

# **LOVE IN RESERVE**

by  
Eric Mansfield

# LOVE IN RESERVE

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## LOVE IN RESERVE

*For Lisa, the baddest Army wife of them all.*

LOVE IN RESERVE

**LOVE IN RESERVE** received its world premiere by Rubber City Theatre (Dane C.T. Leasure, Executive Artistic Director) in Akron, Ohio on November 5, 2021.

Director: Dane CT Leasure  
Stage Manager: Patrick Lee Johnson \*(AEA)  
Scenic Designer: Brian C. Seckfort  
Costume Designer: Irene Mack-Shaffer \_  
Sound Designer: Hazen Tobar  
Lighting Designer: James K. Davis  
Intimacy Director: Julia Fisher

The original cast was:

KATE ..... Paige Felger \*(AEA)  
RAY ..... Christian Achkar  
ARMY OFFICER .....Lysander Mills

Special acknowledgement to Katie Wells and Joe Soriano for their talents in helping to develop this script.

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### **Logline**

When news reports show a deadly attack at her husband's base camp in Iraq, young Army wife Kate cries herself to sleep only to be visited throughout the night by visions of Ray -- a past, present, and a possible future version -- all while both clinging to hope and fearing that sunrise will bring a heart-stopping knock at her front door. (*Dear John* meets *The Notebook*)

### **Synopsis**

Ray and Kate Strong were high school sweethearts in Ohio. After graduation, Ray joined the Army, and Kate followed him as his training progressed. While they have been talking about marriage for several years, their wedding plans were sped up in 2003 when Ray was mobilized for the Iraq invasion. Hours before Ray boarded a plane for the war, they were married in the post chapel in a hasty ceremony and no family present.

It is nine months later when the play opens with Kate alone in their military apartment. She has been counting down the final days for Ray's return home when she views a news report of an attack at Ray's base camp, Camp Freedom. Unable to get information of whether Ray is dead or alive, Kate cries herself to sleep fearing the worst. Over the course of the night, Kate is visited by visions of Ray - a past, present, and (possible) future version of the man she loves. Through these interactions, the audience learns how they fell in love, the unique challenges of being a military couple and how overwhelming it is to be separated during war.

This love story crescendos with sharp feelings, dramatic moments, and even some comedic levity all while draped in the constant uncertainty of whether Ray is already dead. Clues to Ray's fate will keep the audience guessing until the play's emotional climax, which delivers a new appreciation and admiration for military couples.

**Note:** An Intimacy Director is recommended but not required.

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### CAST OF CHARACTERS

**Ray Strong:** A man in his mid 20's who joined the Army immediately after high school. He chose the military in part because he didn't see many other options to making a mark in his life. While he never set out to make the Army a career, the military seems to be his calling now that he has overachieved to become an officer. He is hopeful that Kate, his high school sweetheart who recently became his wife, will embrace the role of Army wife, and while he doesn't intentionally make Kate's life more complicated, he takes for granted that she "knew what she was getting in to" when she married a soldier.

**Kate Strong:** A woman in her mid 20's who adores Ray, and while others in high school thought he was a middle-of-the-road, vanilla local boy, she saw his potential and has often worshipped the ground he walked on. She has made his success and happiness her priority, which has sown seeds of frustration and resentment as Kate has delayed following her own path. Alone in a military officer's apartment, Kate never thought she would feel stranded in an unfamiliar state with her own life on hold while waiting for Ray yet again, this time to return from war. She is a stubborn worrier who uses sarcasm and humor in confronting her fears and frustration. In her heart, Kate is convinced that if she and Ray can just survive the war, her own time to shine will come, and together, their future will be amazing. In the meantime, she has never felt more alone and is constantly fearing that she will become a widow.

**Army Officer:** A soldier and friend of Ray's who appears in the doorway in the final scene.

**Note:** While Kate and Ray interact with one another throughout the play and even hand things to one another, they should not touch physically until the final scene.

/ Indicates overlapping dialogue.

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*SETTING: Married Officers Quarters at Fort Bragg during the end of 2003, about 9 months after the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq began. The small efficiency apartment clearly belongs to an Army wife. A small Christmas tree with a few presents is visible. There is an 82nd Airborne Division flag and many military posters hanging on the wall along with a prominent one that reads "Toughest Job in the Military - Army Wife." A calendar has days marked off as a countdown, and a flag with a blue star hangs in the window/wall, indicating a loved one is deployed. There are wedding pictures on the tables from Kate and Ray's quick ceremony; Ray is prominent in the pictures in his dress green uniform. Kate's dress is simple - an indication of the haste of their wedding before he deployed. There are several small windows, but for the moment, the curtains are partially closed. A dress hangs on the closet door with alteration pins, while a stunning blue dress is visible through the wrapping of a dry cleaner's bag. The entire play takes place in this one set.*

## SCENE 1

*Fade in from black to a ringing phone, as KATE struggles with her keys to enter through the front door. She is wearing pajama pants, a zip-up hoodie and fuzzy slippers from a late-night run to the store. The clock on the wall shows 10:55 p.m. The answering machine engages as she is fighting to open the door.*

**ANSWERING MACHINE MESSAGE.** "Hi. This is Ray. You're probably trying to reach Kate, but she's a really busy lady and can't come to the phone right now so leave (*Kate stops the playback.*)

