WALLS

JEANNIE BARROGA

Copyright © 1989 by Jeannie Barroga. All rights reserved. Inspired by Jan Scruggs's book To Heal a Nation. A nation thanks you. Walls was premiered at the Asian American Theater Company, San Francisco, directed by Marian Li with original cast members Geneva Baskerville, Eric Cazenave, Janis Chow, Ron Dorn, Sharon Iwai, David Kudler, William Hammond, Michael Racela, James Reese, Charles Robinson, Lewis Sims, Maura Vaughn, April–June 1989.
Walls

Time: 1982 to 1984
Place: The Wall, Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial Fund office, press conferences, various settings

CHARACTERS
TERRY, vet, white, remains onstage throughout the play as lone color-bearer
DAVE, African American, Stu’s buddy, never served
STU, Asian American, posttraumatic shock syndrome
JULIE, white (or any), protested in the 1960s
SARAH, African American, former nurse
MORRIS, African American, paraplegic
VI, Asian American, news reporter
RICH, any race, Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial Fund representative
MAYA, Asian American, twenties, architect
SCRUGGS, white, foremost promoter for memorial to veterans
CARHART, any race, vet opposing the Wall
DAN, Asian American, twenties, a ghost in fatigues
JERRY, any race, twenties, also a ghost in fatigues
various OFFSTAGE VOICES, SOLDIERS 1 and 2, MAN, WOMAN, WWII VET, HIPPIE

ACT ONE Scene 1
(VOICE:) They shall not grow old
As we, that are left, grow old
Age shall not worry them
Nor years condemn.
At the going down of the sun
and in the morning—
We shall remember them.

Scene 2
TERRY: For Jimmy-boy, for Mark, for Stevie, and Joe . . . Here we go boys. (He hoists flag into place.)

DAVE: Come on, Al, cover for me, okay? . . . Just tell the man Dave’s uncle died or Dave’s sick, I don’t care. . . . Stu and me are in Washington. . . . Something I gotta do, man, so tell him, okay? Tell him that for me.

JULIE: I’m leaving our class picture with this letter at the wall for everyone to read. Two boyfriends gone, two reasons for pain and regret. And someone’s got to know that. Someone’s got to tell me why that is.

SARAH: Baby, you be home on time after school. Carrots, celery, cookies, lemon pound cake. No messing around, you hear? Going to the Wall . . . I’ll be back by supper.

VI: “Event: Announcement by the Vietnam Veterans’ Memorial Fund of winning design of a memorial to be placed on the Mall to honor Vietnam Veterans. Location, American Institute of Architects, 1735 New York Avenue Northwest, Washington, D.C.”

VOICE: The material used for constructing this memorial is polished black granite imported from India. Approximately 150 panels were cut into three-inch thick blocks, the shortest panel being eight inches tall, the highest ten and a half feet, the largest panel weighing three thousand pounds.

The memorial was conceived in 1981 and eventually built over the next two years, 1982 to ’84. In comparison, the Lincoln Memorial to your right took sixty years to complete. The landscape was leveled, and the apex of the wall reaches a depth of almost eleven feet. Notice the mementos left by those who visit: medals, pictures, flowers, helmets, photos of teenage boys frozen in youth, of babies never seen by their fathers.

This represents an entire war a nation meant to forget.

WWII VET: What are you, a coward?

HIPPIE: No, I’m not a coward! Just cause I won’t fight in a war we don’t belong in—

WWII VET: We fought wars in my day! Bunch of commies, burning draft cards, standing on the flag.

HIPPIE: A commie has nothing to do with commies.

WWII VET: You don’t want to fight, go to Russia.

HIPPIE: Oh, great, now he’s talking about—

WWII VET: I got the Congressional Medal of Honor and you dirty hippies won’t even lift a finger to help your country.

HIPPIE: Big deal—a medal. This is bullshit!

WWII VET: Don’t you curse at me, you punk! I’m an American, not some dope-smoking flower child who’s nothing but a coward.

HIPPIE: You’re a murderer, I’m not a murderer, and I’m not a coward.
WWII VET: Soldiers aren't murderers. Soldiers do their job.

HIPPIE: You go fight if you want a war.

WWII VET: I don't have to fight, I fought my wars. And I'll fight you, you lazy hippie punk. I'll fight you!

HIPPIE: Hell no, we won't go! Hell no, we won't go!

VOICE: No matter how many monuments, or statues, or stones... the wars go on.

Scene 3

DAVE: Lord, look at this. Stu, move on up, look at all this. We're here. We are actually here. Look at all these names, man. Every one of them carved in, every one. Like one big black gravestone, you know? That book of names maybe four, five inches thick, you see that? Stu? That's like thousands of names, tens of thousands. You know there's one man to every ten women our age now? I read that. I read all about that. You wanna know anything, you ask ol' Davey Lewis.

Stu and Terry nod at each other.

Yeah, just ask me. Or tell me. You gonna introduce me to your buddy?

STU: I don't know who he is. He was just there, Dave. That's all.

DAVE: Oh, I get it. Something between you all, huh? Something somebody like me don't know nothing about, right? Stu?

I can't take this silent treatment no more, Stu. I can't all the time be reading your mind, you dig? You gotta talk to me. Why we come here, huh? Why? Not so you could eyeball me every time I want an answer. That's not why I came here, that's for sure.

Say something, man. Tell me to shut up, tell me I'm full of shit. Say something.

STU: You don't know why we're here.

DAVE: Okay, Mr. Knows Everything, then you tell me.

STU: Just a boondoggle to you.

