

## ON THE ROAD TO TIKRIT

### Synopsis

An American soldier fighting in Iraq suddenly finds himself in a no man's land. Confused and searching for his lost friend, he reflects on the mysterious terrain between life and death

## On The Road to Tikrit

A young soldier is smoking a cigarette while sitting on a black box on an otherwise bare stage. He is dressed in Army fatigue pants, black military boots, a sleeveless undershirt with dangling dog tags. He is a handsome, everyman soldier-warrior. He speaks with a sweet lilting Louisiana drawl.

SOLDIER

I wish I could quit these things. If my daddy saw me puffin', one after another like this, he'd have my ass for lunch. "Don't you start with those cancer sticks, boy. Don't be stupid like your old man," ... I did pretty good stayin' away from these things. That is, until the first time I seen somebody blown up right in front'a me. You ain't never ready for that shit! Closest I ever come to seein' blood run like that was huntin' deer back home in Lafayette ... But a deer ain't no human. A deer dies sad-eyed and quiet-like. A man, he dies screamin' for his mamma and his God. At least that's what I seen. And I ain't put these down since.

(Looks at his cigarette, drops it to the floor and stamps it out.)

Guess you're wonderin' what I'm doin' here all by myself. Well, I don't rightly know. I just woke up and found myself in this place, which frankly, I don't know what place it is ... And, man, it's cold here. Lost my shirt and jacket somewhere ... I'm sure Horace must be waitin' on me. I swear that boy'd get lost in a phone booth without me. No use kickin', though ... Way I look at it, if there ain't a bunch'a strangers tryin' to blow my head off, then this is an okay place for now ... I need a break anyways.

I'll be honest, I didn't really wanna come. I mean, nobody wants to go to war - unless they got a heart'a stone and a likin' for blood - which I don't. I joined the Army to travel. Ain't much to see in Lafayette. And the recruiter, well, he sucked me right in, you know?

"Son, you like basketball?"

"Oh, yes sir. Sure do."

"Well then, let me tell you, we got our own team. Play all over

the world, not just in shit-kickin' towns like this."

I looked at that man like he was Moses ready to lead my ass to the Promised Land.

"Oh, I can make a ball dance up and down the court, sir. I ain't lyin'."

Sgt. Dorset looked at me hard, and I felt somethin' there. Like a connection, you know? Like here was a man - cut and strong and lookin' fine in that uniform - and I knew I wanted to *be* that man. So we walked off to the recruitin' office and I signed my life over to him ... Now here I am - wherever *here* is. And, know what? I ain't seen a basketball since then. Ha!

(He reaches in his pocket and pulls out a piece of bubble gum.)

Ya believe I still got a taste for bubble gum? Momma sent me a whole tub of it.

(He blows a bubble.)

Hope I get home before it runs out ... We'll see. 'Cause right now? We're definitely in stupidity mode here ... Don't get me wrong. I know why we had to come and set things straight. I mean after what they did to us. We gotta fight 'em here so we don't have to fight 'em at home. That's what Lt. Larsen keeps sayin'. But things ain't goin' too good right now. Turns out they ain't shocked and we sure ain't awed. And those weapons of mass destruction are still missing in action ...

Hey, 'member when I said there wasn't much to see in Lafayette? Well, I wish I could see all that nothin' right now. Daddy, momma, sis. Funny how a man thinks he's gotta push home far away and take another road in life, follow a bunch of strangers who talk a good game. Well, I found out nothin' will turn a man into a cryin' baby faster than when he yearns for the home he left behind.

(Blows another bubble.)

Now, don't get me wrong. Me and momma, we used to butt heads. She's the nervous type - always thinkin' somethin' bad's gonna happen, worryin' like hell about me and my sister - who by the way, is a livin' saint. I used to get upset when momma worried so much. Made me feel like somethin' bad really was gonna happen to me 'cause she was thinkin' on it so much. Gave me the creeps. When I told her I joined the Army, she slapped me across the

face so hard my head 'bout fell on the kitchen floor.

"Damn you!" she said.

"But momma, I'm gonna play basketball for a real team where everybody's got new uniforms, not raggedy-ass stuff."

"Boy, you got shit for brains. Who gave you that line of bull crap? You bring me to him right now!"

And sure enough she dragged me down to that recruitin' office and made me point out Sgt. Dorset. She went right up in his face and told him he was no kind'a man to go pickin' poor boys off the street to send them to fight a rich man's war. I nearly crawled under Sgt. Dorset's desk. Never seen such a big strong man get so small, so fast.