**KATE.** Ray? Hello. Hello. I'm here ... Hi mom. Told you I was just running to the store to get some fruit. (*Kate starts unloading multiple quarts of ice cream.*) Just because Ray gets to give orders to soldiers doesn't mean that I get to boss people around. Still, I like where you're

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going with that. (*Cracks herself up*) It's the Army, mom. (*Kate unzips her sweatshirt to reveal an army t-shirt and a set of Ray's dog tags.*) No. There's no military balls right now unless you count me bawling my eyes out. (*Kate checks email.*) Sorry .. I shouldn't have mentioned that. You know what it's like when dad's away on business. (*Kate plays with dog tags around her neck.*)

Actually, you have no idea what it's like. (*beat*) I'm sorry. (*Kate returns to unpacking groceries.*) Yes, he can email me from their base camp. No, I'm not wasting my life here at Fort Bragg. I'll go back to college when Ray's deployment ends. He was supposed to leave Camp Freedom two days ago on one last big convoy, and then he comes home on leave. No. No. No, I'm *not* taking him to Disney World. After 8 months in the harsh desert of Iraq ..sleeping in a tent .. Ray will probably just be tired and want to relax and, ya know, stay inside and .. (*Kate holds up a black negligee in the mirror.*) Um ... Sleep. Yeah, sleep. Sleep. That's *all* he'll want to do, mom. (*Kate mocks the idea that Ray will choose sleep over sex.*)

I need to get going. You're the best. Love you. Bye.

**KATE.** (*Talking to the phone.*) Next time, be Ray. OK? (*Kate empties groceries to comically reveal the last of six quarts of ice cream.*) You and I Cherry Garcia are about to make long passionate love to one another. Oh yeah, we're going to *spoon* all night long. And hey Chunky Monkey, you're next. Unless you just want to watch. (*Kate continues to laugh but then realizes she's all alone. She talks to a photo of Ray.*) You see what you've done Ray? You've been deployed so long that I'm having naughty foreplay with dairy products. I hope you're happy. (*Clock chimes at 11 p.m. And Kate crosses another day off the calendar.*)

**KATE.** 275 down. 12 more to go for leave. (*Kate holds up the blue dress and stands smiling in front of the mirror. The computer dings with a new email, and Kate moves quickly to read it, but her reaction shows it's not from Ray.*)

**KATE.** (*Reading aloud as she types a reply.*) No, mom I'm not going to rent all of his favorite action movies and buy him a popcorn machine. For the last time ...

(*Pauses and hits the delete button, and then begins typing again.*) Great idea mom. Thanks. Love you. (*Kate sends the email and then talks to computer.*) A little email



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to let me know you're back at your camp would be great Ray. Any time at all. A little `hey Katie I'm fine!' or `hey Katie, I miss you' or `All done with my mission, next stop 'Fort Bedroom.' (*Kate grabs Ice cream, turns on the TV.*) OK Cherry. Enough foreplay. You're mine.

**TV NEWS VOICE.** Recapping our top story. Several American soldiers are unaccounted for outside of Baghdad tonight after their convoy came under heavy fire. Witnesses say there were multiple fatalities. An all-out search is now underway for the missing U-S troops. Al Jazeera is reporting that the soldiers are based at Camp Freedom and were taking part in a convoy in an area known for attacks when they were ambushed by heavily armed rebel forces. In other news tonight, the white house has announced --

**KATE.** What the? (*Kate nervously sets down the ice cream and then begins to pace. She picks up the phone but then pauses.*) No. If I call mom, she'll freak. Relax Kate. Relax. (*Closing her eyes.*) It's not always going to be like this. (*Kate heads back to the computer.*) Ok honey. Baby. Love of my life. Tell me you're ok. One hello. One smiley face. One little goofy wink. (*To photo next to computer.*) Ray. Don't do this to me. Let me know you're ok. I --(*A light bulb goes off for Kate, and she quickly moves to the refrigerator and dials a number on a magnet.*)

**KATE.** Yes, this is Kate Strong. My husband is First Lieutenant Raymond Strong. He's stationed at Camp Freedom in ... Yes, the camp that was attacked. I'm trying to find out .... Yes, I know the Red Cross is for family members during a crisis .. But you don't understand. Ray is supposed to be home in 13 .. Er ... 12 days .. And he emails me once a day and sometimes he even gets to call ... And I'm starting to freak out. (*Pausing to listen.*) No. Yes. I mean, I know the Army will call me if there's anything I need to know. But we got married right before he deployed, and he and I have been counting this down. And I need to know. Like now. Like Right God Damn now! No, I have the damn number for the Red Cross.

Bitch, are you deaf? I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm just worried. Thanks. (*Kate hangs up and begins to have a panic attack. The phone rings and Kate grabs it quickly.*)

**KATE.** Hello? Yeah I just heard. You hear anything else? I mean, what happened Angela? Have you heard from Joe? Was he working on Ray's mission? Why the hell can't the unit tell us anything? We're their wives. I forgot they lock down all communications at their base camp when these things happen. How is that supposed to help? Ok. If I hear anything I'll call you, and you do the same. Ok. Bye.

