

# **'A Pilot's Honour'**

A radio play by  
Jason Gill

**Scene 1: The interior of a jet fighter cockpit: cramped space, regular breathing through a mask, the constant background noise of a high velocity engine and the sense of passage through space at great speed. There are also numerous electronic noises. Conway's voice is distorted as if speaking through a mask. The voice on his com link is also thin and distorted, occasionally almost breaking up through interference.**

Com voice: Hot Steel. Hot Steel this is Shiloh. Target on the move. Repeat: target on the move. Adjust course and speed to three five nine. Acknowledge.

Conway: Acknowledged. Course adjustment on my mark. Mark.

**[F/X: A change in the movement of air around the cabin. A slow, musical undertone begins to be heard, very faintly, under the sound in the cockpit. It gains slowly in intensity throughout Scene 1, but never so much that it remains more than a suggestion, and it fades out entirely before the end of Scene 1. The music is a sequence of notes roughly suggestive of a countdown, with an ominous orchestral undertone gaining slowly in force. Versions of the same motif are repeated at later points in the drama.]**

Com voice: Copy that Hot Steel. [Pause] Ok, Bob. Revised distance to target twenty two clicks. You should be seeing them any minute now. Confirm.

Conway: Copy that Shiloh. All systems normal. No sign of company. Flying over a ... ridge I think. Guess they're on the other side.

Com voice: Prepare to drop to firing altitude the moment you clear that ridge. Weapons systems final check now.

Conway: Copy that. **[F/X: A sound of buttons being pressed, electronic beeps.]** Final weapons systems check confirmed. All go.

Com voice: Prepare to drop to target altitude. Drop in five ... four ... three ... two ... one...

Conway: Dropping to target altitude. **[F/X Outside noise indicating a steep descent.]** I see them. I see them. Don't think they see me yet.

Com voice: Best get it over. Prepare to acquire target.

**[F/X Series of electronic noises and beeps]**

Conway: Target acquired.

Com voice: Release toys on your mark. Ready.

**[F/X A sudden warning noise in cockpit.]**

Com voice: Hot Steel what's that? What's going on Bob?

Conway: Proximity alert. Got company. Breaking off engagement.

**[F/X: Another noise indicating sudden course change, the warning noise continues.]**

Com voice: Go to ECM.

**[F/X More controls being engaged.]**

Conway: ECM deployed. [Pause] No effect. It's – uh – an SAM I think, homing in on my exhaust.

:

Com voice: Evasive.

**[FX More controls. The warning noise continues. More noises indicating rapid course changes.]**

Conway: Can't shake it.

Com voice: Climb altitude.

Conway: Climbing. [Pause. **FX Another electronic beep.**] Damn.

Com voice: Hot Steel. Report!

Conway: Malfunction in the bird. She won't climb. I can't get clear.

Com voice: Bogey is inside critical distance Bob. She could detonate any second. Get out of there Bob.

Conway: Wait. I want to try...

Com voice: Hot Steel. Abort! That's an order Bob. Get as far as you can and get out of there. Rescue crews already despatched.

Conway: But I...

Com voice: Hot Steel eject! Eject now.

Conway: I'm not high enough.

Com voice: Do it. Godammit. Do it now!

**[FX A loud noise indicates the cockpit canopy being blown open by explosive seals. A huge rush of air is followed immediately by the sound of a chair being released and its occupant flying into rushing air. Almost immediately comes the sound of an explosion, which is held for what seems an unnaturally long couple of seconds, before the sound dissolves into white noise, a sense of nothingness.]**

Scene 2

**FX The white noise itself dissolves and is replaced by the sound of a car coming to a halt. A door opens, then another. Two people get out and close the doors. The sound of footsteps on gravel for a couple of seconds until a short pause is followed by the sound of a doorbell ringing. There is a pause for a couple of seconds, then the door opens.**

Conway: Yes?

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: Captain Conway?

Conway: Who are you?

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: Oh yeah, I.D. **[FX He takes something from a pocket]** Will this do?

Conway: You're with the Embassy in Dublin?

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: Well, yeah. What it really means, I guess, is that we're Secret Service.

Conway: Is there a problem?

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: There could be, sir.

Conway: You want to – uh – come in or something?

