

ATOMIC FIELD

By Kenneth Robbins

ATOMIC FIELD

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In the event of production, the following statement must appear in the program:

"Hibakusha testimonies of Takehiko Sakai, Eiko Taoka, Hiroko Fukada, Keiko Matsuda, Takeo Watanabe, and Akira Ishida are presented through the auspices of the Hiroshima/Nagasaki Live Computer Conference and the Karome Computer Network in Hiroshima. ATOMIC FIELD was written with the support of a Japan Foundation Artists Fellowship."

Dedicated to James Aubrey Robbins, Sr.

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ATOMIC FIELD was first produced in the Wayne Knutsen Theatre, College of Fine Arts, the University of South Dakota with the following cast:

HOWARD LONG.....Darryl Patton
DELORES LONG.....Virginia Monroe
WINSTON LONG.....Tim Baxter-Ferguson
MARISA LOUISE LONG.....Kirsten Gaspar Colt

A subsequent production was staged in the Stone Theatre, College of Liberal Arts, Louisiana Tech University with the following cast:

HOWARD LONG.....Paul B. Crook
DELORES LONG.....Nancy Wallace
WINSTON LONG.....Joel Sharpton
MARISA LOUISE LONG.....Robyn Barrows Orfield

CAST

2 MEN, 2 WOMEN

HOWARD CRAWFORD LONG, 59
DELORES LONG, 55, his wife
WINSTON LONG, 33, his son, a history professor
MARISA LOUISE LONG, 31, his daughter

SETTING: The elder Long's home in the North Georgia Mountains. There is a large combination sitting/dining area adjoined by a kitchen with an attached screened-in porch and front patio/main entrance. To the side is the hibakusha station, a podium with a lectern light and microphone backed by a screen.

TIME: Spring and Summer, 1985

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ACT I

HOWARD LONG, a man in his late fifties is rummaging through the sideboard. He is dressed in his pajamas. He pulls boxes from the shelving and sits on the floor, tossing item after item in the garbage can beside him. After a moment, DELORES LONG, his wife of 55, appears behind him, also dressed for bed. She watches what he is doing without commenting on it. His cleaning of the sideboard becomes frantic for a moment, then subsides. He sits staring at something in his hands. On the screen appears the image of a young Japanese woman with an American serviceman standing behind her with what appears to be a destroyed landscape beyond them. He discards the photo which he holds and the image disappears.

DELORES. What are you doing? Do you know what time it is?

HOWARD. Go back to bed.

DELORES. Can I help?

HOWARD. Yes, by going back to bed.

DELORES. If you'll just tell me what it is you're---

HOWARD. Just a little culling. Spring cleaning you could call it. Junk.

DELORES. At two in the morning?

HOWARD. All this God blessed junk. What're we holding onto this stuff for anyway, Del? Christ's sake, it's . . .

DELORES. It's who we are.

HOWARD. Were. Not anymore. (*The garbage can is overflowing.*) You want to empty this? Put it in a grocery bag, haul it to the dump.

DELORES. I'll take care of it. You go back to bed.

HOWARD. (*Rising from the floor, stiff and tired.*) Finish this tomorrow. Put it in a grocery bag. Sooner the better.

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DELORES. Yes, dear. (*He goes to the bedroom, door closes. Delores takes the garbage can and empties it into a sack. She considers what she is doing, then takes the sack to the porch area and hides it behind the sofa. We hear the sound of the creek outside the porch and tree frogs croaking. She stands, silently listening as lights change and WINSTON LONG approaches the hibakusha station, turns on the lectern light. Behind him on the screen is a slide of the atomic cloud as seen over Hiroshima on August 6, 1945.*)

WINSTON. (*Reading from a document.*) At the time of the bombing, I heard someone shout, "A parachute is coming down." I looked for the parachute, but could not find it. Putting it out of mind, I turned back when there was an intense flash like the magnesium light used for photographing. I crouched. That was when I was knocked down by an immense force. I could feel the extreme heat. I moved my hand, but there was no feeling in it. I tried to move my feet, but I couldn't tell whether they were still connected to my body or not. I was numb from my knees down to my feet and from my elbows to my shoulders. It was pitch black and was stifling. I took a deep breath and sucked mud and sand into my mouth. The side of my body was on fire. I tried putting it out, but it wouldn't go out so easily. (*Slide of a man with burn scars.*) Here are the scars, these are my burns. I could see people running in the dark, some on fire, some just rolling around on the ground. It became lighter, and the light appeared to be in many different colors, red and yellow, purple and white. My face swelled. My lips and cheeks were popped up and my eyes--I had to force my eyes open with my fingers in order to see. Then after some time it started to rain heavily like a sudden storm. The drops were huge and black. That was what was known as black rain. (*He turns the hibakusha light out and the slide fades. As lights change, Winston enters the Long home carrying a small overnight bag. Calling.*) Hello? (*Wait.*) Anybody home? (*No answer. He carries his bag into the bedroom. In a moment, we hear the flush of a toilet. He returns.*) Yo! Mom? (*No answer. In the kitchen he takes*

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a cookie from the cookie jar. He munches it as he goes to the screened-in porch and stands looking across the creek toward the golf course. The phone rings. He doesn't know if he should answer it or not. On the fifth ring, he answers it.) Long's. . . Hello? . . . Oh, hi, Lou. . . No. Here all by my lonesome. You know where they've gone? . . . Really? . . . Well, they knew I was coming today, didn't they? . . . If I'd known that, I could have started later. . . Well, you know, time is money, wherever you spend it, the car, in bed, you name it. . . Okay, okay. . . Sure, I'll be here. I didn't drive six hours just to turn around and head back home. . . Whenever. . . Sure. I'll call. . . Soon as they get back, I'll call, Sis, promise. Bye. *(He replaces the receiver and eats another cookie. He opens the fridge and takes out a Diet Coke. He rummages through the shelves and finds a hunk of cheese. He slices cheese and places it between two cookies and eats, takes a bottle of Jim Beam from his bag and spikes his can of Diet Coke and drinks. From off we hear a car drive up. The doors slam. He quickly returns the liquor to his bag. We hear two people approaching from outside. Entering are Howard and Delores. Howard scrapes his feet as he enters. Delores shoves past him and is headed for the bedroom when she sees Winston.)*

DELORES. Winston? I thought that was your car out there--

HOWARD. Who else you know drives with South Carolina license plates?

WINSTON. Mom. Dad. *(She hugs him.)*

DELORES. It's been so long, sweetheart--

HOWARD. So, look what the cat drug in.

WINSTON. Lou just called—

DELORES. How long've you been home? Oh, you're looking so good.

HOWARD. Let him breathe, Del.

WINSTON. How've you been, Dad?

HOWARD. Ask me later. Right now--I gotta go pee. *(He goes to bedroom.)*

DELORES. Can I help you with your things?

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WINSTON. Traveling light, Mom. You're looking--okay. How you doing?

DELORES. Oh, I'm just fine, I guess. Let me look at you, son. Oh, my, children are clocks, ain't they.

WINSTON. Beg pardon?

DELORES. Gray hair. You've got more gray hair than me. Just look at you.

WINSTON. Thanks for pointing that out. Just what I needed.

DELORES. Marisa Louise called?

WINSTON. Said you'd told her it'd be late this afternoon before you made it back. And I'm to give her a ring soon as you walk through the front door, that she's dying to know.

DELORES. Well, they got us in and out of that place quick as you please. You've lost weight. Can I get you something to eat?

WINSTON. No, not now, not hungry. What place? The hospital?

DELORES. Would you look at me? I need to have this nose powdered.

