha ha ha ha.
LILLIAN

Why are you laughing?
BRIAN

I just realized
my husband
will not kill
his own daughter.
LILLIAN

But what if he will?
BRIAN

He won't. He'll find a way out. I know it. This is all a kind of elaborate joke.
LILLIAN
I must believe that.

Perhaps we are all of us cowards, and those we call brave are simply deluded.
BRIAN

Hush. Here. Come. Dance with me. People always dance at weddings, and tonight there will be a wedding, one way or another. We should practice so we don't look silly.
LILLIAN

I'm a terrible dancer.
BRIAN

Then it's even more important we practice!
LILLIAN

THEY dance a very intimate and intense dance, one that overwhelms BRIAN.
Your pupils are so big. Like two black pools.

It's a reflex.
BRIAN

For a moment this approaches a real intimacy between the two, at which point MANNY enters, dressed for the wedding.

MANNY

It's almost time.

Why aren't you dressed for the wedding?

LILLIAN

Silence!

I will help him.

Leave us!

End Scene

SCENE 6
IRIDES

ALL present and dressed for a wedding but for IRIS, BRIAN, and AARON.

LILLIAN
(from the encyclopedia)

“The iris (plural: irides, or rarely, irises) is a thin, circular structure in the eye, responsible for controlling the diameter and size of the pupils and the amount of light reaching the pupil. ‘Eye color’ is the color of the iris, which can be green, blue, or brown. In some cases it can be hazel (light brown). In response to the amount of light entering the eye, muscles attached to the iris expand or contract the aperture at the center of the iris, known as the pupil. The larger the pupil, the more light can enter.”¹¹

GOVERNESS

So dark here for a wedding! A wedding should be a bright, happy affair! Here, let me raise the lights.

SHE does.

A wedding should also be festive! Let’s play festive music! Come.

There is festive music.

IRIS enters in her gown. SHE is beautiful, and everyone murmurs as much. SHE goes to her mother.

LILLIAN

So beautiful.

Oh, I’m going to do my best not to cry today. I feel like crumbling into a tiny little ball on the floor and crying my eyes out!

IRIS

Please don’t cry. If you cry, then I’ll cry, and we won’t be able to see everything. Today I want to see absolutely everything! I never want to forget any of it.

LILLIAN

I’ll do my best, dear. But I cannot promise.

You know, dear, so often at this point a bride will begin to worry that her groom won’t show up, that he has changed his mind. Will he go through with it?

¹¹ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iris_\(anatomy\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iris_(anatomy))

IRIS

Oh, I'm not worried about that at all.

LILLIAN

Believe me when I tell you, he cares for you.

IRIS

I know that, Mom.

LILLIAN

I'm saying I've talked to him, and if you have any doubts...

IRIS

OhmyGod! Are you saying I should have doubts? What did he say?

LILLIAN

Listen now. It's not important what he said, but... believe me, whether he goes through with the wedding or not, we can count on him as a friend. Always.

IRIS

As a friend?

OhmyGod, Mom. You are freaking me out now.

You should just... shut up a second. All right?

I have to breathe.

LILLIAN

I'm sorry, dear.

IRIS

No. It's fine. I just. Need to breathe.

Wine. Wine.

GOVERNESS brings a glass of wine to IRIS.

Glug glug glug, right?

Why is everyone so sad looking? Everyone so quiet! This is a wedding. People should be smiling, happy. Everyone looks just like Dad looks when he's pouring over maps and numbers and war stuff.

LILLIAN

I'll have one too, please. A wine.

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

THEY drink wine.

LILLIAN
(cont.)

Darling, here. Come here with me.

Iris, dear.

Your father made a terrible mistake.

Everyone here already knows.

But you have been kept in the dark.

IRIS

Oh God. Brian's not coming, is he?

LILLIAN

It has nothing to do with Brian.

The soldiers, through your father's counselor,
Have told him they will not go to war
Unless your father makes a sacrifice first

They want something equal to what he
Will ask of them, when he sends them to war
Blood

A life he treasures above all others

IRIS

Oh God. Is that why all the doors are locked? I tried to get some air and/

LILLIAN

Yes. Yes. Your father wasn't thinking clearly, and he agreed to make the sacrifice.

IRIS

Oh no.

Mom. Are you saying... you? He's going to kill you? On my wedding day?

LILLIAN

No dear.

You. Your life.

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

Me? He's going to kill me?
IRIS

Yes.
LILLIAN

Ha ha ha ha ha!
IRIS

Look at you. So serious.

This is a funny joke.

You can stop making that face.