DAVE: Right. I take off work, pay for two tickets out here. Yeah, just some joyride for me. Tell me something I don't know. Tell me what happened to you. Tell me that.

STU: We don't belong here. I sure don't.

DAVE: Aw, man, don't be starting that again. We here so we can get back to the war we were, hear what I'm saying? You lost some years I don't know nothing about. And I want to know. Cause I'm your buddy. Not like that dude holding the flag back there. He ain't been through shit with you like I have. And lost some years, too. So it's time we both get back on track.

STU: What, we're gonna be punks again? Dream on, Dave. We're nobodies... Don't you be calling me a nobody, Stu. Nobodies look like you. You the nobody. Know why? You lost your bite, man. You lost every bit of that street tough I pounded into you. Where is it, man? Here, in your pocket? Or your jacket, huh? Or here, in your shoe, huh? That where it is? Cause it sure ain't in your head. And it ain't here neither.

DAVE: Oh, I get it. Something between you all, huh? Something somebody like me don't know nothing about, right? Stu?

STU: We don't belong here. I sure don't.

DAVE: Hell no, we won't go! Hell no, we won't go!

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Julie wanders on during the following speech.


Sarah approaches.

What're you looking at?

SARAH: Man on guard duty. Right? Been doing this a long time?

TERRY: Long enough.

SARAH: Got people here, too.

TERRY: We all do.

Sarah approaches Julie.

JULIE: Oh!

SARAH: Scare you?

JULIE: No, I was just . . . Class picture, 1969.

SARAH: You in there?

JULIE: Yeah. And so are they.

SARAH: Young looking, ain't they?

JULIE: They'll always look that way to me.

SARAH: (referring to book) Can I see that?

JULIE: Sure.

SARAH: Got some nurses here I want to look up. You one?
DAN: I always thought she got a kick out of that song.
JERRY: Julie, twelve years from now. Or back. Whatever.
DAN: And that's us down there, huh?
JULIE: Well, it was Dan for a while as a sophomore and a senior. Then it was Jerry as a freshman and a junior. It varied.
SARAH: Kid stuff.
JULIE: Yeah, I guess it was, always kidding around, joking. Jerry was always the corny one.
JERRY: Come on, let's make like a tree and leave. First she don't like your song, then she says I'm corny.
DAN: Naw, man. I want to hear this.
SARAH: Yeah, my daughter's going through that right now. Can't make a commitment at fifteen. At that age, you play the field.
JULIE: I did.
DAN: She sure did.
JULIE: I'm sorry, you don't want to hear this.
DAN: I do.
JERRY: I don't.
DAN: She's hurting, Jer, I can feel it.
JERRY: Come on, I feel like moving.
DAN: You always did.
JERRY: What's that mean?
DAN: That's why we're here.
JERRY: I just jumped out of the foxhole.
DAN: And I jumped after you.
JERRY: So why did you, huh? You could still be alive, you know.
DAN: Cause I had to, you spaz. You're my buddy.
JULIE: They did everything together.
JERRY: Did I really get us here?
DAN: You really forgot, didn't you?
JERRY: I remember we were born, we went to school, went to war, and we died. Some legacy.
JULIE: I would've protested something like this back then.
TERRY: Shit.
DAN: And we left Julie.
JERRY: Yeah... damn.
JULIE: Was it Dan or was it Jerry?
DAN: Hell, she can't even remember. Which one did she love?
JULIE: Maybe both.
SARAH: Both what, honey?
JULIE: I loved them both. I missed them both so much. So much...
JERRY: Come on, let's make tracks.
DAN: Ghosts don't leave tracks.
JULIE: I would've protested something like this back then.
TERRY: Terrific.
JULIE: Oh, Dan and I got into it in letters. I mean, I argued that he'd be mistaken for the enemy cause he was Chinese—
DAN: American—
JULIE: Well, he was American. Anyway, I wrote that all of them looked alike over there.
DAN: American born and bred. We go through this every time.
JERRY: Cool your jets. What difference does it make arguing about that stuff now?
JULIE: God, did I really do that?
SARAH: Do what?
JULIE: Did I really use the time I had left with him arguing?
SARAH: Whole bunch of arguing back then. You weren't the only one.
JULIE: Sometimes I'm reminded of how young I was and self-righteous. Even dating Dan, his being Chinese. I knew what people were saying. I knew everything. Not that I regret anything I said about the war. Just what I said to Danny.
JERRY: What about me?
JULIE: Jerry never wrote letters. He was good for the both of us, that joker. He'd just size us up and wave us off. He'd play around and never let something like war get to him. He'd... He'd...

SARAH: Go ahead, remember.

JULIE: I guess I wonder why I'm here and they're not. Me protesting, them fighting and both over the same thing, really. I need to know why, you know? Why I feel sorry. And why I should tell someone that, someone who was there.

Morris rolls in—in a wheelchair.

SARAH: Well, maybe this is just the place to do just that.

JULIE: I don't know.

SARAH: We're still here. They're still here. Talking don't hurt anyone.

JULIE: I can't. Not that way.

SARAH: I can. I did.

JERRY: Boy, I'm glad they built this thing. To us, buddy, and them. In twenty years we'll be history.

DAN: Spaz, you're history now.

Sarah approaches Morris.

SARAH: (pushing chair forward) Let's get us a close look here.

MORRIS: What're you doing?

SARAH: Got it on lock, huh?

MORRIS: What the hell you doing to my chair?

SARAH: Where you from?

MORRIS: What's it to you? And leave my chair alone.