WINSTON. You've been crying, Mom? What--

DELORES. Oh, it's nothing. We hit a bunny rabbit on the way home, and you know how those things upset me. Go set down, I won't be a minute. Oh, Winston, I'm so glad you're home.

WINSTON. Home's where you live, Mother. I don't live here, so this to me isn't home. Home is. . . *(She has gone into the bedroom. Winston finishes his Coke and crams another cookie into his mouth as Howard returns. He has on slippers and a bathrobe.)*

Hey, Pop, you're looking good.

HOWARD. Sheeee. *(He sits in his chair and lights a cigarette.)*

WINSTON. *(Referring to the smoke.)* Cancer ward.

HOWARD. You want to be helpful, you could turn on the television for me. *(Pause.)* Then, maybe not. *(Winston turns on the TV, then returns to the kitchen bar where he waves the smoke from his face.)* Hand me the remote? *(Winston gives him the remote. Howard surfs through channels.)* Eighteen stations and nothing worth watching. You have cable over there in what you call it?

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WINSTON. Greenwood. It's not that tough a name to remember, Pop.

HOWARD. Greenwood. Sap in the wood. That what you got over there in what you call it? a bunch of saps? (*Still surfing.*)

Wasteland. Nothing but a big city landfill.

WINSTON. It's four in the afternoon. What do you expect?

HOWARD. For twenty a month? I expect paradise. (*Delores comes from bedroom.*)

DELORES. It's been too long, Winston, sweetheart. You've got to come around more often.

WINSTON. Come when I can. You know that.

DELORES. How're classes?

HOWARD. Look at this, Del. Nothing but garbage. Can you believe we pay twenty dollars a month for this garbage? (*Delores turns the volume down.*) I can't hear!

DELORES. If it's garbage, what's to hear?

HOWARD. Tell Winston he's got to stop drinking so much. He's getting a pot. (*She leaves him and goes to kitchen.*)

WINSTON. So, what's the prognosis?

DELORES. You must answer my question first, hon.

WINSTON. What did you ask?

DELORES. Are you finished with classes?

WINSTON. No. Spring break.

DELORES. And that's how long? Two weeks?

WINSTON. Don't I wish. Five days. Plus weekends. Just long enough to get used to a bit of free time and then it's back to the treadmill.

DELORES. It can't be that bad.

WINSTON. I'd like to see you teach three sections of world civ and come away sane.

DELORES. You said Marisa Louise called?

WINSTON. She invited me to come over there.

DELORES. Are you?

WINSTON. I might, sometime this week. So, what do the doctors say?

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DELORES. Oh, Winston, I just don't know. . .

WINSTON. (*After a pause.*) How long did they give him?

DELORES. Half a year. . . maybe. (*Sound of a car arriving outside.*)

WINSTON. Be goddamned.

HOWARD. I heard that. Wash that kid's mouth out with Tide, Della!

DELORES. Ears like a hawk.

MARISA LOUISE. (*Rushing in through the front door. She is a woman of thirty-one and is breathless as she enters.*) You're back.

DELORES. Of course, we are, hon.

HOWARD. Close the door! You're letting in flies.

WINSTON. Hi, sis.

MARISA LOUISE. You were supposed to call me. Why didn't you call me? Winston?

WINSTON. Good to see you, too.

DELORES. I meant to, Hon--

HOWARD. Will somebody please shut the dad-blasted door!
(*Marisa Louise slams it shut.*)

MARISA LOUISE. Nobody ever thinks of me around here.

HOWARD. Oh, good golly. . .

MARISA LOUISE. I have been setting up there in that God-awful house of mine, waiting and waiting for the phone to ring, and it never did, and then you pass the house on the highway doing about ninety and don't even wave or anything. And if that's not enough, you don't even have the courtesy to give me a call!

DELORES. Now, don't get all worked up, sweetie--

HOWARD. Did so damn it give you a call. As we passed your house, I hung my head out the window and hollered, Hey, Marisa Louise? They give me no more than half a year! Wasn't that something to lift your head and sing about?

MARISA LOUISE. What?

WINSTON. Sit down, Lou, you're making me dizzy.

MARISA LOUISE. What'd he say?

DELORES. He said he has six months at most. That's all.

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MARISA LOUISE. *(Suddenly sobbing.)* Oh, Daddy! *(She throws herself on him, hugging and kissing.)*

WINSTON. I've been in a car six hours. I need a walk.

DELORES. In a minute, hon. Now, Marisa Lou, you're getting your Daddy's robe all wet.

HOWARD. Get her off me, damn it.

MARISA LOUISE. What'm I gonna do, Daddy? Lord Jesus, what'm I gonna do?!

DELORES. Sweetheart--

WINSTON. Be back in an hour.

DELORES. You go out that door, I swear-- I need help here, son. *(Marisa Louise is wailing incoherently.)*

HOWARD. Get her off me, I can't breathe! *(He shoves Marisa Louise off.)* Let me breathe, damn it.

MARISA LOUISE. *(A bit calmer.)* Oh, Daddy. *(She is rummaging through her purse for a tissue which Howard gives her.)*

HOWARD. Jesus H. Christ, Della, if the cancer don't do me in, these children will. *(Lights change as Delores enters the hibakusha station and turns on the lectern light. Behind her on the screen is a slide of a destroyed streetcar.)*

DELORES. *(Reading from manuscript.)* When we were near Hatchobori and since I had been holding my son in my arms, the young woman in front of me said, "I will be getting off here. Please take this seat." We were just changing places when there was a strange smell and sound. It suddenly became dark and before I knew it, I had jumped outside. I held my son firmly and looked down on him. We had been by the window and I think fragments of glass had pierced his head. His face was a mess as blood flowed from his head. He looked at me and smiled. His smile remained glued in my memory. He did not comprehend what had happened, so he looked at me and smiled at my face which was all bloody. I had plenty of milk which he drank all throughout that day. I think my child sucked the poison right out of my body, and soon after that he died. Yes, I think that he died for me. *(Lights out in the*

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hibakusha station as they rise in the Long home. It is evening of that same day. Marisa Louise and Winston sit on the back screened-in porch. He has been drinking a bit too much from the bottle hidden in his backpack. He offers the bottle to Marisa Louise.)

WINSTON. Now or never, Lou. Your chance for a little joy this evening.

MARISA LOUISE. You know they don't allow booze in the house.

WINSTON. Hurry. She'll be back out here and then we'll both be tee-totalers.

MARISA LOUISE. I'll pass.

WINSTON. Fine. Means more for me. *(He drinks. From off comes a bellow of rage.)*

MARISA LOUISE. Hear that? No peace in the house since they found the tumor. He's been a baby and a bull all at the same time. I can't stand to come around this place anymore.

WINSTON. Mom needs you. *(They sit in an awkward silence. She takes a pad and chunk of charcoal from her purse and draws.)* It's been a while.

MARISA LOUISE. What has?

WINSTON. You and me had a chance to sit around like this, talk.

MARISA LOUISE. We're talking?

WINSTON. Don't you want to?

MARISA LOUISE. Got nothing to say.

WINSTON. Can I see? *(She gives him her pad. He turns it first one way, then another.)* What is it?

MARISA LOUISE. My brain. The side that doesn't work so well.

WINSTON. Interesting. Can I have a sheet of your paper?

MARISA LOUISE. What for?

WINSTON. Some doodling. *(She gives him a sheet.)* A bit too thick, but we'll see. *(He begins folding the paper origami style.)*

MARISA LOUISE. What're you doing?

WINSTON. Folding a crane. I have this special friend back home. She taught me to fold paper cranes.

