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Harm's Way

Drama by Shem Bitterman



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Harm's Way

Drama. By Shem Bitterman. Cast: 4m., 2w. The story begins in Fort Belvoir, Virginia, where Major Jonathan Fredericks, a widower, lives with his troubled daughter, Bianca. Fredericks is a career army prosecutor charged with investigating soldiers for war crimes. His son, who was also in the military, was recently killed in Afghanistan. Bianca, tortured by her brother's sudden death, now makes it her mission to protect the boys her father is charged with prosecuting. With this in mind, she seeks out Nick Granville, a young soldier who has been charged with a heinous crime. Bianca convinces Nick to run away with her in order to save himself. They take off for Montana where Nick hopes to get help from his former commander, Sergeant Samuel Havesford. Fredericks gets leave to search for the young couple. But Constance Durell, the reporter who broke Nick's story, offers Fredericks her reporter's tracking expertise in exchange for an exclusive, and his desperation forces him to take her along. Soon they are romantically entwined despite their vast ideological differences. The impending tragedy builds to an inescapable conclusion that topples all their worlds in a cataclysm of violence and heartbreak, and Fredericks is forced to reassess both himself and the actions of his country. *Area staging. Approximate running time: 2 hours. Code: HA5.*

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HARM'S WAY

By
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Harm's Way was first produced in Los Angeles by Circus Theatricals, December 1, 2007 to March 15, 2008, artistic director, Jack Stehlin, managing director, Jeannine Wisnosky Stehlin.

Major Jonathan Fredericks Jack Stehlin
Bianca Fredericks Katie Lowes
Private Nick Granville Ben Bowan
Colonel Hank Davis Eric Pierpoint
Connie Durell Wendy Makkena
Sergeant Samuel Havesford Josh Allen

Director. Steve Zuckerman
Lighting Design Derrick McDaniel
Set Design Rachel Myers
Costume Design Kitty Rose
Stage Manager Leah Roobini

Harm's Way was first produced in New York City by Circus Theatricals at the 45th Street Theatre, October 11, 2008 to November 9, 2008, artistic director, Jack Stehlin, managing director, Jeannine Wisnosky Stehlin.

Major Fredericks Jack Stehlin
Bianca Fredericks. Sarah Foret
Private Nick Granville Ben Bowan
Colonel Hank Davis Eric Pierpoint
Connie Durell Wendy Makkena
Sergeant Samuel Havesford Josh Allen

Director. Steve Zuckerman
Lighting Design Derrick McDaniel
Original Music. Roger Bellon
Costume Design Kitty Rose
Stage Manager Julie Watson

HARM'S WAY

CHARACTERS

MAJOR JONATHAN FREDERICKS 40s, a member
of the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Department

BIANCA FREDERICKS 21, his daughter

PRIVATE NICK GRANVILLE 19, just returned from
Iraq

COLONEL HANK DAVIS 50s, head of CID

CONSTANCE DURREL 30s, one of the last
freelance American reporters working in Iraq

SERGEANT SAMUEL HAVESFORD 21, recently
discharged, a veteran of Iraq

The action takes place in Fort Belvoir, Virginia, also in various locations on the road and in the Anaconda mountains, in Montana.

The time is summer, 2004.

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

(Summer 2004. A book-lined study in a middle-class home on base at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. MAJOR JONATHAN FREDERICKS, back ramrod straight, hair shorn, illuminated by a single lamp, cleans and oils the parts of a disassembled gun, his back to an open door. He works with quiet care, like a priest performing his devotions. After a moment, BIANCA FREDERICKS appears. She is physically frail, a result of having been born prematurely, with piercing eyes and an oddly tentative manner. She hesitates, then creeps forward, playing with the torn-out pocket of an old shirt, as she watches, holding silent.)

MAJOR *(without turning; as he works)*. You're standing at— *(She startles. He considers.)* 0100. *(She moves subtly.)* 1100. *(She moves again.)* Straight up—1200.

BIANCA. You're amazing.

MAJOR. Long training. *(Beat.)* Did you think I didn't notice you?

BIANCA. Of course not, Father.

MAJOR. Come ahead if you want.

BIANCA *(comes closer, sees the gun, freezes)*. That was Charlie's.

MAJOR. You recognize it?

BIANCA. I thought they had to turn them in.

MAJOR. This was his own.

BIANCA. His own?

MAJOR. His private one.