SARAH: Come all the way from somewhere to see this wall. Well, let's see it.

MORRIS: Let me be.

SARAH: Don't worry. I pushed lots of chairs like these.

MORRIS: I don't want it pushed. I want to sit here.

SARAH: Now don't be that way.

MORRIS: This is my visit, I'll handle it the way I want to, now leave me alone.

RICH: Ready Vi?

VI: As I'll ever be. How's my hair?

RICH: Always perfect. It's amazing how you manage an invitation to these things. Normally they'd pick a more established newscaster to announce something this important.

VI: Ah, but Dan Rather is not female. And Walter Cronkite is not Chinese. And your winner is both. And so and so I. To me, it's great PR.

RICH: You mean, for you. You only pull out 'being Chinese' when it's to your advantage.

VI: That's it, Rich, stop right there.

RICH: An Asian war, an Asian interpretation in art form.

MAYA: My name is Maya Ying Lin.

VI: Ironic, isn't it?

MAYA: I'm from Athens, Ohio.

VI: A midwesterner? I didn't think they knew anything about art.

MAYA: I graduate in June.

RICH: She's studying architecture at Yale.

VI: Ah, so that's why it's so modern.

RICH: Very modern. Two black lines.

VI: Pretty controversial stuff. Maybe she had a brother over there, or some other relative.

MAYA: I was too young to know anybody there. My dad did, a friend of his.


MAYA: I don't like to talk about myself.

RICH: She's pretty private, Vi.

VI: Well, being private does not news make. If I have to dig up one more anecdote about the hostages, I'll scream. They've been back two months, and they're still front page.
RICH: How about Agent Orange? With this memorial coming up, anything on the vets would be—

VI: Rich, read between the lines. The public doesn’t even want to acknowledge we were there, in spite of the memorial.

RICH: There is a tie-in, Vi: this, the vets, even you.

VI: Yeah, well, with a tight-lipped young architect, it’ll be hard in coming, won’t it? Will she ever say more than the pat answers she’s been giving the press? Will a story come out before this thing is built? Will she?

MAYA: All I can say is: the design speaks for itself.

VI: (to Maya) Nervous?

MAYA: A little, yes.

VI: Don’t worry, you’ll do just fine. If Rich has done his job, you should have no trouble at all. Just answer the questions the best you can, okay? Oh, and honey—

MAYA: Maya.

VI: Sorry. Maya. This is the start of a public image. You know: interviews, television, radio.

MAYA: I know.

VI: Lots of repetitive questions and lots of dirt-digging. Did you know that, too?

MAYA: Yes.

VI: We might even ask you things you’ve already been asked. You see, the public in general has the attention span of a fly. They see a face . . . they may remember, however, they usually don’t. So we prod memories by asking the same questions—or pointed ones.

MAYA: I take it you don’t like the public much.

VI: Hey, honey, they’re my bread and butter. And they love me.

MAYA: Maya. My name’s Maya.

VI: Of course.

MAYA: Chinese?

VI: American.

MAYA: Of course.

Scruggs enters.

VI: Ah, and here’s the man of the hour. Hi, Jan, how are you doing?

SCRUGGS: Hey, how’re ya doing? (to Maya) And you’re the girl from Yale.

VI: Yes, this is Maya Lin. (to Maya) Jan spearheaded this whole thing.

MAYA: Hi.

VI: The monument’s his idea. The chosen design however . . .

SCRUGGS: Well, they told me they were a little worried how I’d react. Unlike some, I have a personal stake in this.

Rich enters.

VI: Oh, there’s Rich. Excuse me.

SCRUGGS: I must admit it looked pretty weird.

MAYA: Oh?

SCRUGGS: I thought maybe a third grader had won. All this work and the thing looks like a bat.

MAYA: I hadn’t thought of it that way, myself.

SCRUGGS: You’re not a third grader, that’s for sure. How old are you, anyway?

MAYA: I’m twenty-one.

SCRUGGS: 1959. The year of the first American casualty in ‘Nam. So you were only four when Kennedy was assassinated.

MAYA: Just around kindergarten, maybe.

SCRUGGS: And the marines landed in Da Nang four years later.

MAYA: Where?

SCRUGGS: Da Nang. In ‘Nam? Do you know these places? Did you know anybody there?

MAYA: No . . . well, maybe one.

SCRUGGS: One, huh? Well, I had practically my whole company blow up right in front of me! I saw parts of buddies lying all around me, and you know what I had? One band-aid. One lousy band-aid.

MAYA: I’m sorry.

SCRUGGS: You weren’t even ten years old when we were over there getting blown to bits. And I come back and work my ass off to get this whole project going, and the judges choose a bat for my bud-
dies to be remembered by. I mean, if this is the way I feel about it, you can imagine what others like me think.

MAYA: The requirement was that the memorial avoid a political statement and begin a healing process.

SCRUGGS: Yeah, well it's a little hard for me to think that I, or any other guy who's been there, will stand in front of something like that and think, "Yeah, I feel better now."

MAYA: I thought all you vets approved the jury's choice.

SCRUGGS: What else could we do, huh? Hey, in 'Nam, I had a machine gun leveled at me for four hours. I know when to move and when not to move. We're this close, and I sure as hell ain't gonna blow it. But I want some honor here. We'll get around this design if we have to. Between you, me, and "The Wall," we could have done better. But I'll back the Fund now. Just expect some changes, that's all I'm saying.

VI and Rich approach.

VI: Have a nice chat?

MAYA: Yes. Very interesting.

RICH: You all set, Maya?