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MARISA LOUISE. A crane like for lifting things?

WINSTON. No. A crane. Like the bird. My friend, she's Japanese. She claims there's an ancient legend in Japan where she lives that if a person who is ill folds a thousand paper cranes, he or she will get well. Have you ever heard that?

MARISA LOUISE. No. I wish it was true.

WINSTON. What makes you think it's not?

MARISA LOUISE. For one, we don't live in Japan. What's your friend's name?

WINSTON. Nora. Noriko but I call her Nora.

MARISA LOUISE. What does she call you?

WINSTON. Macho man.

MARISA LOUISE. No, really. What's her pet name for somebody like you?

WINSTON. Pooh.

MARISA LOUISE. (*Big derisive laugh.*) Love her already!

WINSTON. First, she called me Winnie and when I objected, she called me Pooh. Sort of stuck. You know how those things are. It took me a while to figure out the folding. But it's easy once you get the hang of it.

MARISA LOUISE. Is she pretty?

WINSTON. I think so. Long black hair. Marvelous smile. Eyes that glow in the dark. . .

MARISA LOUISE. Can I meet her sometime?

WINSTON. I don't know. Maybe. (*He finishes.*) There you are. A less than perfect paper crane. It helps if you use origami paper.

MARISA LOUISE. Let me try. (*She folds a paper crane twice as fast as Winston.*)

WINSTON. Hey. You're pretty good.

MARISA LOUISE. You're right. The paper's too thick. I've never known anyone from another country. Must be interesting.

WINSTON. We have our quota of foreign exchange students. Most come from Malaysia. One or two from Europe. Then there's Nora.

MARISA LOUISE. Any truth to this Japanese myth?

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WINSTON. Just might be. Who knows? (*Admiring her.*) I'm impressed.

MARISA LOUISE. If it's true, this legend. Do you think if I folded a thousand of these for Daddy, he'd get well?

WINSTON. He might not get well, but he wouldn't get worse. (*Hearing his mother coming, he slips the bottle into his bag.*)

DELORES. (*Coming from the bedroom.*) Well, that's that.

WINSTON. All tucked away? Snug as a bug in a rug?

DELORES. You know I don't want you drinking in my house, Winston. You insist on drinking, I'd just as soon you do it somewhere else.

WINSTON. I don't remember Dad going to bed so early before, Mom.

DELORES. It's his way, I guess. Way of dealing. (*Holding out her hand.*) Give it here, hon.

WINSTON. What are you talking about? My bag? You want my book bag? There's nothing in it. Junk mostly.

DELORES. Give it.

WINSTON. Mom, for Pete's sake. I need it and you don't. So what difference does it make? (*Delores stands with her hand out. After a beat, Winston gives her the now nearly empty bottle. Delores takes the offending bottle to the kitchen where she pours the liquid down the drain.*) I hate that, Lou, you know? It's too expensive to waste like that.

MARISA LOUISE. I told you.

WINSTON. Well, there's more where that came from. So, you're enjoying your new job?

MARISA LOUISE. Don't tell Mom. But they let me go.

WINSTON. When?

MARISA LOUISE. Middle of last week. I get two weeks' severance and then back to unemployment, I suppose. Best friends I got work at the unemployment office. (*She finishes the crane as Delores returns.*)

DELORES. I know you have another in your car, hon. You bring it in the house and I'll pour it down the drain, too.

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WINSTON. This is so ridiculous, Mother. Daddy doesn't mind a little--

DELORES. Oh, but he does! He does mind indeed. *(Pause.)*
Pretty paper dolls, Marisa Lou. What is it?

MARISA LOUISE. It's a damn crane! For God's sake, Mom, can't you see?

DELORES. Sorry.

MARISA LOUISE. I should go home, I guess.

WINSTON. Is he sleeping?

DELORES. Of course not. He's lying in there, counting the flowers in the wallpaper pattern. When he's satisfied the number is the same as last night, he'll start bellowing, and I'll have to go running. It's become our little ritual. He'll need his back rubbed or his foot massaged. Since they found the tumor, his left foot's been giving him fits. I don't know. I've suddenly stopped being his wife and now I'm his nursemaid, somebody to order around and get angry with. At least I'm there, something he can touch. It's easier to get angry at something you can touch. The tumor--he can't touch that. *(Neither Winston nor Marisa Louise knows what to say.)* Oh, it's so good having my two children home again. You haven't been fussing at each other, have you? Your father and me have dibs on fussing, you're not allowed. Winston, how's work treating you? Marisa Lou just loves her new job, don't you, hon.

MARISA LOUISE. It's great.

WINSTON. When does he see the specialist, Mom?

DELORES. He saw him today. We drove down to Kennestone.

MARISA LOUISE. So, what did the man say?

DELORES. That doctor, he's just the sweetest thing. He's only a kid, you know, probably thirty. We had a nice long visit right there in the waiting room. He graduated from the University, too, Winston. His name's Dr. Sams. You meet him when you were in Athens?

WINSTON. Mother, I've been gone from the University for five years. And even then, I didn't have cause to visit the medical school, so how do you suppose I might have met Dr. Sams?

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DELORES. I was just asking.

MARISA LOUISE. You've still not told us what this teenage wonder said.

DELORES. I don't think he's married. Marisa Lou, you should go with us next time and meet Dr. Sams. He's awful nice. Got the sweetest eyes you ever seen.

MARISA LOUISE. Momma! Will you leave me alone! I've seen enough doctors to last a lifetime, thank you very much.

DELORES. They don't think they can operate.

WINSTON. Why not?

DELORES. Oh, I don't know. Something about where the tumor's located, up near the aorta or something like that. If they operated, they'd not be able to get it all anyway. So, might as well rely on chemotherapy and radiation.

WINSTON. Chemo. My God.

DELORES. Oh, now, it's not all that bad. They want to start on Thursday. Can you go with me, hon?

WINSTON. Sure. *(Pause. Marisa Louise rises, and starts toward the door.)*

MARISA LOUISE. I got to get home.

DELORES. You mustn't let it upset you, hon. It's gonna be all right.

MARISA LOUISE. No, Mother, it is not gonna be all right. How can it be all right? My Daddy's gonna die, and there's not a damn thing I can do about it. *(She leaves.)*

DELORES. Go after her, Winston, make her see.

WINSTON. It isn't your fault.

DELORES. What isn't?

WINSTON. Never mind. *(The car leaves. Delores lights a cigarette.)* Do you think that's wise?

DELORES. What? This? *(Gestures the cigarette.)* It's your father, not me.

WINSTON. But still, lung cancer is caused--

DELORES. You're not in class right now, hon. There's no need to lecture. I know it all, the doctor told me far more than I really

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wanted to hear about (*Waves her cigarette.*). Still. . . (*She puts her cigarette out.*)

WINSTON. Like what?

DELORES. He said he is a lung cancer specialist. He said if everybody in this country stopped smoking tomorrow, in six months he'd have to find a new specialty.

WINSTON. And what do you do? Come home and puff away.

DELORES. I know, I know. . .

WINSTON. (*Gesturing to the grocery sack of old photos behind the sofa.*) What's all this?

DELORES. Oh, your father was going through those last night. Once or twice a week he does that. I've got sacks of stuff stored in every closet in the house. Culling, he calls it. He filled a garbage can with old photos, certificates, and things he was getting rid of. Don't tell him, but I keep fishing them out of the trash.

WINSTON. What was he tossing?

DELORES. Oh, I don't know. Mostly stuff to do with his years in the service.

WINSTON. Really? What for?

