

M.O.M.

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KELLY, a woman in her forties, enters and stands before a white marble military headstone.

KELLY

Been a bit, eh? Shit. I forgot the flowers. I suck. I'll be right back.

She exits. We hear a car trunk open and, after a beat, shut. She returns with a bottle of water and napkins.

How about I shower you? You're looking old.

Kelly pours the water over the headstone and uses the napkin to wipe away the dirt.

Oh, great. It's disintegrating.

She uses the bottom of her shirt to wipe the remnants of the napkin off.

Can you imagine if I took off my shirt? That'd be hard to explain. I'll bring baking soda by. It cleans everything. You'll be beautiful again before you know it.

She watches it dry.

Jessica joined the Marines today. Tom blames me. He believes my love for you has guided her into harm's way. You never met her. She met your sister once, twice, maybe... I had to cut Maisy off. It was hard to see her. She just reminded me of you. Jess is the best. The best person I know. Really. I'm not surprised she wants to be of service. I just... thought she'd be a doctor. I don't believe in God. You know this. I did Jesus... a little, maybe... once. Because there could've been a guy, a superior human being named "Jesus." Like a "Martin Luther King" type? That everyone followed, and then others wrote about... But was he the son of God? A God! The one man... directing all of us. Tom believes this. So did you!

She touches the top of the headstone.

I have felt watched and taken care of sometimes, and I know that's odd, so I don't say it. Often. Today when she came home after enlisting. She looked at me. She looked at me with such pride. She didn't look at Tom. Not once. She went on and on about why it was important to her, just to me. She said it all to me. Not to him. So, he blames me.

She steps back.

I blame you.

Struggling, she covers her eyes. Her cell phone rings.

Guarantee that's Tom or my mom. I don't have to get it.

Beat.

I probably do—one sec.

She answers the call.

Hi Mom. Oh, she did? No, I know. (beat) I was going to... call. Well, she just told us. (Beat) I am... happy. Yes. Proud. (She takes a deep breath.) I'm sorry... I'm driving... can I call you back. When I get home? I don't know, ten minutes. Sure. (Beat) Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. (Beat) I'll call you.

She puts the phone away.

Sorry, I had to lie. I haven't been in... years. I couldn't get into with her before I told you... why.

“I can't see you anymore.” Remember that? My “goodbye” note. I left it in a Ziploc here for all the world to see. Proof I was moving on. I snuck out the night before the wedding, kind of like today. It didn't work. Then, or ever before. I still feel you. In me. With me. You're gone, but...

She touches her chest with both hands.

“It gets better with time.” People still say that. Except it doesn't. I never saw you again. Missing you didn't stop with knowing you were dead. Missing you accumulated with every day you didn't walk in the door. Time never fixed that. Not in twenty-five years.

I will always be in love with two people. Anyone who says you can't. Never has been. And you know what sucks? Jessie is you. And Tom is her father. We made her two years after you died, but she is like you. So much. Why? You died with Tara. She was your girlfriend. She was in the car. Yet, I was your widow. Everyone treated me like that. And I loved Tom. I love Tom. I was with Tom... for over a year when you died. But I lost you, and it hurt. I still needed you, and everyone knew it. Not daily, maybe... I don't know. I just needed to know you were smiling, cooking, climbing, and accumulating credit card debt. Whatever. We had broken up, but you were my first... person. My person.

(Beat)

I'll be right back.

She exits in a hurry. A minute or two passes, and when she returns, she smiles. Then, she proudly places a small stone on top of the headstone.

I attended a Jewish funeral, and the family placed rocks on the grave. The wind won't blow this away. No watering necessary.

Her head falls.

I should be proud of her. But I lied. I've been living a lie. She is trying to fill the space you left—the one of honor, service, and patriotism. But honestly, I hated that part of you. Jesus. We broke up over it. That's not the point. That is not why I'm here.

Her phone rings again.

Jesus Christ. I'm not answering it. (Beat) I should see who it is.

She sighs.

It's Tom. I can't lie to him. I swear, I make everything messy. (Beat) I'll just text him quickly.

She texts.

I said I was ordering a cake. Not sure why I said that because now I must do that. I'm so scared, Bud. I never bought into—God, country... whatever. I wanted to come first. Sorry, I did. I still do. But now she wants to be that. For me. Do I have to put a flag on it?

She takes a moment to touch the etching on the stone.

Oh, I know. I can put her truck... with a little Marine logo. She drives a ridiculous truck. You would love it. A RAM... 1500? I don't know what it's called. Big. It's called BIG. I wouldn't let her get a JEEP. Although she begged and screamed, and Tom wanted to give in, eventually, she saw this enormous red thing. And she let go of the tin can JEEP idea. Now she blares Christian rap all over town. Some guy named NF. You'd like him. I might... if I could understand what he was saying. I know this much. He talks about guns and killings on the streets of Michigan. The songs are sad. Why does she want to hold a gun? Why did you? I don't get it. You were a Marine, but not during wartime. Not post 9/11, Afghanistan, Iraq, or Trump's presidency. I know you would've joined today... too. I know that. But Bud... you never had a kid. It hurts to let them walk out of the house. Period. And if you had seen your parents. Your parents! Their grief was.

I was at Stop and Shop when Maisy called. I rushed to your house. Your folks were heading to the funeral home. The next part is odd. They invited me. To help pick out your casket and grave. Even odder. I was ecstatic to have a job. I didn't grasp that you were dead till about six months later. Grief took its time to creep up on me. I still cried without knowing why, but when my body

and mind got on the same page. I was sick. Sick. Like all the time. I got sick with any illness that would have me. Suppose someone had the stomach flu in my zip code. I got it. Bronchitis that turns into pneumonia, my body was like, sure!

In the car, I saw your father fade. Fade. He turned a different color. He gave up a shade of himself. And your mom. Her skin was crawling. I've seen that now. She couldn't rest, her arms were reaching, and she kept looking at me, and I couldn't... I couldn't relate. I loved you, but I was not your mom. The pain was traveling through her like a freight train. Nothing and no one could calm the current of hurt. I helped them pick out everything. It was absurd. I had to encourage them on where I thought you would like to have a plot. Insane. I helped them determine how much they should or shouldn't spend on a casket. A casket. I can't recall how it all went down except that it was a matter of fact. I felt I had to be because they were inconsolable and forced into planning. The headstone was easy. It was what most Marines get—this handsome white marble memorial. I know you must love it. That much we got right.

It starts to drizzle.

I don't mind getting wet.

Then rains.

You were ripped from our every day, and we all shattered into little pieces. Then my memory collected our past as proof of your existence. My memory accepted the loss by making you precious. Automatically precious. So precious. I made Jess go to every parade. I cried when any firefighter passed. I put your photo up on Veteran's Day. This is the story she grew up with. She believes in service. I never told her. I loved you. I loved you, and you died. That's why I adore everything. Every day that lets me honor you. Tom is her father, and I slowly dripped someone else's story into her bones.

She touches her chest with both hands.

I can't...

Lightning lights up the sky.

Well, hello! I should go.

Thunder rumbles and then cracks.

I need God to protect Jessie and Tom to forgive the love I saved for you.

She secures the rock she found.

Amen?

The rain stops. She looks up and then softly kisses the top of the headstone.

Please do it for me.

She cleans up pieces of napkin from the ground and then exits.

We hear a car door open and shut. A few minutes pass. Then we hear the car start up and slowly drive off.

End of Play