VI: Okay, We're on.

She steps up to podium.

VI: Ladies and gentlemen of the press, the moment you've all been waiting for. We're here to announce the winner of the National Contest to design a Memorial to Veterans of the Vietnam Era. The contest's deadline was March 31st of this year, 1981, and during the week of April 26 through the 29th, our seven judges—comprised of prominent sculptors and landscape artists—deliberated on 1,421 entries. The unanimous vote chose Entry Number 1,026 as the winner.

MAYA: (to Scruggs) I'm not the Viet Cong, you know.

SCRUGGS: I don't care what you are. No one even knew your name till the envelope was opened.

VI: The designer whose proposal most clearly meets the formal requirements of the program has created a place of quiet reflection, where the simple setting of earth and sky pay tribute to those who served their nation in difficult times. Ladies and gentlemen: Miss Maya Lin.

Maya has not only won first prize, but she has also been given a position as consultant on the project. The cash award for first prize is twenty thousand dollars.

Say a few words, Maya.

MAYA: Well... thank you.

VI: Let's take this opportunity to introduce another prominent figure in all this—

VET 2: (whistling loudly) Yo, Jan!

VI: Well, I guess you already know him. Former Army infantryman, the mover and shaker for the Vietnam Memorial, Corporal Jan Scruggs.

SCRUGGS: (aside to VI) Is this really going to go over?

VI: We're about to see. (to audience) Ladies and gentlemen, the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial.

Maya slides the cover off her model. Silence.

VI: Maya, is there anything you'd like to say about your design? Anything at all?

MAYA: Yes, I just want to say I just want to say this memorial is meant to be reflected on. People should be mesmerized. They should face it, approach it, perceive the names before they read them. Touch them and realize in the black reflection they've touched something in themselves.

They shouldn't just see a bunch of names or even a political statement.

Even the process of killing the grass in order to build this is important. I meant to show what it's like to die.

VI: This all started as one man's dream. Let's hear what he thinks.

SCRUGGS: Well, uh... Uh, I, really... really... I really like it... it's a great... uh, wonderful memorial.

Scene 6

Terry and Julie, she watches him.

TERRY: What? What are you doing?

JULIE: I was just... I don't know.

TERRY: I'm busy, lady.

JULIE: Well, I know, but I... Can we talk for a minute?
TERRY: What about?

JULIE: When I was talking to that woman over there, she's a nurse and—

TERRY: Yeah, yeah, we met. And?

JULIE: Well, I thought I heard you say something when I mentioned protesting to her, and—

TERRY: Oh, for Chrissakes.

JULIE: Yeah, something along that line.

TERRY: I said, "Shit." Okay? Got that loud and clear? Want it in writing?

JULIE: No, that's all right. That's pretty much what I heard the first time. Thanks.

TERRY: And you can take that back to all your other antiwar, hippie-flower-children, touchy-feely—

JULIE: Whoa, this sounds a little trite—

TERRY: Listen, I don't really care what you all think. You can call me anything now and I don't give two flying fucks. So I'm a baby killer, so what, huh? So I'm some crazy Vietnam Vet that had nothing better to do than collect ears.

JULIE: Listen can we start over? I'm Julie. (No response.) Okay, we'll start another way.

TERRY: Why bother?

JULIE: Why? Because very few people have. Nobody I know. I came to Washington all by myself because I read all about the Wall—

TERRY: Great, another armchair revolutionary.

JULIE: Yes, I do that. I read a lot. Anyway, I came across some old diaries of when I was at the university boycotting. And you know what?

TERRY: What, lady?

JULIE: Julie. (She extends hand.) Terry. (No response.) Okay, we'll start another way.

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TERRY: What, lady?

JULIE: Julie.

TERRY: Well, what is it?

JULIE: Well, I read them over and, I feel a little silly now. I mean you can read till you're blue in the face about all sorts of things and not know a damn thing about any one of them. Twelve years now, and I'm wondering if what I did made any difference, you know?

TERRY: How should I know.

JULIE: All I know is I need to talk to someone who was there. Because I wasn't. Maybe that someone can help with an answer. Like why are two of my friends just names carved on a wall? And what can I do about that?

TERRY: Don't ask me, lady.

JULIE: Julie. (She extends hand.)

TERRY: Terry. Look, I can't, this flag's heavy. Two hands....

JULIE: Oh, yeah, for sure.

Dan and Jerry enter. Jerry is singing.

DAN: Could you let go of that stupid song, spaz? I'm sorry I ever started it.

JERRY: I can't help it. It's on the brain, now. You know how that goes. "Bird, bird, bird, bird is the word."

DAN: Weren't you even blown away by the beauty of that place? Didn't it even affect you at all?

JERRY: Hey, man, I let go of all that stuff when we got here. You should too.

DAN: 'Nam was always pretty in the spring. Course it looks different, all built up and everything.

JERRY: One thing about being dead, you never have to deal with travel agents.

DAN: And that Vietnamese woman standing where we, you know....

JERRY: Just say it.

DAN: Died.

JERRY: Bit the big one.

DAN: Okay, okay. We're back in D.C. Now how did that happen?

JERRY: Cause she's here.

JULIE: They're here, you know? Feel it? Not just names. Them.

TERRY: I suppose.

JULIE: Doesn't that ever hit you? You're here and they're not?

TERRY: Course it does. Every day, every hour, every minute I stand here. But I'll see this through because... because...
TERRY: I got a job to do.

TERRY: Oh, yeah, sure. Wearing a red bandanna, sitting in the streets, getting out of class, real hard.