DELORES. He was saying how a friend of his died unexpectedly and the family had a great time discovering after he was gone all his hidden secrets. Said he didn't want that happening to him. He'd prefer controlling what we learn about him after he's (*She waves.*). I can see that, can't you? Cleaning house is a natural sort of thing to do, isn't it?

WINSTON. How do you feel about that?

DELORES. What, cleaning house?

WINSTON. His--you know.

DELORES. I don't think about it. . . all that much.

WINSTON. If you don't want to talk about it--

DELORES. No, no, I'm fine. (*She gives a half smile.*) You realize, this July will be our forty-first wedding anniversary? Hard to imagine, spending that much time with another human being. Wonder if we'll make it to July. . . We were both teenagers then.

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He was going off to the war and I was. . . so young. Fourteen. Can you imagine that? I was pretty then.

WINSTON. You're beautiful now.

DELORES. I didn't even know your father's name, but when I saw him walking past our house that day, I was all of thirteen, I said, "Momma, I'm gonna marry that boy."

WINSTON. You've told me.

DELORES. And I did. Didn't even know his name. He was the second best looking sixteen-year-old I have ever seen.

WINSTON. Who was the first?

DELORES. You, of course. Actually, when you were sixteen, you were the spitting image of your daddy. You and he are so much alike in so many ways. He's awfully proud of you, you know.

WINSTON. Yeah, right.

DELORES. First of the Long's to graduate college two times.

WINSTON. Three. You missed the first.

DELORES. Well, we couldn't make it all the way up to Winnipeg. That last one your father still doesn't understand. How can you be a doctor if you can't make people feel any better?

WINSTON. I've wondered about that myself. What are you going to do, Mother?

DELORES. I thought I'd brush my teeth and go to bed. Read a little. Listen to him snore.

WINSTON. No. I mean, after he's. . .

DELORES. You're allowed to use the "D" word, you know. It doesn't bother me. It did for a time, but I'm over that I guess. After Howard's dead, I'll deal with it. I don't know, son, I've thought about it and thought about it, but I just can't seem to get it in my head that he's really not gonna beat this thing. Yes, he'll beat it. He has to beat it. There's nothing else to do. He's beat just about everything else there is.

WINSTON. Will you sell the house?

DELORES. Sweetheart, I'm not about to disinherit you. You've got nothing to worry about on that count.

WINSTON. That's not what I mean, Mother.

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DELORES. He's been so looking forward to this visit, son. It's all he talked about on the trip to Kennestone. When's Winston getting home, when's Winston getting home. He does so love you.

WINSTON. We know that to be the truth, right. He's spoken all of three sentences to me since I arrived. He's never forgiven me, you know.

DELORES. (*Howard enters. He stands in the door.*) He has so done it. Forgiven and-and-and everything else. It's you who's not forgiven if you ask me, you and your highfalutin ways--

HOWARD. She do have a tongue in her head, don't she, son.

DELORES. Howie, you're supposed to be in bed.

HOWARD. Can't sleep. Need a cigarette.

WINSTON. Why not join us? Pull up a chair--

HOWARD. In my own house I get invited. Thank you very much.

WINSTON. You're quite welcome, sir. (*Howard sits. Pause. He lights a cigarette.*)

HOWARD. You were talking about me, weren't you?

DELORES. Now, sweetheart--

WINSTON. As a matter of fact, yeah. You're a prime topic for conversation, Pop. It's your boyish charm.

HOWARD. And my goddamned tumor. Excuse my French, Del. They say it's grown in two weeks from the size of a skinny lima bean to that of a fat juicy kumquat. Healthy booger. How big is a kumquat? (*Winston waves the smoke away from him.*) Don't start. You know, for a schoolteacher, you sure preach a lot.

WINSTON. You give me a lot to preach about. It seems to me that with your condition--

HOWARD. My condition is my condition. It belongs to me. A couple packs of cigarettes every hour's not going to cure me, and it sure as hell can't make me worse. So, don't preach. Del, fetch me that bag of pretzels from the kitchen. I thought Lou was here. You two have another fuss, Winston? You send her home in a red snit?

WINSTON. (*As Delores fetches the bag of pretzels.*) She's not your slave, you know.

HOWARD. Who?

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WINSTON. Mom.

HOWARD. Been married to the woman for forty-odd years, and I still need my only son telling me who and what she is. If that don't beat all. (*Delores has returned to her chair.*) So, where's my Coke?

DELORES. You didn't say--

HOWARD. You ever known me to eat pretzels without a Coke to wash down the salt? Go fetch me a Coke, won't you? (*She does.*)

WINSTON. Lie down. Roll over. Sit up and bark. Jeez.

HOWARD. She'll be past the slave part soon enough. Six months.

WINSTON. You know, doctors have been known to be wrong.

HOWARD. (*As Delores returns.*) Thanks, Della. You're precious and I don't deserve you. Give us a kiss. (*She does and sits.*) I got a tee time for in the morning. Want to join me for a round, say nine thirty?

WINSTON. Sure.

HOWARD. Good. You bring your clubs this time?

WINSTON. In the trunk of my car. Haven't been used since last time. I'll be rusty as an old hinge.

HOWARD. That's fine with me. (*They sit in silence.*) I heard your questions a bit ago, Winston. Among other things. You're family, I suppose, you've got a right to know. Your mother and me have talked about it. You want to, you can help, but it's not necessary. Della's to get rid of this place and find a house in town, maybe a condo, something less troublesome to keep. We've looked into a couple of places already. Expensive, though. It's been so long since we've bought a house, we'd forgotten how costly they've gotten. Still, this is too much of a place for a widow woman to maintain. I've already set up the accounts so the transfer to Del will be simple and complete. Mo Shealy in town's taking care of the financial end of things. The insurance company is already processing the claim. I'm leaving everything to your mother. Hope you weren't expecting a whole hell of a lot. I'm afraid of lingering, though. That could deplete what Del's to get and she'd have to turn to you and your sister for help.

WINSTON. Lou and I will do what must be done.

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HOWARD. I know you will. In some ways I raised you right. *(They sit in silence.)* Strange thing. If we're not talking about Mr. Cancer, we have nothing to say.

WINSTON. I was just thinking of going to bed. Damn if I ain't pooped.

HOWARD. Get your rest. You'll need it in the tee box if you plan to keep up with me. Guess I'd better get to bed, too. Be quiet when you come in, slave woman. Don't want you disturbing my beauty sleep. *(He goes leaving Delores and Winston sitting on the porch.)*

DELORES. *(As Winston rises, stretching.)* Don't go just yet, son.

WINSTON. I'm really beat.

DELORES. There're some things I want you to see.

WINSTON, Okay. I'll try staying awake. *(She goes into the kitchen and takes a grocery sack from the cupboard.)*

DELORES. *(Bringing the grocery sack with her from the kitchen. She places the sack at Winston's feet.)* I want you to look at this. *(She pulls a large black and white photo of a navy ship from the sack.)* The USS Circe. *(We see the photo as a slide.)* Howie took this while still in dry dock at Pearl. Before they shipped off to that Japanese place--

WINSTON. Okinawa.

DELORES. That's the one.

WINSTON. He's throwing these things away? They're priceless.

DELORES. Wants me to, but he knows I won't. *(Winston thumbs through the photos, pulling them from the sack and looking at them. Some we see flashed on the screen.)*

WINSTON. Why would he throw this away?

DELORES. It's like, if it has anything to do with him before you kids were born, he gives it a toss. *(She pulls a small wooden box from the sack.)* Here. Take these to bed with you and let me know what you think. I've not seen them before, can't make heads or tails of the lot. Only don't let him know you have them. *(Winston opens the box which is held closed by a rubber band. He holds what appear to be hundreds of small black and white photos. He takes*

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one out and looks at it. We see an image of a city in ruins.) I have no idea what those are of.