(*Kate tightly hugs an Army sweatshirt and grips Ray's dog tags.*)

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**KATE.** We made a deal Ray. I wait and you come home safe. To be by my side and to live the life we planned. None of this is worth it if you're not here. *(Kate hits button on the answering machine.)*

**ANSWERING MACHINE MESSAGE.** Hi this is Ray. You're probably trying to reach Kate, but she's a really busy lady and can't come to the phone right now so leave her a message. Oh, and Hooah! *(beep)* "Hi this is Ray -- " *(Kate stops the playback, turning off the machine. She curls up crying herself to sleep. Blackout)*

### SCENE 2

*Lights come back up full over stage left, illuminating Kate's bedroom. The right side over the kitchen remains dim. The clock on the wall reads 1:45 a.m. Kate's body position has changed to indicate she has been asleep. RAY is in the shadows, leaning against the kitchen wall in green Army basic training fatigues. Kate realizes she has dozed off, and quickly jumps with the sound of new email.*

**KATE.** Ray? Ray? *(Kate checks email.)* Spam at 1 in the morning. Seriously? Damn it.

**RAY.** You *do* realize that you're talking to a computer, don't you? You jump every time you get a / new email.

**KATE.** Yeah, like you don't know already?

**RAY.** I like watching you talk to the screen. Like it's suddenly going to come to life like a transformer.

**KATE.** What else am I supposed to do? I haven't heard from you since you headed out on some damn convoy.

**RAY.** Not unusual.

**KATE.** Well now there's been an attack and soldiers are missing and some might be dead.

**RAY.** And?

**KATE.** And need I remind you that you're 7,000 miles away in some godforsaken place I can barely imagine? You make me crazy, you know that?

**RAY.** I thought that's why you fell for me?

**KATE.** No, I fell for you because I'm crazy. You make me sane.

**RAY.** Oh, so it's not just the uniform? Chicks dig the uniform you know.

**KATE.** Yeah, I know. You told that's why you were enlisting in high school.

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**RAY.** Well, I wanted to serve my country. (*tongue-in-cheek*)

**KATE.** You wanted to impress girls. And yeah, the first time I saw you in that forest green uniform after basic training with the boots and the hat and the shaved hair. (*blushing*)

**RAY.** Right??? See?? Chicks dig the uniform.

**KATE.** Stop it (*laughing*). Actually, I was just jealous of all those pockets. Do you know women would rule the world if we just had pockets?

**RAY.** Well, you rule my world if that counts.

**KATE.** Dork. Hey, do you get even more when you get promoted?

**RAY.** No. Same green uniform when I eventually make sergeant someday just like it is now as a new private first class. The army is nothing if not practical.

**KATE.** You and your uniform. From the first day you put it on. Even before we graduated high school.

**RAY.** Got you, didn't I? All I had to do was run down to the recruiter's office and swear an oath that I'll sacrifice my life in service to the United States of America. Small price to pay for you to dance with me.

**KATE.** I was dancing with you, Ray, not the uniform.

**RAY.** You loved me right away.

**KATE.** Oh, you're so sure are you?

**RAY.** *Yeah.* And as I recall, there's proof.

**KATE.** Where?

**RAY.** In the yearbook. There's a photo. Clearly shows us at the school dance together, and you can't take your eyes off me. (*Kate takes a yearbook from shelf.*)

**KATE.** Oh yeah. That's you 'shaking your thing'. But take a look lover boy. You're not dancing with me. You're dancing with Cindy.

**RAY.** Wait a minute. No. I'm right! Look. You're there in the picture. Right behind candy.

**KATE.** You mean Cindy?

**RAY.** See I didn't even remember her name. Proves all I remember is you.

**KATE.** Do you even know *my* name?

**RAY.** Stop it. You're right there staring at me.

**KATE.** If you mean staring at the fool trying to moonwalk, then yes.

**RAY.** Soooo. We're both kind of right.

**KATE.** You were a dope then, and you're a dope now.

**RAY.** But I ended the night with you.

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**KATE.** Lucky fool.

**RAY.** And you fell in love with me.

**KATE.** Did you really sign my yearbook with "to Katie - prettiest girl I danced with?" Shouldn't it have been, "prettiest girl *at* the dance?"

**RAY.** Wasn't that implied?

**KATE.** Um, no ... And of course, you wrote that right next to your *own* bio. Ray looks proud and gives manly grunts with each activity. Ray strong. Tennis team alternate. Speech and debate. Ski club. Newspaper. Marching band. And chess club.

**RAY.** So?

**KATE.** Marching band *and* chess club? How did Uncle Sam not make you a green beret right there?

**RAY.** You done?

**KATE.** I guess.

**RAY.** C'mon. How could I compare with your bio? (*From memory.*) Kate Powers. Homecoming court. Key club. French club president. 4-point honor role. National honor society and senior class vice president. Ray mocks a salute to Kate.

**KATE.** My god you're right.

**RAY.** What?

**KATE.** With a bio like that, what the hell am I doing with you?

**RAY.** You're hilarious.

**KATE.** I was so out of your league. Still am.

**RAY.** That's why I needed the uniform. (*Whisper*) I was dating up.

**KATE.** No, you weren't. But yeah, once and for all, I love the uniform.

**RAY.** So, focus on that instead of worrying all the time.

**KATE.** What? You think that makes me weak?

**RAY.** Whoa. Whoa. I didn't mean it like that. It's just --

**KATE.** From the day you left for basic training - right after high school - I took this on. All of it. You're out there. Strutting around in those green fatigues with everyone in awe of G-I Joe. And me? Back then, I was just *the girl*.

