

# Daughter of the Regiment

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a short play

by

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# Daughter of the Regiment

**Character** \_\_\_\_\_

**Mother** — Late twenties, early thirties.

**Setting** \_\_\_\_\_

**Place**

Limousine driving through the suburbs of Maryland.

**Time**

2011

**Scenic Elements** \_\_\_\_\_

Two chairs that suggest the front seat of a limousine. Purse and Army staff officer cap rest on the stage right chair.

**Acting Note** \_\_\_\_\_

There is no need for a realistic set or multiple props. Almost all of the stage directions can be mimed. It is up to audience to create the space with their imagination.

(Lights up. Billy's Mother sits in stage left chair – as though she were driving a car. She looks up into an invisible rearview mirror as though she can see the passenger in the rear seat.)

**MOTHER**

Are you in? Buckle up.

Good boy!

(She mimes turning ignition, driving forward.)

Isn't this exciting? Your first day in a new school.

(She looks up into the rearview mirror and listens for a moment as though the person in the rear seat were speaking.)

Because Granddad thought it would be nice for you to arrive at the academy in his shiny new limousine. How many of the boys will be able to beat that? Big... silver car with the pretty American flags on the bumpers... hmmm? Better than my little Elantra.

No... a general is higher than a colonel.

No, Granddaddy has *two* stars. Don't tell them four or the boys will call you a liar and we don't want to start that all over again do we? All those terrible stories you told at your last school... the UFOs... the frog people... your mother does not have webbed feet or catch flies with poisonous spit darts, thank you very much! Promise me, honey... No more lies...?

Sit still, Billy.

Don't play with the intercom. I can hear you fine.

No.

No.

No, honey.

No.

No, we didn't.

I never said that.

I never promised you that.

No, I didn't.

You are going to this school whether you like it or not.

(She glances up into the rearview mirror.)

Look at me, honey. Granddaddy pulled a lot of strings to get you into this school. Now we don't want to disappoint him, do we? After all he has done for us after losing the house. . . You didn't like that awful family billet on base, did you?

No. See?

And getting you into this school. How many of your friends back home can say they're a junior cadet at St. John's Military School for Boys, huh?

They do too.

Yes they do.

Because it's very prestigious.

Yes it is.

Because there's a list of about 500 little hyperactive 3rd-grade boys crying into their C-rations right now because they couldn't get in. That's how you can tell. Now don't make your mother lose her temper on such an exciting... such a special day.

Did you remember your iPad?

I don't know. It's an expensive school with expensive ideas.

(She glances up into the rearview mirror.)

Honey, that needs to stay buttoned.

It's called an *epaulette*

They don't look stupid. They're an important part of the junior cadet uniform. Now just leave it alone and sit still. Do you have your pills with you?

And the note?

Give the note to your teacher. It explains when you have to take your pill. Do you understand, Billy?

Ritalin, but you don't have to tell that to your new friends. If they ask just say it's a special vitamin.

Because it's none of their business. *Why? Why? Why?* It's like you're a broken record this morning, honey!

Of course you can tell them about your daddy.

Tell them that he's a very brave man and that he has fought very hard to serve his country.

It's near India. Remember? I showed you on the map.

We don't use that expression, Billy.

I don't care what the kids on the base call them. We call them Afghanistan... ees. Anyway, over there it's more like a hat than a towel.

Because that's where the Army decided to send him. That's where the war is. Your daddy is a soldier and that's what soldiers do. They go on tours... one... two... or even three times... and they fight in wars.

Yes, Billy. With his M16... and M4A1... and XM25... and all the other guns, grenades and rocket launchers with numbers and letters that he brought home to show you.

(She glances up into the rearview mirror. A little shocked. Not sure how to continue.)

Yes, Billy. He did. He had to.

Because there are very bad people out there who want to kill us for the sole reason that we are Americans. And it's your daddy's duty to go to these countries and find these bad people and... and... stop them. Something your father is very proud to do as his sworn duty to God and Country. And without your father and patriots like him, you'd probably be bowing to Allah five times a day in some middle-east terrorist training camp and I'd be herding camels, spinning wool, and wearing a burka.