WINSTON. You know what these look like? A landfill.

DELORES. Well, I'm going to bed. Are you okay, son? Do you need anything?

WINSTON. No, I'm fine. *(This slide is of a destroyed trolley with a group of service men kneeling in front of it.)* These are. . .

DELORES. See you in the morning, Winston. I love you. *(She is gone.)*

WINSTON. Hmmm. *(He is alone.)* Curious. *(He looks at another. The image is of desolation, a city in destruction. In the foreground is a woman bent from the waist, tending to a small vegetable garden. Another image, this of a group of Japanese people walking down a street with the shadow of the photographer in the foreground; one of the people, a Japanese soldier, walks with crutches. Another image, this of three servicemen standing under a telephone pole, backed by a city in ruins. On the pole is a sign. Winston holds the photo closer to his nose. On the sign are written the words "Atomic Field." He drops the photo to his lap; the image goes dark.)* My Lord. . . *(Lights change as Marisa Louise enters the Hibakusha station backed by a slide of Hiroshima in ruins. She turns on the lectern light.)*

MARISA LOUISE. *(Reading from the manuscript, turning a page.)* When I sat at my desk and took my notebooks and pens, I saw a very strong flash of light. It was yellow. Despite the shower of glass, I didn't have any major injuries. I went outside, too dangerous to stay inside. So many people were terribly injured I felt embarrassed. At the river, a flood of people went down this cliff. Down. Everything was burning. More and more people came from behind me and crashed into me. I was pushed into the river with many other people. I was spun around by the current and large pieces of hail began to fall and my face started to hurt. I plunged my face into the water time and time again, but it just wouldn't stop. The water swirled around me like a tornado, and I thought I was going to die. The faces of my family came to my

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mind one after another. I thought they might have already been killed by the bomb. Later I learned my mother was on Ninoshima. She died on August 10. My brother was with my mother. He survived. My sister had been mobilized to pull down houses. I never found her. I was only eighteen and had lost both my parents, and I didn't know what to do. I cannot afford to bend myself to grief. It is hard to talk about it. I can't. . . (*Lights rise in the Long home. Delores is preparing sandwiches for lunch. Marisa Louise is at the counter. The radio is on, playing country music.*)

DELORES. . . from the start. It was a miracle, hon, that they found the tumor in the first place. His back's what led us to the doctor--we couldn't find why he could get no peace from the ache in his back. Then the doctor said he wanted to do this biopsy on Howie's chest. You know what that is, don't you? Biopsy? They run this--

MARISA LOUISE. Mom!

DELORES. What, sweetie?

MARISA LOUISE. You're fixing lunch, for God's sake.

DELORES. I know what I'm doing.

MARISA LOUISE. Well, isn't there anything else you can think about? I mean, my God, for the past hour, nothing but gross talk of daddy's x-rays and back pangs and biopsies.

DELORES. Why are you so angry, sweetheart?

MARISA LOUISE. Daddy's got no right doing this to us, and it makes me a little pissed off, that's all.

DELORES. You think he's doing this to himself? On purpose?

MARISA LOUISE. He's still smoking, isn't he? That seems to me that he's all but given up. . . Mother, can't you get him to stop?

DELORES. Let me tell you something. This has to be our secret, all right? Howard would probably skin me alive if he knew I told you, but there are some things we need to know. You, me, Winston. The doctor said your father's lung cancer wasn't caused by smoking. He said cigarette smoke may have been a contributing factor, maybe causing the tumor to show up sooner than normal, but it's not the cause. Not really.

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MARISA LOUISE. Then what is?

DELORES. This I don't understand. He asked if your father had ever worked in the nuclear business or had an abnormal number of chest x-rays. He asked if we've ever lived near a chemical waste dump. Can you believe that? A chemical waste dump in Pickens County? Dr. Sams said your father's lungs are scarred like he's been around radiation or something, that the cancer is a result of his having been exposed at some point in his life to high levels of something he called "gamma rays." He wanted to examine me, too, but I wouldn't let him. I mean, I'm not all that sure I want to know. *(Pause.)* Then he asked if you and Winston would come in. He'd like to examine all of us, he said.

MARISA LOUISE. What did you tell him?

DELORES. He was so insistent, hon.

MARISA LOUISE. Gamma rays?

DELORES. He asked me what Howard did during World War II. And I told him. . .

MARISA LOUISE. You told him what?

DELORES. That I honestly do not know. That your daddy spent almost ten years in the service after the war was over, and when he came out, I knew less about the man than if I'd never met him. He asked me about your--you know, your condition. . . when you were born. . .

MARISA LOUISE. You didn't tell him, did you?

DELORES. He's a doctor, hon.

MARISA LOUISE. Oh, Mother. . .

DELORES. It's no reflection on you, Sweetheart. It's my fault, not yours, your condition--

MARISA LOUISE. My deformity! How much did you tell him?

(The look on Delores' face tells Marisa Louise that the doctor knows everything.) Oh, Mother!

DELORES. Well, he asked, Marisa Lou. I couldn't lie to him, now could I? *(Marisa Louise is crying.)* Oh, hon, now. It's okay, really. When you meet Dr. Sams, you'll see. No harm done, trust me.

MARISA LOUISE. You could have lied to him.

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DELORES. What good would that have done? Mainly he was interested in when you and Winston were born and I told him, and he asked me if that was before or after Howard came out of the service and I told him it was during. . . Then he asked if we'd ever wanted any more children, and I told him, yes, we had, but nothing ever came of it. You know what he asked me then?

MARISA LOUISE. Momma, was I there? How would I know what he asked?

DELORES. He asked if we knew that your father was sterile.

MARISA LOUISE. What?

DELORES. My reaction exactly. I couldn't believe it. So, I asked him: was he? He said, yes, he *is*, that from the looks of things, Howie's been sterile for quite a long time. I don't understand these things, hon, really, I don't.

MARISA LOUISE. You suppose Daddy knows this?

DELORES. No, I don't think so. I mean, how could he be? We had Winston, then you. . .

MARISA LOUISE. That's strange. You don't think. . . it's catching, do you?

DELORES. What?

MARISA LOUISE. This whatever it is that's making Daddy sterile.

DELORES. We don't even know what it is.

MARISA LOUISE. You didn't tell Dr. Sams about. . . you know. . . my baby? (*Delores is silent.*) I could just die.

DELORES. I understand so little of all this. Dr. Sams said Howie's radiation scarring was about as severe as any he'd ever seen. (*She lights a cigarette.*)

MARISA LOUISE. Can I have one of those?

DELORES. Sure you can. (*Marisa Louise lights a cigarette. They sit on the porch, smoking in a moment of silence. Delores rises and returns to the kitchen.*)

MARISA LOUISE. How would you find out such a thing anyway?

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DELORES. You ask the most questions. If I whipped up some brownies, would you help me eat them?

MARISA LOUISE. (*Storming back into the kitchen area.*) What the hell is Daddy doing? Out playing golf when he should be here in bed! Damn him for this, Momma. He has no right, no right to do this to me! He's smoking, he's overexerting--he's killing himself, Momma, and he's sterile on top of it all! Now I don't even know where I came from. I mean, him being sterile and all, how could you get (*She makes a gesture*) with me?

DELORES. The doctors are just wrong, honey.

MARISA LOUISE. I can't take this, Mother, I swear I can't.

DELORES. Calm down, honey, your father will be coming in in a little bit, feeling great and all that, and I don't want you upsetting him, do you hear me?