**RAY.** Um, *girl-friend*.

**KATE.** Yeah, the *girl-friend*. Instantly available when Uncle Sam says you get time off. Smiling and pretty "on demand".

**RAY.** Well, you are pretty. Might I say a younger version of your beautiful mother.

**KATE.** Oh, stop sucking up. Mom loved you from day one.

**RAY.** And your dad too.

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**KATE.** Dad was cleaning his gun the first time you came in, remember? Wouldn't even look up at you?

**RAY.** I did sense he was trying to scare me off. (*Leans in.*) didn't work.

**KATE.** Nope. Instead, he scared you to join the damn military. Just like he did.

**RAY.** If I wanted to win you over, I had to win over your / dad.

**KATE.** By joining the Army? Well, that was a stupid idea.

**RAY.** Maybe. But I mean, didn't you like dating a soldier who was serving America and making something of himself?

**KATE.** Oh yeah. Sending you 10 letters for every one you wrote. Baking you cookies to share with your buddies. And feeding your ego with pictures of me missing you.

**RAY.** And every photo helped.

**KATE.** I'm sure the ones with me not wearing very much at all lifted your spirits.

**RAY.** Good thing the drill sergeants stopped opening my mail.

**KATE.** Yeah. Almost as much fun as going to every family gathering, every movie premier, every wedding - alone.

**RAY.** If I were there --

**KATE.** News flash: all the girls you think are jealous because I'm the one dating a soldier, well *they're* the ones with dates.

**RAY.** Yeah, but --

**KATE.** And all I got to do back then was write and write and write. (*Kate grabs a box of letters.*) Here's the stack I wrote to you at basic training. Here's the stack I wrote to you at infantry school. And here are the 9 -- count them only 9 -- that you sent me.

**RAY.** Hey, it's quality, not --

**KATE.** Shut up.

**RAY.** I put a lot of thought into every letter. Writing comes so easy to you and that puts a lot of pressure on me to be perfect.

**KATE.** As perfect as the ones you got from Carma?

**RAY.** Oh lord. Why do you still have those?

**KATE.** Oh, you know why.

**RAY.** You know she was just a young girl from high school who had a crush. So, she wrote to me at basic training. Big deal.

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**KATE.** Yep. Twice. Which one should I read? The one where she says she always wanted to marry a soldier? Or the one where she talks about what names she'd give your kids?

**RAY.** Nothing happened, and you know that.

**KATE.** Yes. I do. But I also know that you wrote back to her at least once. And you hung on to these. So even if your heart wasn't on duty, your ego was.

**RAY.** I'm sorry. I only wrote back to be nice.

**KATE.** Nice my ass --

**RAY.** And to tell her that I was in love with *you* so she would stop writing. Why do you even keep those anyway?

**KATE.** Why? To remind me that as long as 'chicks dig the uniform' (*Mocking.*) there will be women coming after you.

**RAY.** Not my fault.

**KATE.** It's kind of flattering in a keep-your-hands-off-my-soldier-bitch-or-i'll-steal-a-tank-and-blow-your-house-up kind of way.

**RAY.** Ahhh. Memo to me. Lock tanks when Kate's around.

**KATE.** It also reminds me that if this is gonna work -- being an army wife -- there has to be trust and ...

**RAY.** And?

**KATE.** And forgiveness, which you know I hate. Lord knows I'm not perfect either.

**RAY.** You don't have to be perfect.

**KATE.** Tell you what. I'll let her go if you do too. (*Kate tears up Carma's letters.*)

**RAY.** It's your letters that matter.

**KATE.** Knucklehead. I know every one of your letters backwards and forwards. Every. Word. Ray.

**RAY.** Uh huh.

**KATE.** Nine letters, and you said "I love you" a total of 12 times. Once at the end of each letter, and three more times in this letter when you were about to do your very first airborne jump. Kate pauses to cherish the letters.

**RAY.** I said that?

**KATE.** You said if anything ever happened ... (*Kate hands letters to Ray while she recites the one letter from memory.*) This is it, Kate. I know I just jump when they tell me, but I don't know if I can do it. The one thing I know is that I love you. (*Holds up one finger.*) so the sooner I jump, the sooner I get back to you. If

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anything happens to me, just know it's because I love you (*Second finger.*) that I even had the courage to jump. It's all because I love you, Kate. (*Third finger.*)

**RAY.** How many times have you ... Wow you really do know them.

**KATE.** Yeah, I do.

**RAY.** See? I wrote all of --

**KATE.** Can you ever just let me have a moment? Please? Ray? Right now, not knowing where you are or if you're safe, these (*Taking the letters*) are all I have.

**RAY.** I didn't know that Kate. I didn't.

**KATE.** It's ok.

**RAY.** I'm sorry you ... Hey, what's with all the ice cream?

**KATE.** You had to be here. (*Kate moves the ice cream to the freezer.*)

**RAY.** Apparently. I love that I'm always learning something new about you.

**KATE.** It's not new that I'm glued to my email and this phone. Because maybe, just maybe you'll call. And if I miss it --

**RAY.** You know I don't get mad if I call and you're / not home.

**KATE.** It's not always about you. I *want* to hear your voice. I want to hear what you've been doing. And I want to know that you got my letters.