Didn't matter, though. Momma finally met her match: the U.S. Army. 'Cause they carted my ass off to boot camp the very day they said they would, even though momma cursed them all to hell and back.

Funny, I couldn't wait to get away from her. Couldn't wait to be my own man. Now, when I close my eyes at night, I see her ... And, never thought I would, but I miss her.

(He takes the gum out of his mouth,  
puts it back in the wrapper.)

I'll save this for later ... Yeah, I wasn't afraid'a 'nothin' back in Lafayette. But things are different here. I don't know if this is a rich man's war, like momma said, but when you're out on the streets, so scared you're almost peein' yourself, you don't care whose war it is. You're not thinkin' about makin' Baghdad safe for democracy. You're just tryin' to keep all your body parts attached and your head on straight ... Maybe momma was right. Maybe I really do have shit for brains ...

(He starts to shiver.)

Damm! It's cold. I wish I knew where my jacket was ... You know, I'm really losin' patience here. I ain't seen one single soul since I woke up. I'm startin' to get fightin' mad. And when that happens, I get strong. I got so mad at my daddy once, I took the back door right off the hinges. Man, me and my pop, we had some doozies, too. But I'll tell ya, don't let anybody say somethin' bad about me. 'Cause he'll take right after 'em ... Yep, he was so happy first time he saw me in my uniform. Not like momma. She wouldn't even look at me. But pop was different. He stepped back and said: "My, my, the Army sure can polish up a turd real

good." ... Uh, that actually was pop's way of givin' me a compliment. I think he was proud of me ...

I don't understand why I ain't seein' nobody. I need to get back to my unit and check on Horace. Last time I saw him ... Let me think now ... Yeah, we was sittin' together in the Humvee, on the road to Tikrit, from Mosul. You know, what they call the Suni Triangle. Bad place, man. You gotta stick with your partner like beans and rice, 'cause one man ain't got enough eyes to see all the shit comin' at you ... So, yeah that's it. We was riding down this road that looked like the surface of, I don't know, Mars? And we was bouncin' up and down like on a carnival ride. Thought I was gonna lose my teeth, when ... SHIT! ... JESUS FUCKIN' CHRIST! ... an RPG comes smashin' through the window and, FUCK ME! it lodges in the door right next to Horace. I can't believe the fucker didn't explode. But there it was, just a tickin' fuckin' bomb. And I start screamin' ... GRAB THAT FUCKIN' THING! And fuckin' Horace! Fuck him! ... He's just like FROZEN! And now everything just goes into slow motion. I'm lookin' at Horace. He's PARALYZED! And then I'm lookin' at the RPG and flippin' out! ... YO! MOTHERFUCKE! GRAB THAT THING AND TOSS IT, MAN! Horace finally wakes the fuck up and goes for it ... And then ... I, I don't know ... I don't ... remember ...

(He stops. Moves his head from side to side, as if he's just realizing where he is and what's happened to him. Now there's a hint of panic. Finally, he falls back onto the black box, then let's out a laugh that starts quietly then builds.)

Ha! Ha! Ha! ... HA! HA! HA! Oh man ... Oh ... How 'bout dem apples? I guess Horace fucked up ... Sweet Jesus ...

You know, I ain't never wanted to hurt nobody ... not even that asshole who fired the RPG into our Humvee. It's just that sometimes you realize you're lost and need directions. So you stop and ask a guy for help. And he tells ya that what you need to do is take that right turn just up ahead.

"Yeah, Yeah, ya go right up there and turn by the gas station, see? Right over there."

And this guy is actin' like he's so damn sure that turn's gonna take ya where ya need to go. But you're not sure, right? You're

tryin' to figure out ... does he really know what the hell he's talkin' about? Or is he just tellin' me some bullshit 'cause he ain't got no clue, but he still has to be the man with all the answers.

So, like a goddamn moron, you fall for it. And you take that road to fuckin' hell.

Well, let me give you all some good advice ...

Listen to your mamma ... 'cause *that* woman will never send you down the wrong road - ever.

(He gets up, takes out his pack of smokes and pulls out a cigarette.)

Last one.

(He crumples the pack, throws it on the ground and lights the cigarette. Lights fade to black as he takes a long, slow drag and blows out the smoke.)