MARISA LOUISE. Momma, I love him so much--

DELORES. I know you do, sweetheart. We all do. But now, listen to me. Are you listening? The doctor said--

MARISA LOUISE. Hate all damn doctors.

DELORES. I know, I understand. The doctor said that there's coming a time, and not so far in the future, when your father won't be as active as we're accustomed to him being. Pretty soon, he's going to be bedridden most of the time, not because he wants to be, but because he won't have a choice.

MARISA LOUISE. But I don't understand--radiation scars? Being sterile?

DELORES. I don't understand that, either, hon. Maybe it's best if we just forget about that and take it one day at a time. Okay. Let's start those brownies. Remember when you were a kid, we used to bake brownies every Saturday afternoon? We'd eat them while they were hot, and the boys watched football on television, and we'd refuse to give them any unless they turned those hateful games off. Remember that?

MARISA LOUISE. Not really.

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DELORES. I'll need your help with this. First off, set yourself down over there and crack these nuts. Don't eat the meat, either, like you always do.

MARISA LOUISE. Can I lick the beaters?

DELORES. I'll think about it.

MARISA LOUISE. (*Settling at the counter, cracking pecans with a nutcracker, leaving the shells on the Formica.*) This Dr. Sams--

DELORES. Oh, that Dr. Sams. He makes me wish I was a young woman again. He's just the cutest young man I think I've ever seen.

MARISA LOUISE. You're not old, Momma.

DELORES. Douglas. That's his first name. I do believe it's Douglas.

MARISA LOUISE. Do you think I might go with you next time to Kennestone? I wouldn't mind making the acquaintance of a handsome young doctor. Especially if he's called "Dr. Douglas."

DELORES. That would be lovely.

MARISA LOUISE. Do you really think he's not married? (*Sound of an automobile pulling up and two doors closing. From off we hear two men arguing over a golf score card.*)

DELORES. I don't know about that. I might have been mistaken. That ring on his wedding finger might have been a wedding band after all. It was certainly the most unusual wedding band I've ever seen, if indeed that's what it is.

MARISA LOUISE. I'm not going if he's married.

DELORES. Well, now, hon, I don't know if he is or not.

MARISA LOUISE. Why didn't you ask him? You knew I'd want to know. (*Howard and Winston enter with golf clubs.*)

HOWARD. You added wrong. Let me see that score card. This college professor doesn't know how to do simple arithmetic, Della. What do you think about that?

WINSTON. Check it yourself, then. He's upset. I finally beat him, Mom, and he doesn't care for losing at all. Howdy, sis. What're you doing, going nuts?

MARISA LOUISE. Leave me alone.

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HOWARD. (*Having been checking the score card.*) Here. On number eight, the long par five? You have me down for a six. See? I had a par and you know it.

WINSTON. Your drive went into the woods. You took a seven, Pop. I was doing you a favor giving you a six.

HOWARD. Oh, yeah. Who asked you to change my score? Give me an eraser, Del.

MARISA LOUISE. Never understood golf. Chase a little white ball around and hit it with these weird sticks. . .

WINSTON. Clubs, sis. Woods, irons, wedges--

MARISA LOUISE. Putter. Don't forget the putter, bro. What kind of game is it that requires people to putter around, huh? Sounds sort of kinky, doesn't it, Mom.

DELORES. Glad you had a good time, sweetie.

WINSTON. We come to number eighteen, Pop up by two. He has honors and puts his drive right down the middle, two hundred yards out.

HOWARD. Two-twenty-five. See? Can't do distance, either.

WINSTON. Then I step up and do the same. We're less than a yard apart. I'm out, maybe one fifty from the green, so I take my five iron and put a beauty of a shot, my best middle iron of the round, on the front edge of the green. It hits soft and rolls up, twenty-five feet from the pin. Well, old Mr. Pro here says "I can do better than that." He takes his six iron--showing off, you see--takes a big swing, and the ball flies true as can be, straight for the pin. Well, you're not gonna believe this, but remember, he used a six iron--the ball comes down a yard shy of the green, hits a sprinkler head, and bounces way up in the air over the trap, into the woods, and comes to rest six inches from a post oak tree.

HOWARD. Ah ha! (*He points to the score card, then changes his mind.*) No, forget it.

WINSTON. So, I two-putt, in with a par. And Dad's over there, figuring out his shot. First, foot-wedges himself away from the tree, and then pitches into the trap. Then he blasts out to the fringe. He's a good sixty feet from the pin. Now, he's got to get down in

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one to win, two to tie--and that's not counting the foot wedge.
What does he do?

HOWARD. I hate gloating.

WINSTON. Not from me you don't. You've never seen me gloat before. I never had cause to gloat until today. And oh my, did that three-putt for a triple bogie feel good! *(He gives a whoop.)* Can you believe it, Mom? After all these years, I finally beat the old coot! This is how spring break is supposed to be!

HOWARD. You're making me want to go puke.

DELORES. Did you understand a word he said, Marisa Lou? What's a foot-wedge, hon?

MARISA LOUISE. You ask me, Winston's the one who's nuts. *(She is eating more nuts than she is putting in the nut bowl.)*

HOWARD. It makes no difference anyway. *(He tosses the score card in the garbage.)*

WINSTON. No! I want that. I'm going to frame it and hang it over my desk in my office at school where I can gloat every day if I want.

DELORES. *(To Howard.)* Did you have a good time, hon?

HOWARD. Actually, it's nice to know I can make someone so goddamn happy! Next time, Winston, S.N.F.M. You hear me? S.N.F.M.! T.N.F.P.!!

MARISA LOUISE. What in the world does that mean?

HOWARD. He knows. Don't you, son. S.N.F.M. T.N.F.P.! Play again in the morning?

WINSTON. We'll see.

HOWARD. When's lunch, woman! *(He goes into the bedroom. In a moment we hear the flush of the toilet.)*

MARISA LOUISE. What does that mean, Winston? S.N.F.M. T.N.F.P.?

DELORES. Please, hon, don't ask.

MARISA LOUISE. I want to know.

WINSTON. *(Getting very close to her.)* Show No *(he mouths the word "fucking")* Mercy. Take No *(he mouths the word "fucking")* Prisoners.

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MARISA LOUISE. Oh. I've got to remember that.

DELORES. Did you have a good visit with your father?

WINSTON. Sort of. He's so damned closed mouth about things. Does that come with age or is it genetic? Or is it just me?

DELORES. Lord knows.

WINSTON. I think he's a little pissed at you, Mom, for not letting him throw those pictures away. And he won't tell me about them.

MARISA LOUISE. Pictures?

WINSTON. Pop's cleaning house. Thank God Mom was around to save the good stuff. You should see these little photographs Dad was trying to throw away. They're fascinating. But he won't tell me a thing about them.

MARISA LOUISE. Can you blame him?

WINSTON. What do you mean?

MARISA LOUISE. Well, I for one am sick and tired of your writing about this family and plastering us all over the place for other folks to ogle at. What was that last one? Some God forsaken magazine--

WINSTON. *The Midwest Quarterly* is highly respected.

MARISA LOUISE. What right have you got to write about us that way?

WINSTON. It was a memoir, Lou. It wasn't about us. It was about me. You're not even in it.

MARISA LOUISE. Why not, that's what I want to know.

DELORES. Lunch is ready, sweet. We have egg salad, tuna fish, or turkey breast sandwiches. Can I fix you a plate?

WINSTON. I'll get it, thanks.

MARISA LOUISE. This enough nuts, Mom?

DELORES. It's a start. Here, eat this tuna fish sandwich so your brother don't have to eat alone.