**RAY.** And your naughty pictures.

**KATE.** Yes, Ray. And my naughty pictures.

**RAY.** Love those.

**KATE.** I hope you love the woman in those pictures too.

**RAY.** Well of course I do.

**KATE.** Sometimes I just need to hear it. You know my mom told me I'd be a slave to waiting. Waiting for you to call. Waiting for you to write. Waiting for the whole damn world to go around until the army says you get to see me.

**RAY.** Well, if Uncle Sam had wanted me to have a wife --

**RAY & KATE TOGETHER.** He would have issued you one.

**KATE.** Yeah, well there's no bar code on my ass.

**RAY.** (*Playful.*) I could put one there.

**KATE.** Ray.

**RAY.** (*Waving at Kate's backside to mock a store checkout.*) Beep.

**KATE.** Ray.

**RAY.** Beep.

**KATE.** Ray!

**RAY.** Oh. C'mon, it's kind of funny.

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**KATE.** Yeah. It makes *you* laugh. (*Becoming serious*) I love your laugh, and I know you love the army ... And I'm just so proud.

**RAY.** Thanks. You know I couldn't have done this without you.

**KATE.** Yeah, but right now this sucks. When you're away on duty, I'm just lost ... And I get sucked into watching sappy movies .. And apparently, I like to talk dirty to Ben and Jerry.

**RAY.** Wait. What?

**KATE.** Don't ask. Ray, look at me. What do you see?

**RAY.** I see my girlfriend, who will one day be my wife.

**KATE.** That's it? That's what you see?

**RAY.** Yeah.

**KATE.** Ok. Never mind.

**RAY.** What am I missing? Is this a trick question?

**KATE.** Ya know, I really don't know either.

**RAY.** I see you Kate. I do. But do you see me? I'm a professional soldier. If the enemy opens fire, I'm trained to take cover and return fire in just one second.

**KATE.** How in god's name is that supposed to make me feel better? That you *have* to know how to shoot back because at any moment someone might try to *kill* you?

**RAY.** I'm good at it.

**KATE.** Not helping.

**RAY.** But that's how good I am at being a soldier.

**KATE.** Again. Not the point. Girls dating plumbers or doctors or mailmen don't have to worry like that.

**RAY.** So, they don't get the adventure.

**KATE.** An adventure? You've got me living and sleeping the army. God, I even looked at the store clerk tonight and said "Hooah."

**RAY.** Oh, that's awesome. Hooah!

**KATE.** Awesome? Really? And what does Hooah even mean again?

**RAY.** Whatever you want.

**KATE.** So, it means, yes?

**RAY.** Hooah.

**KATE.** And, no?

**RAY.** Hooah.

**KATE.** And 'I don't know'?

**RAY.** Hooah.



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**KATE.** Dear lord.

**RAY.** See, it means whatever you want. That's the Army.

**KATE.** And I wonder why I feel like I've lost my mind.

**RAY.** Hooah. (*Mocking*)

**KATE.** Ray, some days I just wish I could be a normal wife with normal problems.

**RAY.** Normal? But then you wouldn't get to 'be all that you can be' and see the world.

**KATE.** Oh. Yeah. Right. See the world (*Mocking*). I've seen the inside of military housing if that counts.

**RAY.** I like what you've done with the place.

**KATE.** Ya know, I would have liked to have been your wife during those first few assignments. Not just shackled up as the girlfriend-slash-fiancé.

**RAY.** You *wanted* to come with me on assignment.

**KATE.** I wanted to be with *you*. After basic training at Fort Benning and then airborne school here at Fort Bragg, I was really glad to finally be with you at Fort Carson and then Fort Drumm.

**RAY.** Me too --

**KATE.** Then, *back* to Benning for Officer Candidate School. Ohhhhh and while I'm jumping from post to post keeping your apartment clean, *you* got to go to night school to earn college credits to be promoted to lieutenant. All while my college ... my career ... all put on hold.

**RAY.** That's not fair.

**KATE.** Four posts in three years Ray. And now we're here with the famed 82nd airborne at Fort Bragg. Or at least I am. (*Clock chimes for 2 a.m., and Ray starts doing pushups.*) When do we get to just be together in one place?

**RAY.** I told you I was just waiting for the right time.

**KATE.** Yeah, the right ... Hey, what are you doing?

**RAY.** Top of the hour. We do pushups. That's how the army works. Routine and discipline. (*Kate gets down in Ray's face at push-up level.*)

**KATE.** Hey. Rambo. I just wanted to teach, but I can't because we're never stationed anywhere long enough for me to finish college. (*Ray halts in the pushup position.*)

**RAY.** I was proud when you started college. And you can go back any time you want.

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**KATE.** No, I can't, Ray. We're always on the move. The only time you ever thought about staying in one place is when you thought I was pregnant.

**RAY.** Well, that would have been different.

**KATE.** Why?

**RAY.** (*Stands up.*) Because. Because kids need stability.

**KATE.** Oh, and I don't?

**RAY.** Now c'mon Kate. (*Agitated.*) It's not so bad. You knew we would move around with the army. And as I keep telling you, it's not always going to be like this.

**KATE.** I know. I know, Ray. I love you.

**RAY.** I love you too Kate.

**KATE.** No, I really love you. You enlisted as private Raymond Strong to everyone else. But before Uncle Sam got you, you were my 'Ray of Sunshine.'

**RAY.** Love it when you call me that.

**KATE.** And right now, I don't know where you are. I don't know if you're safe. And I don't know if you're alive. If you were lost in the woods, I could form a search party. But you're in a warzone, so I can't do ... Can't .. *Arghhhh* ...