BIANCA. Oh. *(Beat.)* Is that allowed?

MAJOR. Of course it's allowed. Why wouldn't it be allowed?

BIANCA. But not to take into battle.

MAJOR. No. *(Beat.)* Oh, I see. No, not into battle. *(Beat.)*

BIANCA. Why is it here?

MAJOR. I was thinking I'd make a present of it.

BIANCA. A present? To who?

MAJOR. To *whom*. *(Beat.)* To you, actually.

BIANCA. What would I do with it?

MAJOR. You could go to the range.

BIANCA. Why would I want to do that?

MAJOR. I find it relaxing.

BIANCA. It's true. You do. *(He turns to look at her. She returns a half-smile, uneasy with his eyes on her.)*

MAJOR. You're like your mother.

BIANCA. Really?

MAJOR. She hated guns.

BIANCA. I don't hate them—

MAJOR. Saw the need of them—hated the fact of them.

BIANCA. I don't hate them, Father.

MAJOR. What's that you're fiddling with? *(He takes the piece of fabric from her hands.)* You've been going through those boxes again.

BIANCA. A little.

MAJOR. Bianca, I've told you—

BIANCA. I know, I'm sorry.

MAJOR. What is it you're hoping to find?

BIANCA. I don't know.

MAJOR. I'm going to throw all that stuff away.

BIANCA. Please—don't.

MAJOR. It's not healthy—

BIANCA. I won't. Ever again. I promise. (*Beat.*) Can I have it back now? (*He relents, hands it back, returns to the gun.*)

MAJOR. I don't know why you need these things, Bianca.

BIANCA. If it doesn't harm anyone—

MAJOR. I didn't say—

BIANCA. It doesn't harm anyone.

MAJOR. I suppose. (*He sighs.*)

BIANCA. You're tired.

MAJOR. Was there something you wanted?

BIANCA. I don't mean to annoy you.

MAJOR. I'm working, that's all.

BIANCA (*hesitates*). The boy.

MAJOR. Boy?

BIANCA. The new one—the one you're interviewing tomorrow. Private Granville?

MAJOR. You've been in my files again.

BIANCA. No, no, it wasn't like that. It was just, you left your appointment book sitting open on the dining room table and I was cleaning, and, and...

MAJOR. What about him, Bianca?

BIANCA. Will he—be all right?

MAJOR. Of course he will. Why wouldn't he be?

BIANCA. You're interviewing him.

MAJOR. Yes, and...?

BIANCA. And sometimes when you interview boys—when you interview boys—they don't come back.

MAJOR. Ah. I see.

BIANCA. That won't happen this time, will it?

MAJOR. I hope not. (*Beat.*) No, of course not.

BIANCA. "Of course not" or "I hope not"?

MAJOR. Bianca—

BIANCA. Because they're not the same: "of course" and "I hope."

MAJOR. He'll be fine, Bianca. (*Beat.*) He'll be fine.

BIANCA (*calms*). Good. (*Beat.*) Good. (*She turns to go.*)

MAJOR. And you?

BIANCA (*pauses*). Me?

MAJOR. Will *you* be fine?

BIANCA. Why wouldn't I be?

MAJOR. All this—attention—you lavish—on total strangers. You make everyone your cause. (*Beat.*) It doesn't help.

BIANCA. Help what?

MAJOR. You. Or them for that matter.

BIANCA. I know.

MAJOR. Then why do you persist?

BIANCA. I don't know. (*An edge.*) What's wrong with me?

MAJOR (*sensing it*). Nothing's wrong with you.

BIANCA. Something is.

MAJOR. You're fine.

BIANCA. I'm working to be better.

MAJOR. You don't need to work to be better.

BIANCA. You're *wrong*. I do. You said it yourself. I shut myself in, I don't have friends—

MAJOR. You have friends.

BIANCA. I read too much, I'm overweight—

MAJOR. You're not.

BIANCA. Have bumps on my skin, on my arms, I can't play tennis like Charlie could—

MAJOR. Bianca—

BIANCA. I need to be more like Charlie was.

MAJOR. No.

BIANCA. Yes, yes, Charlie was good at everything.

MAJOR. Charlie was *not* good at everything.

BIANCA. He was.

MAJOR. No, Charlie wasn't. Charlie went and got himself killed. That's not being good at everything, is it?

BIANCA. In *battle*.

MAJOR. Friendly fire.