WINSTON. Pop?! What kind of sandwich you want?

HOWARD. (*Off.*) Not hungry!

DELORES. He'll eat. It's a game we play every meal. Never hungry and he eats like a horse. (*Setting places at the counter.*)

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WINSTON. (*Calling.*) Dad? I really am sorry. I didn't mean to beat you! (*To Delores.*) Honestly, I didn't. The fun is in playing, being together in the middle of a garden, not winning. Tell him for me, will you? I mean, God, the man's sick--

MARISA LOUISE. He is not *sick!* Will you leave him alone? (*She goes to the screened-in porch. Winston gestures to Delores "What did I say?" and Delores gestures back "Don't worry about it, it's not your problem."*)

DELORES. Howie? You need anything, hon?

HOWARD. (*Off.*) No!

WINSTON. Have you looked at those old photographs very closely, Mother?

DELORES. No. They're part of Howie's life he wishes he could forget. So, I let him the best I can.

WINSTON. It's quite possible they could be important. Maybe even unique. I'll need to study them more closely. They could be quite a find. And he won't talk to me about them.

DELORES. What are they of--the unique ones.

WINSTON. Well, one has three sailors standing beside a telephone pole and a destroyed city behind, and on the pole is a sign. I can't be sure, but I think the words on the sign are "Atomic Field."

DELORES. (*She stops what she is doing.*) What in the world could that mean?

WINSTON. Has he told you anything about what he did after the war was over?

DELORES. Well, he stayed in the service for nine and a half more years following the war. Only after the war, he was in the Marines instead of the Navy.

WINSTON. The Marines? Seriously? I didn't know that. Why would he switch branches of the service?

DELORES. More money, I suppose. I don't know. Why don't you ask him?

WINSTON. He won't talk to me! He can't stand me, you know, all because of. . . It's frustrating. There're only two places I know

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where a sign that reads "Atomic Field" might be appropriate. Hiroshima or Nagasaki, Japan. (*Pause.*) Is it possible, do you think.

HOWARD. (*As he returns from the bedroom.*) Turkey breast, Della, light on the mayo, slice of tomato and some lettuce. And the answer to your question, son, is yes, it's possible. We anchored for six weeks in the harbor outside Nagasaki after the war.

WINSTON. You never told me this.

HOWARD. I didn't think you'd be interested.

WINSTON. Not interested! Dad, my dissertation topic was contemporary American History. One of my focal areas of study was the Jewish holocaust and its aftermath. You know that. Sheez.

HOWARD. I thought you were only interested in Vietnam. . . and Watergate, all that crap.

WINSTON. I'm not that provincial for God's sake.

HOWARD. So, I was wrong. Excuse my stupidity. If you want to know, we got to Nagasaki September 29. The bomb had been dropped in August. Yes, I saw it all. More than I ever needed to see, more than I ever hope to see again. What're you doing anyway? Writing a book or something? Marisa Louise? Come join us in here. We won't bite, we promise.

MARISA LOUISE. Leave me alone.

HOWARD. Come in here now. That's an order. (*Pause. Marisa Louise returns to the kitchen, bringing her half-eaten sandwich with her.*) Now look at this, Delores Elizabeth Boyd. Once again, one big happy family. Don't it make you feel all goosepimply inside? I called the club, son. We have an eight-thirty tee time in the morning. Don't disappoint me.

MARISA LOUISE. Can I come too? Please?

HOWARD. Well. . . sure. The more the merrier. I'll lick you both with one hand tied behind my back! And you can forget white flags! Don't mean squat in the game of golf!!

WINSTON. (*To his sister, grinning.*) S.N.F.M.

WINSTON/MARISA LOUISE. T.N.F.P.!! (*They are laughing. Delores is looking on in surprise as the lights change. Winston,*

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Delores, and Marisa Louise stand at the hibakusha station. Delores turns on the lectern light. Behind her we see a slide of a Nagasaki image.)

DELORES. *(Reading from a manuscript.)* It was very, very hot. I touched my skin and it just peeled right off. The driver of the streetcar was not in sight. I thought he had been quick to run away but now I think that he was probably hurled outside by the blast. It was around August 25 that a pile of my hair just fell off at once. I had a high fever and maggots infested my eyes. I've had two children, but I have not told them about this experience. And I don't want to talk about it. I have tried to avoid it until now. *(She steps aside. Winston takes the station.)*

WINSTON. *(Reading.)* My wife didn't know I was a victim of the A-bomb, a hibakusha, until she read about it in my diary. I didn't want to talk about it. Every year from the end of July to the beginning of August, I run a high fever and become ill. It was, it is a burden, though, but I just. . . I just have no more choice. *(He steps aside. Marisa Louise takes the station.)*

MARISA LOUISE. *(Reading.)* Several months later, I can remember, I remember a cold morning, I don't know why but my mother always kept a round hand mirror by my pillow which I picked up without thinking. I looked at my face and I saw something so shiny on the corner of my head. I called out to my mother who was in the kitchen, and I said, "Mother! My hair is growing back!" I'll never forget that day and the feel of the tears that my mother shed for me while she held me in her arms. *(She turns off the lectern light. Lights rise in the Long home. It is that night. Howard and Winston are listening to a spring training baseball game between the Atlanta Braves and Montreal Expos being broadcast over the radio. Marisa Louise is stretched out on the sofa, sketching in her pad.)*

HOWARD. Biggest mistake the Braves ever made was signing that guy, Andy Messerschmidt.

WINSTON. Or thinking they could get by with that new kid-- what's his name?

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HOWARD. Or letting Bob Horner fly the coop. You're not supposed to treat your heroes like that. Horner wasn't much of a third baseman, but when you can deliver in the clutch, you've got something real special. Know what I mean?

WINSTON. I got Horner's autograph. He signed the bill of my Braves cap and then some son of a bitch stole the cap out of my car. Where's he playing these days?

HOWARD. In Japan for all I know. He deserves better.

WINSTON. I'd love to go to Japan. What's it like?

HOWARD. Listen to the game.

WINSTON. No, tell me, what's Japan really like.

HOWARD. You expect me to know?

WINSTON. Yes. (*Pause.*) If I were a baseball player--like Horner? I'd choose to play over there, just to see a different part of the world.

MARISA LOUISE. I'm going abroad one of these days.

HOWARD. I thought you were asleep.

MARISA LOUISE. Sleep with that God-awful noise blasting away?

WINSTON. You don't have to listen to it. There are other rooms in the house you know. You have rooms of your own, too--at your place?

HOWARD. Leave your sister alone, bud. She's not bothering you.

WINSTON. How would you know? (*They listen to the game.*

After a moment.) So, what was Japan like?

HOWARD. You'll need to look someplace else for book material.

WINSTON. (*Taking the box of photos from his book bag.*) I believe there's a book right here in this box. More than that, I believe there just may be tenure and promotion in this little box. (*Howard stares at the box. After a beat, he rises.*) Where are you going?

HOWARD. Bathroom.

WINSTON. Game's not over.

HOWARD. Just pre-season. Who gives a . . . (*He leaves.*)

MARISA LOUISE. What'd you do that for?

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WINSTON. I didn't do anything.

MARISA LOUISE. You're so blind. Can't you see he doesn't want to talk about it? Whatever it is. Why can't you leave him alone?

WINSTON. Do you realize that in less than a year, our father will be dead?

MARISA LOUISE. Jesus, you're morbid. I don't want to think about that. I can't--

WINSTON. And I'm not asking you to. It's just that. . . when he dies, he'll take everything he's experienced with him. I can't let him do that.