(There is a loud buzz. It is the car's phone. She doesn't know whether or not she should answer it. It buzzes again. She punches a button on the dash thinking that it will hang up. It doesn't.)

(Whispering:) Goddamn it.

(She tries desperately to find the button on dashboard to turn off the hands-free settings.)

Hands-free... How do I turn off the damn hands-free?

(She finds it and presses it. She mimes speaking into the car's phone.)

(Lower voice:) General Verhoeven's car.

Oh... it's you, daddy. I didn't know if I should. . . .

Your driver took you in the Audi at the crack of dawn, so I figured it's Billy's first day at school, the keys were on a hook next to the door, why not....

(She mimes sliding shut the Plexiglas panel behind her head so that Billy can't hear.)

Oh, Daddy... Watch your language! It's not going to do anyone any harm. I promise not to go to the grocery store like last time. It'll be back at home in 20 minutes. I promise!

(Suddenly serious:) What? What do you mean he's back? His tour isn't over until...

(Frightened:) Is he okay?

If he's fine, then why is he back?

What?

When?

He... What did he do?

Oh, god. Oh, god...

Did anyone get hurt?

Where was Andy... Jose... the rest of the men on his team? Why didn't they stop him?

Oh, God. Are they hurt...?

Thank God.

Why didn't they tell me? Why wasn't I informed?

Need to know? He's medevac'd out of Kandahar and I'm not informed? I'm not the press. I'm his wife and I need to know.

That's bullshit. Have you seen him?

What did he say?

Yes. I want to hear it. Tell me.

He said that?

What do they have him on? Those are the drugs talking. Is he restrained?

Then can you blame him? You know he has a temper... Where is he? I'll be there as soon as....

Don't tell me what I'm going to do, Daddy.

He said that? About me?

What? He said that?

How could he have ...

(Frightened:) I warned you... Last week after that call. I told you something was wrong. I told you and now... I *called* the crisis line. Just like you told me. There was nothing they could do because he was *on duty*. You guys had your hands on him. They notified command, but did that stop them? No. Sending him out into the field for weeks at a time. This is all your fault. Three tours in four years? All your goddamned fault! (Anger building:) Why didn't you do something about it? You big shots in your plush offices in the Pentagon... playing people like they're pawns in some... stupid... elaborate... pointless... hideous... *Goddamnit!* You think if there was a draft, you get away with this shit for even a second? You'd all be out on your asses and the Pentagon would be in cinders. Three tours. This is what happens. And now I've got to pick up the pieces. We barely survived after the last tour. You think that is the man I married? This is what you've done to him. This is your fault.

(Long pause as she listens. He is obviously yelling at her. She reacts. At first she is mad, but then we can see that what he is saying has its effect. She calms down.)

Don't you yell at me!

No, I will not!

Stop it. Stop!

Make it stop! Please. Make it stop!

I know.

I know!

Yes.

Yes, sir.

Yes. I hear you.

I understand.

I understand.

I understand.

Yes, sir.

I will.

My duty.

Yes, sir. As soon as I drop Billy off. Yes. Bethesda Naval... Psych B... Fifth floor.

Goodbye, sir.

(She hangs up the microphone/receiver. Glances up into the rearview mirror. She opens the Plexiglas slider.)

Yes, Billy?

That was your Granddad. He called to say that Daddy's back. Wonderful big surprise. Daddy's home!

It happened last night.

Because they sent him right to the... to the base.

It might be a few weeks, honey. Daddy isn't feeling well.

No. He's okay. Nothing like that. Don't worry, he's just...

He didn't mean it, Billy. When he said those things on the phone last week he wasn't feeling well. He needed more sleep and he didn't know what he was saying.

No, honey.

In a few weeks. He will be back to his old cranky, temperamental self and you two will be in the back yard throwing that old football around...



Nothing to worry about, just something he picked up in Afghanistan. That's why he's in the hospital. On the base. But if we are brave... and patient... and show him how much we love him, they will be able to fix him.

Maybe next week. Okay?

Things are perfectly fine. I promise.

Okay?

Good! Good! First day at a new school. How exciting!

(She mimes turning the steering wheel. She looks up through the windshield.)