**RAY.** Right. You can't. So don't worry.

**KATE.** Stop it. You don't get to tell me not to worry. You know what, Ray? I've known you since you were 10. They know the soldier (*Pointing at army poster.*), but me, I know *you*.

**RAY.** Do you Kate? Do you know what it was like the first time a drill sergeant was in my face? Or the first time I nearly passed out on a run? Or fired live ammo?

**KATE.** That drill sergeant was Drill Sergeant Sanchez. The run was 6.5 miles in 95-degree heat on the Fourth of July, 1999, and the live fire exercise was on Roberts M-16 Range, at the top of Banes Hill. Oh, and you were in hole number 14.

**RAY.** (*Dumbfounded.*) How the hell do you remember all that?

**KATE.** Because I pay attention. What you go through, I go through. Don't you remember me at your basic training graduation? I was so excited and proud that I was going crazy in the stands? (*Waving.*)

**RAY.** How could I miss you? You were waving like a giant inflatable at a car wash.

**KATE.** I wasn't waving dummy. I was signing 'I love you' like this?

**RAY.** Oh. From a distance it looked like you were trying to land a plane or something.

## LOVE IN RESERVE

**KATE.** You're an idiot. I love you. But you're an idiot. Even though I didn't shoot the guns --

**RAY.** Rifles.

**KATE.** Whatever. You might not have seen me, Ray, but I was there. And I know that the military alphabet to spell our last name is (*flirty*) 'Sierra, Tango, Romeo, Oscar, November, Gulf.' Hooah?

**RAY.** (*deadpan*) God. I am so hot for you right now.

**KATE.** That's because with you it's always sex.

**RAY.** Don't you mean (*flirty*) Sierra, Echo, X-ray?

**KATE.** You're hopeless.

**RAY.** Thanks ... I'm just saying -- in all seriousness -- that you impress the hell out of me, Kate. In fact, *you* should have enlisted instead of me.

**KATE.** I always told you that I would make a good army wife. I'd make a great army anything because I care, ok? (*Kate moves to the closet; her back is to Ray.*) I may not have my own uniforms, although ... (*Kate pulls one of Ray's green tops over her t-shirt.*) God, I love all these pockets. Not a fan of shining boots. Although I think if you shined up these pumps you could have some fun. But then again, to play dress up you have to be alive ... (*Kate turns around, and Ray is gone.*)

**KATE.** Ray? Ray? (*Stage lights full as she becomes completely awake. Kate checks computer; no message. She picks up the yearbook and reminisces silently as she flips through the pages.*) Prettiest Girl at the dance? Casanova. (*Softly, then flips page.*) Really Ray? Chess Club? (*Kate kisses her finger and plants it on a yearbook photo.*) C'mon baby. Send me a sign. Let me know you're ok. (*Kate closes her eyes while clutching the yearbook before putting it back on a shelf and then laying on the bed.*) It's not always going to be like this. It's not always going to be like this. Kate fights a quiet cry and falls asleep. (*Blackout*)

### SCENE 3

*The lights come back up illuminating Kate's bedroom again. The clock on the wall shows 3:05 a.m. Kate's body position indicates she has rolled around in her bed. Ray is in the dim light again. This time, he is in a desert war uniform with a pistol belt. Kate wakes up startled.*

## LOVE IN RESERVE

**KATE.** Ray? Ray?

**RAY.** I like to watch you sleep. You're so pretty when you're peaceful.

**KATE.** Not tonight I'm not. Kate gets up quickly and checks email.

**RAY.** Katie. I can take care of myself.

**KATE.** Yeah, you keep telling me. Every picture I see of you in that desert uniform makes it all the more real.

**RAY.** Real enough that it's my job to lead a platoon here in Iraq. I'm the lieutenant now remember?

**KATE.** Well, yes sir lieutenant. (*Kate mocks a salute.*)

**RAY.** What was that?

**KATE.** Well, since you're a big officer now, I'm showing my respect. (*Kate salutes again.*)

**RAY.** With your *left* hand?

**KATE.** Does it really matter?

**RAY.** Does it matter? (*Comes to attention.*) Um, since 1820, a salute is rendered to a passing superior officer using the right hand -- the *right* hand, Kate -- coming directly (*Demonstrating.*) up to touch the brim of your head cover as the approaching soldier delivers the greeting of the day such as "good morning" or "good evening, sir or ma'am."

**KATE.** Ohhhhhhhhh kay.

**RAY.** The salute is then returned by a superior officer, and the right hand immediately snaps back to his or her side.

**KATE.** You are so serious sometimes.

**RAY.** Most of all, it shows the approaching soldier that neither is holding a weapon.

**KATE.** (*Flirtatious, funny.*) Oh, I'll hold your weapon.

**RAY.** Kate.

**KATE.** Want to order me around?

**RAY.** Katie.

**KATE.** I love it when you talk 'Army'.

**RAY.** Kate!

**KATE.** Oh, so you can make jokes while you're missing. Maybe even dead. But I can't?

**RAY.** Not the same.

## LOVE IN RESERVE

**KATE.** So, Mr. Big shot lieutenant platoon leader soldier boy. Why haven't you contacted me?

**RAY.** War is a busy place. Time kind of stands still in combat.

**KATE.** Yeah? Well, it stands still at Fort Bragg too. Especially right now.

**RAY.** This isn't new Kate. There are attacks every day in the desert.

**KATE.** But this was at *your* base camp. Need I remind you?

**RAY.** Speaking of the desert, you know if I'd lived long enough and they'd checked my prostate, ya know what they would have found? Sand.