JULIE: Hey, wait a minute. Don’t discount what I did back then. I fought off nightsticks and tear gas for you guys. Yeah, me and the others, we got you out of the jungle. We helped pull you out of Saigon.

TERRY: Don’t think you did anything for me, lady.

TERRY: You were just grunts. Yes, sir, no, sir. We did what we were told. Know why? It wasn’t our turf, that’s why. You do what you’re told and look out for each other cause one wrong move and you’re dead. Just like your goddamn friends. I did what I was told, and now I’m here. I’m not just some name on a wall.

JULIE: Bothered you, didn’t it?

TERRY: This is a twenty-year-old argument, lady—

JULIE: Julie! I have a name. You have a name. We can both say them. We’re not reading the two of them off some wall, either—

TERRY: Two. You got two on this wall. I got twelve. And I’m doing this for them.

JULIE: Well, so am I. For your twelve, and my two. Does that still put us on opposite sides?

JERRY: Are we having fun yet?

DAN: The war’s here, Jerry. It’s still going on. I won’t let this all be for nothing—I won’t.

Scene 7

VI: We are interviewing Maya Lin, winner of the nationwide contest to design the Vietnam Memorial to be built right here in Washington. How are you, Maya?

MAYA: Fine.

VI: First of all, you’re twenty-one? A Yale architect student?

MAYA: Yes. I graduate in June.

VI: The top of your class, I imagine.

MAYA: Well, uh, no. I wouldn’t exactly say that.

VI: Tell me, Maya, what did you personally think of the Vietnam War? Were you opposed to it? Or did you think we were right?

MAYA: Uh, well ... I don’t know.

VI: Well, you must have some opinion, one way or another.

MAYA: I was pretty young.
VI: Well, for a young woman, you came up with an amazing tribute to soldiers who served in Vietnam. Now, you do realize that, don’t you.

MAYA: Yeah, yeah, I do.

VI: Are you a Democrat?

MAYA: Uh, well, I don’t know.

VI: An independent, is that it?

MAYA: No, not exactly.

VI: Playing it safe, I guess. Tell me this then, Maya: are you happy?

MAYA: Yes ... I’m happy.

VI: And we’re happy, too. The memorial is a bold artistic statement, one that should affect anyone who sees it. Already some controversy is giving it coverage not only on TV, but on some radio talk shows, and of course, the newspapers. (to Maya) What do you think of all that, Maya? Not even built, and the whole nation’s reading about it. Any comment?

MAYA: I don’t read newspapers.

VI: We’ve been interviewing Maya Lin, designer of the Vietnam Memorial, fast becoming a national controversy. We may be seeing a lot of both Maya and the Wall. Back to you....

Scene 8

WOMAN: Look at all the people, John ... John? ... Hold me.

Our son’s name. Nineteen years old and war takes him away from us. (takes his youth, his ideals, his life) I wanted a son who would visit us with grandchildren, who would grow up as we grew up and live into our old age.

Memories, John. I wanted memories with my son. But this is what I have, what we have. A name to look at in the black stone. And your face. Your face as his would have been, looking back at me. His and your face ... John? John?

Scene 9

Scruggs watches from the side.

PRESS 1: Why is the wall black?

MAYA: Well, it’s more reflective. This isn’t new, it’s been used before. People should be entranced by its reflective quality. The depth doubles and triples dimensions—as I’ve told you before.

PRESS 2: How come it’s underground?

MAYA: That way it’s like the earth itself is a wound and pushing out from it are the names of those who have descended into it and have emerged to remind us they were even here.

PRESS 3: I guess I’m not visual. These drawings need a lot of explaining. It looks like two black lines—

RICH: It says exactly what we want to say about Vietnam—absolutely nothing.

PRESS 1: Okay, so there are names and dates, right?

MAYA: Names and two dates: 1959 and 1975, beginning and end.

PRESS 2: Where does it say Vietnam?

RICH: Does the Washington Monument say Washington?

PRESS 3: Are they alphabetical, the names?

MAYA: No. Chronological, by the date they died.

PRESS 3: So how does anyone find anyone?

RICH: We’re in the process of addressing that very issue.

PRESS 1: Alphabetical’s easier, don’t you think?

MAYA: I think of it as a Greek poem: at the height of battle, the most names. The sheer number should astound people.

RICH: Maya—

MAYA: Finding the names by the date they died is like finding the gravestone on the field.

RICH: Let me handle this—

MAYA: All the victims in one place on one day, the last day of their lives.

RICH: Don’t play this up— no belief in memorial

MAYA: Reading the names, like a bell, tolling in your head.

RICH: Again, as I have said, we have not yet made a final decision on that. Next.

PRESS 2: What’s construction on the monument going to cost?
RICH: Well, we've projected that all together we'll need about seven million dollars.

PRESS 2: Got your work cut out for you, Rich.

RICH: We can do it.

PRESS 1: We've heard unanimous votes have pushed the memorial this far. Who's involved?

RICH: Well, the judges, of course. Then the vets themselves approved the judges' choice. Then the Fine Arts Commission unanimously approved the judges' and the vets' choice. And finally the National Capital Planning Commission voted unanimously to approve everyone's choice... Maya's.

PRESS 3: And Secretary Watt? He still has power to veto?

RICH: Only if he acts within ninety days. And frankly, he's been pretty quiet. Our time is up. We'll inform the media again of any follow up. Thank you.

Maya exits.

SCRUGGS: Rough?

RICH: Not bad. I didn't want to touch that alphabetical listing, though. Not one bit.