BIANCA. Friendly? How can fire be friendly?

MAJOR. That's just what they call it, Bianca. If they could think of another name for it, they would. (*Takes her hand.*) I know, it's confusing, but see, Charlie wasn't careful and Charlie got himself killed and that's all there is to it, okay? I don't want you thinking about Charlie anymore or worrying about Charlie or comparing yourself to Charlie. Charlie was Charlie and you're you. You have nothing to do with one another.

BIANCA. But that's his gun.

MAJOR. I know.

BIANCA. And you're giving it to me.

MAJOR. To be careful with, not to *be* Charlie.

BIANCA. Do you hate him?

MAJOR. Of course not!

BIANCA. Sometimes the way you talk about him—

MAJOR. Charlie is—Charlie was—was a hero, that's all. He was just a hero who never got to—to be a hero. Sometimes it happens that way. But he's still a hero, right?

BIANCA (*nods*). I guess.

MAJOR. I'll put his gun away. I won't give it to you.

You're right, it was a bad idea. The world is dangerous for a young girl, that's all, so I thought—

BIANCA. I'll be safe.

MAJOR. I know, I know you will.

BIANCA. I won't make a mistake like Charlie did.

MAJOR. Good. (*Beat.*) Now go to your room. Go change.

We'll eat off base and see a movie. See what's in the paper. We'll see anything you want.

BIANCA. I already know. (*Beat.*) *Spirit.* (*Beat.*)

MAJOR. *Spirit* is for children, Bianca. (*Off her disappointment.*) All right. We'll see *Spirit*.

BIANCA. Really?!! (*He nods. She hugs him like a child.*) I love you, Father. (*She goes. He stares after and then down at the gun. Sighs. Blackout.*)

SCENE 2

(*The next day. CID headquarters—Fort Belvoir. MAJOR's office. Desk. Law books. PRIVATE NICK GRANVILLE is already seated, head bowed, waiting. He's in uniform, wearing weathered army boots. MAJOR enters with a purposeful stride.*)

MAJOR. Soldier.

NICK (*leaps to his feet, salutes*). Sir, yes, sir.

MAJOR. At ease, soldier. This is an informal—preliminary—meeting. Sit. (*MAJOR gestures him back to his chair then sits as well. He pulls out a yellow legal pad,*

makes himself comfortable.) How long have you been stateside, son?

NICK. Three days, sir.

MAJOR. Enjoying the break? *(Beat.)* From combat? *(Beat.)* How was it over there? *(Beat.)* Whenever you're ready, son. *(Beat.)*

NICK. Sir, I don't know what to say, sir.

MAJOR. This isn't a test. Just tell me. In your own words.

NICK. Do I have a choice?

MAJOR. I'm sorry?

NICK. Do I have to say something?

MAJOR. Of course not.

NICK. Then I'd prefer not to, sir.

MAJOR. All right. *(Beat.)*

NICK. When can I go back, sir?

MAJOR. Back?

NICK. To my crew. They need me, sir. *(Beat.)*

MAJOR. Your squad members are all stateside now, son. Their tour is done. You know that, don't you?

NICK. Sergeant Applebee said we'd be going right back in, sir. He said "right back in."

MAJOR. Well, "right back in" is a relative term.

NICK. "Relative term"? *(Beat.)* What's that? What's that mean?

MAJOR. It just means that it might not be happening all that quickly, son.

NICK *(considers this)*. Then I'd like to request a transfer, sir. I'd like to go back with another crew, sir, on the next transport plane. There's a lot still to be done over there—and I would like—love—the opportunity to do it.

MAJOR. Don't you want to take some time? You've been over there for more than a year.

NICK. That's not necessary, sir.

MAJOR. You don't have anyone you'd like to visit here in the states? Some family?

NICK. I have family, sir. *(Beat.)* We don't get along.

MAJOR. I'm sorry to hear that. But surely after a year apart—

NICK. The last time I saw my dad he tried to kill me, sir.

MAJOR. To kill you?

NICK. With a chain, sir. He was drunk, sir.

MAJOR. Had you done something?

NICK. Sir, I was trying to take away his bottle, sir. *(Beat.)*

MAJOR. Please, you don't need to keep calling me sir. Look, try this, call me Major Fredericks. And may I call you Nick?

NICK. I don't care what you call me. But I'd prefer to call you sir, if you don't mind, sir. *(Beat.)*

MAJOR. Nick, do you know why you're here?