**KATE.** I'm sure your proctologist will appreciate that.

**RAY.** Just so tired of eating, sleeping and fighting in the damn sand.

**KATE.** Fine. Can we get back to this?

Kate points to the wall calendar.

**RAY.** Is that all you do is count?

**KATE.** What else is there to do on this army base, Ray? Count the days since you left. Count the days til you come home.

**RAY.** Ok.

**KATE.** Counting military time. 1500, 1800. Is it 2400? Or zero hundred? I don't even know.

**RAY.** Well, we have to --

**KATE.** I still laugh at you counting your army socks while you rolled them into little smiley faces. (*Kate removes smiley-face socks from dresser drawer or laundry basket.*) Seriously. I mean who does that?

**RAY.** There better be 12 of those. Six sets.

**KATE.** (*Speaks while playfully throwing the socks at Ray, who keeps ducking.*)

Fine. But I need to *count* on you to let me know you're alive. Ok?

**RAY.** Well, I'm sorry there's not a payphone on the hump of every camel that blocks my Humvee.

**KATE.** Ray.

**RAY.** At least we're married now. (*Grabs wedding photo*) which is what you wanted, right?

**KATE.** Yeah. Too bad it was a quickie wedding by the chaplain. (*Takes photo from Ray.*) For God's sake, I'm in an Easter dress of all things. I mean who gives a couple just 24 hours to get married?

**KATE & RAY TOGETHER.** The Army

**Light cue for flashback.** (*Kate and Ray face each other as though taking vows.*)

## LOVE IN RESERVE

**KATE.** I take thee Raymond James Strong.

**RAY.** I take thee Katelyn Marie Powers.

**KATE.** To be my wedded husband.

**RAY.** My wedded wife.

**KATE.** To have and to hold.

**RAY.** From this day forward.

**KATE.** (*Quickly and forcibly aside*) For better, for worse. For training and deployments. For relocations with no notice. For acronyms and terms we *have* to learn but no one else understands. For the endless number of nights that I don't know where you are because your training is "classified." For the hasty deployment to a war zone with no return date. For the impersonal 1-800 number I'm supposed to call when I'm losing my mind. And for this wedding by a Chaplain we met a whopping 10 minutes before the ceremony, which was so quickly thrown together that *none* of my family could be here. (*Comedic beat, returns to facing Ray.*) Oh, and to love and cherish til death do us part.

**KATE & RAY TOGETHER.** I do.

**Light cue to end flashback.**

**KATE.** Right, the army. Funny how that's the answer to so many questions. It's always, the army.

**RAY.** When they tell you to pack for an invasion, it's not open for debate. I know it wasn't the big wedding you wanted, but hey we did it. Gold bands and all.

**KATE.** Yes. A whole 16 hours finally as Mrs. Katelyn strong. Officially. (*Kate holds up a cheesy "bitch you got hitched" or similar mug from the cheap motel.*) And what a lovely souvenir I have from our wedding night. What princess wedding isn't complete without eight hours in an efficiency at Marty's discount motel between the pawn shop and the tattoo parlor?

**RAY.** Hey, the sheets were clean.

**KATE.** Yeah, there *was* that.

**RAY.** There was more too. (*Playful.*) Don't forget the hot night before the wedding in my buddy's van behind the target ranges. I had a rose in my teeth?

**KATE.** (*Sarcasm.*) Yessssss. Just swept me off my feet.

**RAY.** C'mon Katie. (*Leaning in, smiling.*) the helicopters zooming by overhead? Last time as single people? Knowing we'd be married in a few hours?

## LOVE IN RESERVE

**KATE.** Yeah. Wow. Ok. Hooah. *(Two thumbs mocking.)* But I wanted a real wedding. The bridal party stuff and my dad walking me down the aisle .. and lilies in the church.

**RAY.** Sounds like you wanted the ceremony stuff more than you wanted me.

**KATE.** You know what I mean. But why does everything have to be hurry-up-and-wait? Hurry-up-and-wait?

**RAY.** That's the Army.

**KATE.** Even our wedding?

**RAY.** We'll do the big wedding when we go back to Ohio. And the white wedding dress and the lilacs.

**KATE.** Lilies.

**RAY.** That's what I said. Lilies. Hey, I love you in that dress. You looked incredible in that dress. You were still wearing that dress when I looked out the bus window.

**KATE.** I didn't want to take it off. Less than 24 hours after we said 'I do', we had to say goodbye. No bride should spend her first sunrise as a married woman inhaling bus fumes.

**RAY.** You've got a point. *(Ray pulls a folded paper from his pocket and lays it where Kate can reach it.)*

**KATE.** What's this?

**RAY.** Look.

**KATE.** Ray? Why are you still carrying our marriage license? You were supposed to mail this to the courthouse? You said you did?

**RAY.** If I couldn't have you, I at least wanted proof that the happiest day of my life really happened. So, I kept it.