Daddy wouldn't murder me.

But he would.
LILLIAN

No no no no no.
IRIS

This can't be real.

This can't-

SHE looks around at the stony faces, and each confirms her mother's words. SHE rushes out. LILLIAN follows her.

Iris!
LILLIAN

THEY exit. The happy music continues to play, and the guests stand around awkwardly.

Somebody should tell a joke.
GOVERNESS

I've forgotten all the jokes I used to know.
OLD MAN

Actually that's not true.

I only remember the dirty ones.

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

MANNY

Well come on then.

Tell us a dirty joke.

OLD MAN

Well. I first heard this one in the war.

“Two Greek nuns - a mother superior and one of her charges - arrive to the US by boat when one says to the other, 'I heard that Americans actually eat dogs.'

'Odd,' her companion replies, 'but when in America, we might as well do as the Americans do.'

So they decide to go to a hot dog vendor.

'Two dogs, please,' says one.

The vendor wraps both hot dogs in foil. Excited to be eating their first meal of dog, the nuns hurry over to a bench and began to unwrap their strange American delicacy.

The mother superior opens hers first, then leans over to the other nun and whispers, 'What part did you get?'"¹²

Nobody laughs.

Quite suddenly, we hear very big wedding music.

AARON enters, walks across stage, turns, and waits. MANNY stands by his side.

IRIS and LILLIAN enter and stand awkwardly.

BRIAN finally enters, carrying his guitar without strings.

LILLIAN

Will you please stop that goddamned music!

The music stops.

AARON

So. We're all finally together then.

¹² From <http://www.humorshack.com/archive/jokes/dirty/4.shtml>

IRIS
Daddy.

AARON
Yes?

IRIS
Mother tells me that you have it in mind
Not that I should be married
But that you should
Sacrifice
Me

Like a lamb, or-

AARON
No. It's absolutely not true.

IRIS
That's what I've been told! And that's what everyone says now! That this whole thing,
all these preparations, these guests, this room, everything exists to pull the wool over my
eyes. To blind me to this fact.

AARON
No, dear, no. It's not true.

IRIS
Why isn't it?

It should be!

AARON
Excuse me?

BRIAN
Iris, stop.

IRIS
No!

You don't think I know
What duty means?
I, the great general's daughter?

You think I am some dumb
Sheep, some doe-eyed babe

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

IRIS
(cont.)

a stupid little girl?

I have watched you
Give your life away
For the cause of our nation

For the common good

I have watched you
Do your duty
For years, day by day

And now it's simply my turn.

My life is a gift, and I offer it freely.

AARON

No. That's not right, Iris. That's not/

LILLIAN

Iris, dear.

IRIS

Yes, Mother?

AARON

This is all just one big misunderstanding! Come on now. Some lively music. A little dancing, and we'll forget about... Brian, play your guitar.

BRIAN

I don't have any strings!

AARON

Play it! Play a song!

BRIAN strums the guitar without strings. Perhaps he sings a song.

Sing, damn it! Come on! Louder!

IRIS

Daddy! Stop. You're embarrassing me.
I know it must be this way.

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

AARON

No. I made a mistake. I can undo this.

IRIS

To save one life
You would put a thousand others in jeopardy?
You would risk our entire family
The reputation of our entire nation?

You and I
And everyone here knows
This would be wrong.

AARON

No.

IRIS

Yes. You know this in your bones. Daddy, come here. Look at me. You taught me this lesson.

AARON

What lesson is this?

IRIS

Duty, of course. And love-

AARON

Duty.

IRIS

Yes. And love. This blinding, terrible/

AARON

If I taught you this, then I regret teaching it.

IRIS

Are you saying only men should be patriots?

That women can't be heroes?

AARON

No, my God. But this isn't. This isn't heroism. You've been misled. Betrayed.

IRIS

I had been, but no longer. Now my eyes are open. Opened wide.

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

LILLIAN

Stop. Just stop.
 I see what's happened.
 Because your father has
 Broken your heart,
 Your father, whom you loved
 And who should have loved you
 Better, has wounded you
 And broken your mind

you think you can throw your life away.

It's childish. Think of Brian, who loves you.
 Think of your love for Brian.

IRIS

This too is a kind of love.

LILLIAN

Iris! Stop. You're being a child!

IRIS

It is not childish! You can't tell me my death won't serve to protect our family, to ensure our eternal glory. You cannot look at me and tell me that with a straight face. Why? Because it would be a lie, and we've had enough lies for today, haven't we?

Look at the others! They are silent because they know this is the right thing to do! Even father. Even his counselor. Even the old man there.