NICK. Am I in some kind of trouble, sir?

MAJOR. Not necessarily.

NICK. The guys at the barracks said if I was seeing you over at CID I must be in some kind of trouble.

MAJOR. Is that gum?

NICK. I'm sorry?

MAJOR. Are you chewing gum?

NICK. It's my tongue, sir. I chew on it sometimes. *(Beat.)* When I'm nervous.

MAJOR. Nick, how'd you come to join the Army?

NICK. I was working, sir, had a good job, very good job, at a 7-Eleven. Do you know the 7-Elevens, sir?

MAJOR. Yes, Nick, I'm aware of the 7-Elevens.

NICK. Real good job. But, sir, I couldn't keep the job on account of my dad had a fist fight with the manager, sir.

And that was the third good job I had had that year and always my dad managed to find a way to ruin it. He's homeless, sir. Sleeps in an airshaft in a shut-down factory off a spur line that doesn't run no more. I was homeless too as a kid. Partway, anyway. I mean, when he worked at the Taco Bell we used to come in at night after it was closed and sleep in there. But that was back when my dad had it together, sir. Now the crank, sir, the meth, has hold of him and when he needs his fix, sir—well, I try to be good, to take care, but sometimes it's just so I have to get away from my dad because every good job I get—as soon as he hears I'm making good money—he just shows up and makes trouble. (*Beat.*) Then one day I'm walking through the mall and I see this recruiting station, right by the Orange Julius, you know, and I think to myself, “The only place he can't follow is the Army,” so that's why I'm here, sir, I guess.

MAJOR. I see.

NICK. I want to go back in, sir, to Bagdad. There's nothing for me here, sir. When can I get back?

MAJOR. In time, Nick.

NICK. So I *am* in trouble. (*Beat.*) Is it because of Al Kut?

MAJOR. What about Al Kut?

NICK. I dunno, I mean, you know, when a person, you know, risks their life for a country so that people can have, you know, cars and stuff, then I think it's a mistake to say that the people who are fighting are like messing up and stuff, you know—

MAJOR. Is that what happened over there?

NICK. Because, like, you've been over there—

MAJOR. Actually, I haven't.

NICK. —it's harsh. And like coming back, sir, is like another world. You can't be on this side of coming back and judge the things that we had to do on that side.

MAJOR. I understand your feeling.

NICK. Then why am I here?

MAJOR. Right now we're just having a conversation.

NICK. A conversation?

MAJOR. That's right, a simple conversation. About the night of May 17th in Al Kut.

NICK. No one just has a conversation, sir. I haven't had fucking conversation number one since I've been in the fucking army, sir.

MAJOR. Nick—

NICK. Tried once—when I first got over there—they shot me down.

MAJOR. Nick—

NICK. Docked my pay, three months. Insubordination. I learned my lesson but good. You can't question it, just have to do what they tell you to do. Dump shit in an old barrel, soak it in gasoline and stir it while it burns.

MAJOR. The night in Al Kut. The night of May 17th.

NICK. You think we kept a calendar, sir?

MAJOR. The night of May 17th. The night of the raid on the home of Abdul Kalik.

NICK. They didn't have names, sir.

MAJOR. Abdul Kalik.

NICK. They didn't have names.

MAJOR. Major Fredericks. My name. Major Fredericks.

NICK. Hajjis, sand niggers, ragheads, okay? That's all they are. I want to go back to my crew, sir. Let me go back to my crew.

MAJOR. There is no crew to go back to.

NICK. Then reassign me. Reassign me, sir. Reassign me, *Major Fredericks. (Beat.)*

MAJOR. Soldier, I want a detailed account of what took place that night, the night of May 17, in the home of Abdul Kalik, in Al Kut. I want it in my hands at 0800 tomorrow. Are we understood? *(Beat.)* Are we *understood*, soldier?

NICK *(jumps to his feet, salutes)*. Sir, yes, sir, thank you, sir.

MAJOR. In the meantime, soldier, you're confined to base. Dismissed. *(NICK turns sharply on his heels, goes. MAJOR sits, rubs his eyes, takes out a hand-held tape recorder, presses "record." Dictates.)* The boy—and he is a boy—is frightened. He comes into a room and his eyes will not settle. They will not meet mine. He doesn't know what's expected of him. May 17, Al Kut. *(Beat.)* Everything depends on that. *(Blackout.)*