SCRUGGS: She got all dressed up for a garage sale, I see.

RICH: Aw, come on, Jan. Lay off her. The press thinks she's cute.

SCRUGGS: You know if she can't change for us, she should do it for her design. As long as she looks like a hippie, she'll be treated as one.

RICH: Okay, okay.

SCRUGGS: It's not just her image, you know, or her design. We're seen through her. I pick up a newspaper and see her face and how she dined somewhere in Georgetown and there's nothing about us vets, or Agent Orange, or unemployment—

RICH: Jan, what's the problem here, huh? What is it, really?

SCRUGGS: Aahh, this whole design. So what are we going to do about the alphabetical listing? We can't do a thing till we know what order they'll be in.

RICH: Between you and me, we're thinking we'll index them in a separate book nearby. With the panel number, and the line number. And for multiples—Smith, Jones—they'll all have the home state as well.

SCRUGGS: It just seems to me—

RICH: The Defense Department has a listing two inches thick, five point type, and six hundred are named Smith. That's practically a whole panel by itself. So that's a pretty sound argument to me why not to go alphabetical. She thought of that, you know.

SCRUGGS: I just want my buddies remembered. I don't want them screwed again. I'm not going to argue about minimalism or modernism or figurative art. It's beyond that now. As far as I'm concerned, every name of every vet who served is going to be on that wall—one way or another.

RICH: We haven't addressed if it will be everyone, yet—

SCRUGGS: I'm addressing it. There's got to be a separate inscription for those who didn't die.

RICH: We're working on a prologue and an epilogue. You know that.

SCRUGGS: She didn't go for that.

RICH: She's been told there'll be changes.

SCRUGGS: Well, good, then... good.

Scene 10

DAVE: Want one? (offers a beer)

STU: No... not here.

DAVE: Where, then? When?

STU: Later.

DAVE: Everything's later for you.

STU: Don't you like some peace and quiet sometimes? Just some silence. Is that ever in your realm?

DAVE: "Realm?" You barely say two words to me in five years, and now you say stuff like "quiet" and "realm?" Shit—

STU: I've talked to you.

DAVE: Sure, bullshit about Hawaii. That's all I know you did. Ain't no action in Hawaii.

STU: You're wrong there.
DAVE: So tell me.

STU: I told you. Americans like me in the hospitals getting operated on last cause they look Vietnamese. I told you that.

DAVE: So, they shouldn't have signed up.

STU: We had to. We volunteered cause we were loyal. Our families backed us. My father's grateful to this country. I wanted to show I was, too.

DAVE: Yeah, well, you Chinese have a thing about that stuff anyway.

STU: What does that mean?

DAVE: Well, see, you Chinese and all you Asian types—Japanese, too—you got this family honor thing that keeps you going. I mean, you got things you still paying dues for that happened dynasties ago. And this fuels you, you dig? Like we don't have that shit. Me, man, I wait till they draft my ass, then I think of all kinds of shit to make me something other than the kind of soldier they want. See, I don't have generations to answer for. It's just me, man. Just me, that's why I fight, not cause I'm gonna lose face by saying I made a mistake, you dig? See, that's what this whole country did. Too chicken shit to say they made a mistake. They shouldn't have gone over there. And they sure shouldn't have stayed.

STU: So I saved face for my Dad, huh?

DAVE: I don't know, man. Maybe your grandfather, too. Didn't he work on the railroad or something, laying the track cross-country or some such shit. Well, see, both your father and your grandfather are thankful they got to make something of themselves in America—even though it sounds like your grandfather was pretty much of a slave. But anyway, they stayed and done good and now American-born Stewart Lee is gonna do them proud serving his and their time and coming back crazy.

STU: I'm not crazy.

DAVE: Well, you ain't exactly all there, either.

STU: You don't know what I've been through.

DAVE: No I don't. Look I packed away three beers already and all you been telling me is how you met some other Chinaman from the States.

STU: I wouldn't expect you to understand.

DAVE: That's like me going to Fifty-seventh Street in New York and bringing back snapshots of me and Al from the warehouse. We didn't meet nobody. We just fucking around, goosing each other.

STU: That's not the same at all. You know it isn't.

DAVE: I just wanna get past the tourist shit that's all.

STU: Tourist shit, huh? Amazing how you have an opinion on just about everything, you know that?

DAVE: I'm a knowledgeable man—

STU: You're bullshit, that's what you are.

DAVE: What're you really mad at, huh?

STU: You stand there and dribble on about what you read or what you heard. But how could you know, huh? You weren't there. Too fucking chicken shit to serve, that's what you were.

DAVE: I ain't afraid of nothing.

STU: Bullshit. You're afraid of being left behind, that you might have missed something over there. Yeah, those of us who were there might have something over you, might know more than you for a change.

DAVE: Am I hearing you right? Here I am doing you a favor—

STU: Don't bother.

DAVE: I think we're going to get down and be the friends we once were, but no. Stewart Lee don't need nobody. Don't need me, anyway.

STU: Truth hurts, don't it?

DAVE: Don't fuck with me. I should've just let you wimp around, feel sorry for yourself, sleepwalk the rest of your life. No, I should just beat the shit out of you, just to see if you can feel anymore. Thinking—no, believing—that my bringing you down here is gonna give you a reason to talk, and a chance for me to listen.

STU: As if you could shut up for a minute.


STU jumps him, then backs off.

STU: I'm not crazy.

DAVE: Well, you ain't exactly all there, either.

STU: You don't know what I've been through.