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: Actually sir. We were kind of hoping you might take a drive with us.

Conway: What the hell for?

Scene 3

**F/X: A different location. A car door opens and someone gets inside. Point of view is inside the car. The engine is turned on. The car begins to move forward slowly. A GPS voice intrudes: "Follow regular route fifteen point six miles, then take right exit 15." Conway sighs and the car begins to travel faster. The engine noise recedes to the background as Conway's interior monologue takes over.**

Conway: I did that and now I do this. Change of career, change of direction, except it isn't. Jesus. Since Iraq I can't even get on a passenger plane without a mouthful of tranquilisers. Wonder what the people down there would think if they knew that. Would it make them smile? Guess not. [Pause] Look at that blue sky. Nearly always a blue sky here. Nevada. What if I'm asleep? Can you be asleep and still bring death to thousands? Maybe I've been asleep since Iraq, since Ireland. [Another sigh] I sit by myself, in my apartment, in work. I touch buttons and watch a screen dreamed into life by some geek who lives exactly the way I do. I do my thing and wait for the imaginary flash that says 'paydirt. Job well done.' Then I drive home. That's what it is to be asleep.

Scene 4

**F/X: Dissolve to a seascape, a few seconds of waves crashing over waves, which itself fades and is replaced by a woman with a soft Donegal accent speaking an interior monologue in some enclosed location, such as a room in a house. Music, a tune which will be associated with Mary's monologues, also plays: a guitar playing a slow, vaguely folkish tune, accompanied by a quiet violin.]**

Mary: I remember that first night we talked. I'll never forget it now, will I? I'd seen him around of course. Everybody had. God but Yanks looked so different to everybody else around Galway. He was so big, so tanned, just . Like he'd stepped down out of the telly and somehow arrived in NUIG of all places. Lucky me. [Pause] I'd been in the place a year at that stage. Needed to get a teaching degree. Something solid I suppose, in case the art didn't work out. 'Twas as much about getting away from home too. I was twenty. I suppose I'd seen more at twenty than most but still ... I found it an awful confusing place. So much noise. You'd see him at the odd English or History lecture, always near the back, like he didn't want to be seen, though of course everyone saw him. You'd see him walking down the concourse. Big leather shoes. Books under his arm. But even then ... It didn't look, you know ... natural on him, like he'd put on a uniform, something he thought made him look the perfect scholar. There was all sorts of rumours. He had some big old house all to himself out in Fairlands. He was loaded. He was the son of some billionaire. He was one of those computer millionaires who'd had a breakdown and was trying to find himself in Galway. While everyone else talked, talked shite... I looked at his eyes. I looked at his eyes and I thought I'd never seen anything so lost in my life. And a couple of times, he looked back. He looked back and there was ... did he smile?

Scene 5

**F/X: The car engine fades to an interior. A room with closed doors. Conway is with the two agents from Scene 2.**

Conway: [Shouting] What the hell's it got to do with you? How is any of this your business?

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: You're absolutely right, sir. All things being equal, I agree with you. But ... All things are not equal sir. I wish it wasn't so.

Conway: You're going to tell me I'm married, yeah? I already know that. What the hell has any of that to do...?

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: With us? Nothing, sir. Of course we know about it. Married six years ago to Madeline Carstairs, daughter of a retired Colonel in the US Marine Corps. Course we know sir. And you're right. It's nothing to do with us.

Conway: Then why are you...?

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: We're not here about that, sir. Not at all. I mean, who of us is without sin? But sir, there's a lot less free will around the place than most people think. Especially for people like us.

Conway: What do you...?

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: There is one thing though ... The young lady, Miss Brady.

Conway: What about her?

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: She doesn't know you're married, does she?

Scene 6

**F/X: The sound of rain against a window as the scene moves inside to a wide open interior space. There is metal softly clanging against metal. The sound of lockers being closed. There are multiple footsteps, people moving around, low voices, the occasional laugh. Mary is attempting to close a locker. She makes a couple of unsuccessful attempts. She tries to move items around inside the locker and tries to shut it again.**

Conway: Need some help?

Mary: Oh, uh, hi. I – uh – I can't – uh...

Conway: These things get chancy. You need to just. Here **[F/X: A small grunt of effort from Conway.]** Try it now.