MARISA LOUISE. Why not? Who are you to say--

WINSTON. He's a history text. There are things in him that need to be remembered, and I plan to attend to them if he'll just let me.

MARISA LOUISE. Maybe he doesn't want to remember them.

WINSTON. He has to. I mean, look at this. *(He takes out a photo. On the screen we see the three sailors standing next to a telephone pole with the sign above their heads.)* That's amazing. How old do you think Dad was in this photo? 1945. I figure he was nineteen.

MARISA LOUISE. You know, Winston, you don't come home much. And when you do come home, it's as if you don't realize that Mom and Dad have a life when you're not around. They do, you know. They live day by day--

WINSTON. I know that.

MARISA LOUISE. --day in, day out, just like you'd never been born, just like they'll do when your spring break's up and you're back in Carolina doing whatever it is you do.

WINSTON. Do you remember when you were nineteen?

MARISA LOUISE. When I was nineteen, I had my last surgery. It didn't work.

WINSTON. I didn't know that.

MARISA LOUISE. How could you know? You were in Canada by then. The doctors messed it all up. They tried to make my left leg as long as my right. All they gave me was another scar and thirty-eight weeks in bed plus a severe case of blisters from the crutches I used for half a year after that. So, I don't particularly

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enjoy remembering when I was nineteen and maybe Pop doesn't either. You should leave him alone and let him have his little secrets.

WINSTON. I can't.

MARISA LOUISE. Seems easy enough to do. You just say to yourself I'm not going to bother my father anymore. Be done with it.

WINSTON. Our history is who we are, Lou. Don't you realize that? Our parents define us just like we'll define our kids--

MARISA LOUISE. Not having any kids.

WINSTON. Marisa Louise. Ever wonder where your name came from?

MARISA LOUISE. Mother told me she had a pet dog named Louise when she was growing up.

WINSTON. Not it. This is your history, Sis, and it's not half bad. When Dad was seventeen, he met this woman. She worked the loom next to Dad at the cotton mill. They got along really well to hear Mother tell it. I've asked Dad about her, but he won't tell me a thing. Who knows. He might have actually loved her. This co-worker? Her name was Marisa Louise.

MARISA LOUISE. You're full of crap.

WINSTON. It's history, sis. Your history. It's important to know these things.

MARISA LOUISE. What else did Mother tell you?

WINSTON. Your conception. Did she tell you about that?

MARISA LOUISE. No. Do I want to know?

WINSTON. Listen, the historian doesn't control the truth. We seek it, we question it to make certain of its credibility, and once that's pretty well set, we accept it and go on. I'd think you'd want to know about your own personal history, your conception. Do you?

MARISA LOUISE. I don't know. Do I?

WINSTON. I was six months old. Mother was still just a baby herself, hardly past twenty. She was in bed with a headache late one afternoon and Pop--he was home on leave--came home from the mill filthy and stinking. He was filling in for Granddad while

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home, giving him a little vacation and picking up a little pocket money, I guess. He came in, covered with cotton lint and sweat. All he wanted was a hot shower and a good night's rest. But he came through the bedroom door, and there was our mother, lying on the bed with me nursing.

MARISA LOUISE. You are so full of crap.

WINSTON. Never argue with a historian. Of course, I have only one source for this information, Dad not caring to talk about it. So, I can't vouch for the truth of all this.

MARISA LOUISE. Mother wouldn't lie.

WINSTON. That much is absolute. Anyway, that was the night you were conceived, Lou. You should be proud of your remarkable beginning.

MARISA LOUISE. Well, I'm not. Why would she tell you such a thing anyway?

WINSTON. I asked.

MARISA LOUISE. You are such a sicko.

WINSTON. It's important. If we don't know who we were, how can we possibly know who we are. . . or who we might become? I was conceived during an electrical storm.

MARISA LOUISE. I cannot imagine my Mother and Father doing it.

WINSTON. There are two facts which prove they did.

MARISA LOUISE. There's only one thing wrong with your stories. Dad's sterile.

WINSTON. (*Beat*) Where'd you get that?

MARISA LOUISE. Mother. They did some tests at Kennestone and low and behold, Dad turns up. . . And our mother does not lie.

WINSTON. That changes things, doesn't it. (*Marisa Louise nods.*) It's just one damn mystery on top of another. I mean, how could our father leave home at eighteen, coming from the poorest family in all of Pickens County, and return ten years later with enough cash to buy a grocery store? You're not curious about where the money came from?

MARISA LOUISE. No. I don't think you should be either.

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WINSTON. Only one person knows, and he's dying of lung cancer. It's hateful to think of him going to his grave with so much stored away.

HOWARD. (*He has been standing in the semi-dark for quite some time.*) It was my salary. The branch of service I was in paid good. Who won?

WINSTON. Expos, I think. Do you always go around eavesdropping on people?

HOWARD. If it's said in my house, I guess it was meant for me to hear. What is it you want to know? Did I steal all that money? The answer--

WINSTON. Of course not--

HOWARD. --to that ridiculous question is "No, I did not, thank you very much." What a son I've got, thinks his old man's a thief.

WINSTON. I didn't--

HOWARD. We played poker, I was good at it, and my earnings, I sent home to your mother. Simple as that.

WINSTON. No one is that lucky at cards, Dad.

HOWARD. Well, I was. Now, what else do you want to know for this book of yours?

WINSTON. I want to know it all. Everything. I want to understand you as a young man. And not because of any book, either. I love you and want to know everything I possibly can about you. Maybe if I come to know you, I might know myself.

HOWARD. There are things best left forgotten, son. You'll understand someday. There are things in my past I'm not too terribly proud of, Winston, and I'd just as soon you'd leave those things alone.

WINSTON. You can't deny that--

HOWARD. I can deny anything I damn well please. (*Hatefully.*) Marisa Lou, if you're spending the night, you need to tell somebody.

MARISA LOUISE. No, I'm leaving. (*She stops at the door.*) You know, Daddy, one of these days you're not going to have me to push around anymore.

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HOWARD. I think it's the other way around. (*Marisa Louise exits. In a moment we hear her car leave. To Winston*) Where do you plan on sleeping tonight?

WINSTON. Sofa's fine. Why were you in Nagasaki? Were you part of the occupation?

HOWARD. Of course not. I was in the Navy. I was there because that's where my ship dropped anchor. You know where the bedding's kept. You want a pillow, there's one on the bed in the basement. You can sleep down there if you want.

WINSTON. No, this is fine. What was it like, Dad?

HOWARD. You've seen the pictures. Figure it out.

WINSTON. I want to hear it from you.

HOWARD. So, you can write this epic.

WINSTON. The book isn't important. It's there to be written, that's all. If there's a book in this and it gets published, great. If not, that's okay too. I'm not convinced I can write a book, but it's worth a try. And I'll do it whether you talk to me or not.

HOWARD. So, it's yourself you're concerned with. Typical.

WINSTON. I don't know. What the hell, Dad?

HOWARD. (*After a pause.*) They say. . . Hell is a burning inferno. Little do they know. Hell is what's left after the inferno's burnt itself out. . . Hell is seeing things you never suspected you'd be led to see and smelling things, like burned human flesh left four weeks in the sun, and hearing things. . . like silence. (*He sighs.*) Hell is being exhausted and knowing that in just a couple of hours, you've got to get yourself up out of bed and feed your offspring a slice of humble pie on the golf course. Rest up. You'll need all the energy you've got come morning. (*He leaves. Winston is alone. He enters the hibakusha station, but does not turn on the lamp. Behind him we see an image of the mushroom cloud that rose over Nagasaki that day so long ago. The image slowly fades along with the lights.*)

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS –
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