DAVE: No I don't. Look I packed away three beers already and all you been telling me is how you met some other Chinaman from the States.

STU: I wouldn't expect you to understand.
DAVE: Okay, hotshot. We're long overdue, anyway. Come on, come on. Come on you dumb shit.

STU: Sure big man. Some big ass punk who'll never grow up. The gangs are gone. Handshakes, secrets, rules—all gone! Rules don't do anything for anybody over there, and I know, cause I was there. I saw them! I know!

DAVE: What did you do, man?

STU: I hauled body bags, you dumb shi—

DAVE: Okay ... okay.

STU: I put these guys on their last plane rides home. You know how that feels? Well, I do. I thought about it all the time I was there.

Scene II

RICH: I don't know what he's going to say. I don't even know who he is. Who's this Tom Carhart?

SCRUGGS: A vet. In fact, he entered the contest.

RICH: Is he vindictive because he didn't win?

SCRUGGS: Naw, Tom wouldn't do that.

CARHART: (at press conference) A black wall of shame! I, for one, can't live with this. A lot of vets wanted to celebrate a monument to Vietnam Vets, we were hoping to glorify it. Memorials, I was brought up to believe, should be white. And if there's any honor involved—which I had hoped this memorial would have—it should also be above ground. Vets are being put on the back burner again. Vets, like me, are being screwed—again. I, for one, am personally entering my veto on the choice of the design to honor Vietnam Vets.

RICH: Can you get to him?

SCRUGGS: I know him, we toss down a few—

CARHART: I invite all vets who feel as I do to join me in resisting the ultimate insult in an already underacknowledged tribute to fellow vets.

RICH: He knows how you feel, then?

SCRUGGS: Hey, we talk.

CARHART: I hope the key people in power—in positions critical in shaping the right decisions—will join me, too. Thank you.

RICH: The phone will be ringing off the hook after this.

CARHART: Well, Jan don't. At least he didn't the other night.

SCRUGGS: Not in public, Tom. Let's get it done and—

SCRUGGS: We can add our own little ideas later.

CARHART: Why? It's not even built. Let's just nip it in-the-bud. Hell, it would save everybody a lot of time and money.

SCRUGGS: You don't understand. There are a lot of politics involved here.

CARHART: From a twenty-one year old Chinese girl? Come on, Jan, you know that.

SCRUGGS: Lots of other people didn't win, either, Tom.

CARHART: Hey, don't get me wrong. I never claimed to be an artiste, a sculptor, or anything. I can take rejection. I have before. But what they picked can't be changed, can't you see? We're in Washington. There's power here. There's money too. Can your fund say that?

RICH: Who's backing this, Tom?

CARHART: I'll give you a hint—

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SCRUGGS: A vet. In fact, he entered the contest.

RICH: Not in public, Tom. Let's just get it done and—

SCRUGGS: We can add our own little ideas later.
SCRUGGS: Just tell us.

CARHART: He financed the whole contest to begin with, the first mailing. He paid with his money, and he don't like the results.

SCRUGGS: Perot?

CARHART: "Make it inspiring," he said. "High, white, and rising." Perot don't like it, Jan, it's as simple as that. He said, you've all made a mistake—a big mistake.

RICH: Well, we've got big guns of our own. Tell him that.

CARHART: Yeah? Who? You're being funded by nickel-and-dime organizations all around the country. The very people who spit on us as we got off the plane. They won't come through for you, Jan, they didn't before. Call me, we'll do lunch.

Scene 12

SARAH: (begins to wheel Morris closer to the monument; he applies brakes) Sorry.

MORRIS: Should be.

SARAH: Bad habit from my nursing days, trying to get my boys to open up. A place like this kind of does that to folks, you know. Helps them open up.

MORRIS: Listen, do me a favor. You go be a nurse someplace else. I want some quiet, understand what I'm saying? I heard enough noise over there. "Open up." Someone else can "open up." I'd like some nice closed peace and quiet?

SARAH: Well, excuse me.

MORRIS: You're excused.

SARAH: I swear, I get so sick of ornery cusses like you. (indicates Terry) First him, now you. Got a handicap, don't take it out on me. I didn't give you that handicap, just giving you a hand, that's all. Just putting my hand out there, that's all I did. Cuss. An attitude problem, a bad one, too. Don't want no company? Stay home, you feel that way—

MORRIS: What you got here, huh? You got some man or boy on this here wall that you can come up to me and roll my chair wherever you want, huh?

SARAH: I got a right to be here.

MORRIS: Well, I got more rights.

SARAH: Oh, you do, huh?

MORRIS: Yeah, I do. In the seven men I'm paying my respects to. Wiped out in one day. I lost a wife, a son—both ashamed of me—and I lost the use of the two legs under me, so there. I told you how I earned my rights. So you think about yours.

SARAH: Hey, it's 1984, cuss, how long you gonna keep up this kind of attitude, huh?

MORRIS: I'm fine the way I am without the preaching, thank you.

SARAH: What're you doing at this wall, you ever ask yourself that? Cause you better, if it's not for people to talk to you—

MORRIS: I know what I want.

SARAH: —And while you're asking, ask yourself just how fine you really are coming here, staring into space. Ask yourself how long you want to keep up this I-don't-need-nobody attitude you so proud of, cuss—

MORRIS: The name's Morris.

SARAH: —Ask why you take it out on the likes of Sarah Mitchell, cuss.

MORRIS: Sergeant Lee Morris!