There it is! St. John's! Up on that hill... surrounded by all those playing fields. Isn't it beautiful? Your Granddaddy went there and so did Uncle Bobby... You can be on the football team just like them! We'll pull right up to the front door so that everyone will see us. Look at all those little boys in their little uniforms. Isn't it adorable?

They see us! I've got to act like a chauffeur.

(She puts the Army staff officers' hat on her head.)

Isn't this fun? You are going to be the biggest hit!

(She mimes pulling the car over to the curb.)

Ready? Wait! I'll open the door for you.

(She gets out of the car and mimes opening the back door. She waits. And waits. She bends over and peers into the limo. A school bell rings)

Honey, that's the bell. You have to get out of the car. Come on. The other boys are going inside!

(She sees something in the back seat.)

What's that?

Give me that.

Give it to me!

(She mimes struggling to take something away from the boy. She succeeds.)

I told you to lose the Justin Bieber lunch box. That's why Granddad gave you his Vietnam War mess kit.

I know you like the lunch box, but what are you going to tell him when.... Give me the Kit and we'll just put these sandwiches...

(She mimes opening the lunch box.)

... Your frog family dolls. Honey... The frog dolls. I thought we threw these out.

Don't you understand, Billy. You've got to stop that. That's not real. You know that, right? You are not an alien. You were not born on the frog planet and you did not rocket to Earth on a UFO. Those are all just stories you made up. And you can't hide behind the bushes after I drop you off... or sneak away during recess until it's time to come home. You can't afford to fail the 3rd grade again, honey!

No. They won't know that you were held back. No one here knows. Granddaddy took care of that. Okay?

No one knows. Now let's get out of the limo like a good little soldier, salute your mother, and march up those steps to class.

Come on, honey. It's your duty. Make me, granddad, and your father proud.

He does remember you, Billy.

He does. He's sick, honey. That's why he said those things to you on Skype the other day. He's very sick.

No, honey. He loves you.

I know. He knows you love him too.

I'm going to the hospital to see him right now and I'll tell him. I promise. But you've got to do something now for me too. Okay?

We took care of everything after your interview last Friday. All you have to do is go to the office and check yourself in. But this is something I want you to do on your own. Okay?

No. On your own.

Because you've got to prove to me that this is something you can do by yourself. I can't follow you around every minute of the day. You're not a baby anymore. You are a junior cadet. And a junior cadet at St. John's Military Academy for Boys knows his duty to god and country and his mother.

Got it?

Yes. You can. Because you must.

Now stand up straight, square your shoulders, suck in your gut, and march up those stairs.

I'll tell him. Okay?

Good!

(She stands straight.)

Salute your mother.

(She salutes.)

I love you, baby.

Remember, the office is through the door and on the right.

(She waves as though he were walking away.

She gets back into the car. Turns on the ignition. Drives. She turns a few times. She pulls over. Removes binoculars from her purse. Gets out of the car. Mimes that she is peering around some bushes. Puts the binoculars to her face.)

Oh, no. No. Honey, go back in. Stop. No... no... stop! Oh... good boy... turn around... turn around... Yes! Now, go up the stairs... go on... go on... up the stairs... up.... Open the door. Open it, honey. Yes! Good boy! Good Boy! That's my boy!

(She gets back into the limo and removes lipstick from her purse. She turns the rearview mirror so that she can apply it. She brings the lipstick up to her face and freezes.

The woman she sees staring back at her in the mirror surprises her. This is a woman she has never seen before – an insecure, frightened woman who is exposed and alone.

Her world stops....

... for a moment.

A tear runs down her cheek. She sees it. Other tears follow.  
This will not do. She frantically searches for tissues in her purse.  
She finds one and uses it to blot her face.  
She throws the sodden tissue to the floor of the limo.  
She is afraid to look at herself in the mirror again. But she has to know that she is presentable before she can proceed down the road.  
She gathers her courage...  
... then tentatively looks back into the rearview mirror.  
She stares blankly at herself for a moment. Then takes a deep breath...  
... and smiles a winning smile.  
She puts the car into gear, presses down on the accelerator and drives forward.  
Blackout.)