And Brian too. And the Governess.

They are struck dumb before my awesome truth.

LILLIAN

Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!

We should probably start getting the guests their coats. It's getting late, and we don't want anyone to get into an accident on the way home. Those roads can be so treacherous! All right, everybody! Show's over. Time to go. Turn up the lights. Come on...

IRIS

Oh Mother, hush.
 I'm sorry to make it so difficult for you.
 But I want you to celebrate my decision,
 I want everyone to celebrate

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

IRIS
(cont.)

because we all know
this is the right thing for anyone to do.
And if I could set an example,
this is the example I would set.

And by it I would become more than even God

God must be all things to truly be God
I am only a spoiled girl
and I only need to be this one, perfect thing
And by this sacrifice
I will become truly immortal

Listen, Mother. Do you hear how none of the men object?
They are silent because they would have the same glorious death.
but they seek theirs in foreign wars.

I will win mine at home.

AARON

I forbid this.

YOUNG SOLDIERS

There will be mutiny.

AARON

Then let them mutiny!

MANNY

You aren't thinking clearly.

AARON

Maybe not, but I will not do this to my daughter.

IRIS kneels.

IRIS

Daddy. I beg you. Let me do this.
Why let these splendid preparations go to waste?

Why send our guests home
without their promised celebration?

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

IRIS
(cont.)

They were promised a wedding
And we must give them one.

AARON

No.

IRIS

Yes.

AARON

No, Iris. Stand up. Stand up!

IRIS

I will do this.

By your hand or mine,
it will be done.

MANNY

This must be done, Aaron.

You know this.

AARON

Iris, honey. Stand up. Look at me. Look me in the eye.

IRIS stands. SHE looks at her father. HE breaks
her gaze.

Such beautiful eyes. Like a doe's eyes. So soft.

IRIS

Daddy. Please. Don't make me do it to myself. I will. I'll do it.

AARON

Yes. Okay then. Fine! Fine.

LILLIAN

God damn you both, no!

This isn't love. This isn't patriotism. This isn't honor.

This is madness.

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

AARON

No, dear.

It is only
war. And we
are a warlike
people.

IRIS

Mother! Governess!

Help me out of this dress.

LILLIAN and GOVERNESS do. IRIS lets the
dress fall to the floor so that SHE is in her slip.
SHE turns and leaves. AARON follows her out.

There is music.

The wedding party stands around, not knowing
what to do.

GOVERNESS

We should dance. People always dance at weddings.

MANNY

Isn't that usually after?

GOVERNESS

Well whatever the case. We must do something.

LILLIAN

Yes. A dance. Let's dance. Come here, Brian. Please. My legs aren't steady.

BRIAN

You really want to dance? Now?

LILLIAN

Yes. I do. Very much. Come here.

BRIAN

We should do something.

LILLIAN

No. There's nothing to be done.

IRIS

KEVIN KAUTZMAN

BRIAN

I love her. Iris. Your daughter. I do.

LILLIAN

No. No you don't.

Come on now.

Dance with me.

THEY begin to dance, strangely and slowly – mournful and celebratory at once. LILLIAN and BRIAN partner, as do GOVERNESS and OLD MAN. YOUNG SOLDIER begins to clean his rifle and prepare for the coming war. MANNY stands to the side. HE stares at the white walls, and images of violence and lust, love and war are witnessed upon them. Perhaps the walls should have been painted black, but it is too late.

The music rises and the images comingle across the two walls, and the dancers dance and slough off clothing to become more comfortable: a shoe here, an overcoat there, military medals flung across the floor like old hard candies, a shirt tossed to the heavens.

IRIS and AARON enter and stand upon the purple carpet. SHE smiles broadly like a joyous bride might upon being taken to the altar. AARON grimaces. HE may be weeping, but his hands are steady. THEY begin their walk across the carpet, hand in hand. With his free hand AARON holds a knife across IRIS' throat. THEY walk, and the dancers dance, and the music plays, and an image of a doe appears upon the walls, as MANNY described.

When the dancers notice AARON and IRIS' procession, THEY stop and stare. THEY gaze as IRIS and AARON walk, the blade to her throat, in a long, slow procession of firm steps upon the purple carpet, treading upon the broken irises.

The lights gradually dim until the only light remaining is that from the iridescent doe upon the walls. And within its glow, we see that MANNY remains beside it, staring in dumb, awestruck wonder, his lips trembling slightly as HE repeats to himself the words from the beginning of the ACT. Slowly, HE brings his hands to his eyes and covers them against the light.

End of Play