SARAH: —And another thing, Lee, I got eight nurses on this wall, and I got close to fifty-eight thousand mothers and daughters and loved ones I stand with looking at it. And you won't see our names up there, and you won't see our wounds. Hell, you won't even see what part of us we really lost. We paid, just like you. And we survived. Just like you. You talking peace and quiet? No, sir, you talking respect. And I deserve some of that, too. All of us here do, I earned it.

MORRIS: Oh, you did, huh?

SARAH: Yeah, I did.

MORRIS: Well, okay, then.

SARAH: Okay.

MORRIS: I had plans, I guess... expectations coming here. Arguing with a nurse wasn't one of them.

SARAH: Talk to me then, Lee. Especially me and the others here like me. Know why? Cause you and me is cuss. All the more reason we
need to tear down those walls we build to buffer ourselves against the world out there, against all them other wars. That make any sense to you?

— MORRIS: Every day's a war to me.

SARAH: Whose damn fault is that, huh? Okay, there are daily wars. (Take them on) then, one day at a time. Like I am, with you. Hey, I've seen lots of attitudes like you. And I deal with them cause it's important to me. Cause all you are is a voice crying in the dark. And I hear you no matter how much you say I don't. How's that for nursing?

MORRIS: You must have been a great nurse.

SARAH: Shoot, I was a beautiful nurse. Beauty don't last long under all that stress, though. Probably better for them we did so dragged out. I remember one, though, head all bandaged, his eyes gone. We knew he'd never see again. But he took hold of my hand, and I kept telling him, "It's all right, baby. Everything's all right." And he settled down and said, "You're all beautiful, aren't you? Tell me you're the most gorgeous women on earth, right at my side. Tell me!" And we looked at each other, all us tired, overworked, under-slept nurses doing our jobs. And we patted his hand and said, "Yeah, we're the most beautiful women in the whole wide world, baby." And they wheeled him away, this sightless boy never to see that whole wide world again. And I'm here, remembering him... It's time to come home now.

MORRIS: I thought coming home meant I didn't have to talk about that war no more.

SARAH: When you're at home with yourself, that's when the war's over, cuss.

MORRIS: I ain't no cuss! Talk about respect, I told you, they called me Sergeant.

SARAH: If we be talking respect, then you call me Lieutenant. You respect me, and I'll respect you, Sergeant Cuss.

MORRIS: Well, I'll be damned. I'll be god damned.

Scene 13

MAYA: What changes?

SCRUGGS: Well, that's what we should talk about—"
and as Secretary of the Department of the Interior, I, James Watt, hereby declare the execution of such monument on hold until a suitable compromise is reached or until further notice.

RICH: All our work.
SCRUGGS: — till further notice.

Carhart enters.

CARHART: I warned you. I warned all of you. You forget we always had the numbers. We’ll get more, too. We’ll always outnumber you.

ACT TWO Scene 1

"Puff the Magic Dragon" plays. Eventually, Stu joins in, singing.

SOLDIER A: Chrissakes, folk songs in Hawaii? Hey, turn that down. Do Hendrix or the Stones. Smarmy kid’s song. Come on, put on something we can all enjoy. Hey! (to Soldier B) What’s wrong with him?

SOLDIER B: He’s high. He’s a little . . . you know/spooky

D A V E: Spooky? Why’d they call you that? Hey, man, I knew you smoked, but—

SOLDIER A: How spooky is he? If he jumps me, I’ll whip him good.

SOLDIER B: Listen, this guy can’t whip cream.

D A V E: You let them talk about you like that, man? You could hear them, and you didn’t do nothing to defend yourself?

SOLDIER A: This job sucks.

SOLDIER B: Yeah? Wait till the show starts.

STU: (reading dog tag) Staff sarge, first name William . . . Bill.

SOLDIER B: Yep, ol’ Stu’s seen ‘em all.

STU: My dad’s name was William. I’ve found my two uncles’ names, my cousin’s, I even found yours, Dave.

D A V E: You always this ripped, then?


STU: Private First Class . . . Jeffrey . . . Jeff . . . My middle name’s Jeff.

SOLDIER B: He’s starting up again.

D A V E: Too many names, man.

STU: Sorry, sarge, but it looks like you’re on the bottom for this ride.

D A V E: I’m not feeling too well.

SOLDIER B: You asked for it, man. You wanted to know.

D A V E: Okay, okay. I know I did.

SOLDIER A: How long has he been here?

SOLDIER B: Too long.

D A V E: Ten months. I remember.

STU: Knew it all back then, didn’t I? Thought I had it made! (He begins to laugh.)

D A V E: Go on, man.

STU: Yeah, got it made! Honolulu. Blue ocean, grass skirts, naked women. Got it made. (to Soldier A and Soldier B) Let’s get a move on here! Chop, chop! Get it? Chop, chop?

D A V E: No one’s laughing, man.

STU: Come on, throw ‘em on. Planes to fill, boys. Lots of planes to send home. It’s okay, they’re light, see? Sorry, Jeff, old buddy. This won’t hurt. But I gotta dump you on the sarge over there. Ol’ Bill won’t mind, will you, Bill?

SOLDIER B: He’s working up to a real good one this time.

An agonized scream is heard offstage.

SOLDIER B: They must be moving the live ones to the hospital. All victims of the war.

STU: They’re all the same, those here and there. These don’t cry, that’s all.

Scene 2

SARAH: How goes it?

JULIE: I feel I’m back in ’69.

SARAH: I hear you. Stubborn, huh?

JULIE: It’s not him, it’s me. I feel I’m always apologizing. Why should I apologize? I didn’t start the war.

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Jeannie

Barroga