**KATE.** Oh my God. That is so sweet. *(Beat.)* Why the hell didn't you file this? Are you nuts?

**RAY.** Kate.

**KATE.** What if we're not legally married?

**RAY.** Katie.

**KATE.** Oh my god. It's like those movies on Lifetime.

**RAY.** Kate. *(Laughing.)*

**KATE.** It's not funny.

**RAY.** I had the unit clerk make a copy and file it. I just kept the original. It's ok. We're really married.

**KATE.** Really?

## LOVE IN RESERVE

**RAY.** I swear.

**KATE.** Don't do that to me.

**RAY.** You should see your face.

**KATE.** Ray.

**RAY.** Ok, just know that I look at it every day, and I carry it right here.

**KATE.** That's precious. This way the medic can find it as they're cutting your uniform off when you get shot.

**RAY.** Here you go again.

**KATE.** While you bleed, the soldiers can pass it around. (*Mocking deep male voices.*) "Kaitlyn Marie. Wife. She sounds hot."

**RAY.** My God. Do you ever not think about me getting killed?

**KATE.** So?

**RAY.** (*Walking to window where a blue star flag is hanging. A gold star flag sits nearby.*) So, what kind of optimism is this? A blue star up because I'm deployed, but you already have a gold star flag? Just ready to go just in case --

**KATE.** In case...?

**RAY.** Stop.

**KATE.** No. Go ahead, Ray. Finish that sentence. I have a gold star flag in case ...

**RAY.** I'm not answering that.

**KATE.** Well let me answer it for you hero. My last memory of you alive is right here. (*Taps calendar.*) March 9th, 2003. Stunned in my make-shift wedding dress watching that giant grey tomb on wheels with the love of my life trapped inside. Crying quietly into the small flags they handed out while watching you roar away into the darkness headed for war.

**RAY.** I'm just / saying.

**KATE.** Did you know that I slept in my dress the first night? It still smelled like you. In fact, I rounded up every shirt that smelled like you. (*Kate deeply smells a nearby shirt.*)

**RAY.** That's nice, but take it from a guy in the desert, you really should wash those.

**KATE.** Oh, the Army told us you landed in Operation Iraqi Freedom, but that was it. I didn't hear from you for the longest two weeks of my life. Where you were and what you were doing -- all Top Secret. (*Still clutching shirts.*)

**RAY.** You told me you could follow the invasion on TV.



## LOVE IN RESERVE

**KATE.** Are you kidding me? (*Kate begins throwing shirts at Ray.*) A hundred thousand troops storming across the desert and I'm supposed to look for you like your mom looking for you in the marching band?

**RAY.** No.

**KATE.** Only for me, I get to see the helicopters returning with the injured and the dead.

**RAY.** Well, I'm glad you saw it like an action movie. Guess I missed Bruce Willis saving the day.

**KATE.** It's not entertainment. It's real. (*Beat.*) Do you know what it's like to be trapped here, day and night, fixated on this phone? Hoping to God you're going to call, but terrified it's actually going to be some officer telling me you're dead?

**RAY.** I told you they don't *call* with news like that. And I bought the extra life insurance. 250-thousand.

**KATE.** Damn it, Ray. You're missing the point. Damn it. Damn it. Damn it. You're always missing the / point.

**RAY.** So, what's the point Kate? What?

**KATE.** I don't want to live like this. I'm only 23 years old and yet I have to know what drawer to go to find your life insurance and your will. Oh, and a power of attorney in case I have to make medical decisions because you're wounded and can't wake up.

**RAY.** C'mon Kate.

**KATE.** This isn't normal. (*Beat.*) If this is Army wife Basic Training, where the hell are my drill sergeants? There is no one here to show me or any of the Army wives how to do this.

**RAY.** I'm sorry.

**KATE.** Just try for one second to know that right now, I'm blind. While you're off saving the world, I have to live my life knowing that at any moment yours could end.

**RAY.** You knew that when I enlisted --

**KATE.** Don't.

**RAY.** Don't say you didn't. You *knew* I could deploy. Hey, our country got its ass kicked on 9/11 / so / don't --

**KATE.** It's not about patriotism! It's about the one soldier in the one company in this one army who is my one husband - you. You're my whole world. And I can't protect you. I can't do anything to keep you safe.

## LOVE IN RESERVE

**RAY.** I told you I'm coming home. I told you I won't let you get a flag.

**KATE.** Oh, you're God now? You? You control that?

**RAY.** I'm careful.

**KATE.** Careful. Great.

**RAY.** It's all I can do.

**KATE.** Do you know that I practice?

**RAY.** Practice? Practice what?

**KATE.** (*Kate takes a white bath towel, lays it out on a table, and begins to fold it slowly into triangles like a military honor guard folding a flag.*) Receiving my flag. I've seen the funerals on the news. The 21-gun salute. Everyone in their dress uniforms. And do you know what the cameras are focused on? The widow. They never turn away from the widow. They zoom in. Worst moment in their entire lives. Their hearts destroyed. A river of tears they're trying so hard to damn up inside. Oh, everyone's impressed with the precision of the honor guard as they take the flag off the coffin and fold it perfectly. And then they zoom that God Damn camera right in the widow's face just as an officer slowly, gently, places the American Flag in her arms. (*Kate finishes folding a military triangle and displays the towel in her arms.*) And do you know what the widow has to do, Ray? She has to graciously accept this lifeless linen in place of her soul mate. And somehow, she has to find the strength to make a small smile and whisper "thank you." because *that's* what army wives are supposed to do.

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