**[F/X She does so. The locker closes successfully.]**

Mary: Wow. Thank you.

Conway: No problem.

Mary: I'm – uh – I'm Mary.

Conway: Yeah, I know. I'm Bob.

Mary: How do you know?

Conway: We have the same tutorial, you know? In modern Irish history? I remember the tutor calling out your name.

Mary: Yeah? Oh yeah.

Conway: Yeah.

[Pause]

Mary: Haven't seen you there for a bit.

[Pause]

Conway: You're – eh – you're hitting the books late. You got an exam?

Mary: No, not really. I just ...

Conway: What?

Mary: I felt I needed to keep up. I feel like I'm falling behind or something.

Conway: Oh I doubt that.

Mary: Why?

Conway: I remember you speaking in tutorial. Everything you said sounded so smart.

Mary: Ah now.

[Pause]

Conway: Listen – uh – stop me if I'm disturbing your studies. But – uh...

Mary: Yes?

Conway: Can I maybe buy you a cup of coffee?

Scene 7

**F/X: Conway back in the car from Scene 3, still on his way to work.**

Conway: I still blush when I think of that first conversation. I still blush when I think of the whole thing. My dirty little secret. I was thirty six. Thirty six and a war vet and there I was blushing down at this schoolgirl. I've had a lot of time to think about it since then. I've realised that blushing is one of those things you do when you're alive. When you're alive you're open. You're a body out on the sand, the way I was in Iraq, half-broken.

Scene 8

**F/X: Conway and Mary are sitting in a pub. The sound of many voices and clinking of glasses are heard in the background.**

Conway: Well, uh, yeah: me being here is all some kind of crazy accident, I suppose.

Mary: You're military.

Conway: Yeah.

Mary: What part?

Conway: I'm – uh – I'm not sure I can...

Mary: Were you wounded?

Conway: I...

Mary: You were wounded, weren't you? I can see it in your eyes.

Conway: My eyes?

Mary: You'd be surprised what you can see in a person's eyes. What happened?

Conway: I – uh...

Mary: You're uncomfortable. It's ok. You don't have to talk about it.

Conway: No, it's not that ... I just...

Mary: What?

Conway: It's where we are. People can have strong opinions. I don't want to...

Mary: 'People' meaning me? You're worried I'm a peacenik?

Conway: No, I ... Me being here, you know? It kind of depends on ... not being noticed.

Mary: Why are you here anyway?

Conway: Why? Oh, I don't know. I ... I won't say what happened but I got beat up pretty bad, you know? I nearly didn't make it. I was a long time in hospital, over there and back in the States. When I got out ... I wasn't much interested in going back to active duty, that's for sure. They ... my bosses ... they were kind of ok about that. They asked me what I wanted to do so the thought kind of popped in: go see the old country. Go find myself, some bullshit like that.

Mary: You ever been here before?

Conway: Never. I mean, I know I've the surname, but I suppose I was, you know, curious. I mean, I literally couldn't think of anything else to do, so I guess I kind of stuck my finger on a map.

Mary: And what made you study here?

Conway: I don't know. I felt like I needed something to do, some excuse to justify myself. They pulled a few strings. It's good. And I like Galway, the atmosphere.

Mary: Mm.

Conway: What?

Mary: Oh, nothing.

Conway: No, come on, what?

Mary: It's just ... Everyone says the same thing about Galway: great town, great atmosphere, and I mean it's probably true. But...

Conway: You don't agree.

Mary: Not exactly, I just think ... it's no place to be lonely in, that's what I think.

Conway: Huh ... I guess. You're not from here anyway.

Mary: No.

Conway: Where's home?

Mary: Home for me is up in Donegal: a wee place no one's ever heard of. Bellarda.

Conway: Bellarda? Sounds lovely.

Mary: It's a little village, a few fishermen, a wee oul spit of a beach. Cliffs and stuff.

Conway: You miss it.

Mary: I miss the quiet. It's not the sort of place you can stay in your whole life. I know that, but ... In Galway, you're expected to be up for a party that never ends. It gets a bit ...

Conway: Tiring?

Mary: Tiring, yeah. What?

Conway: Nothing.

Mary: Come on. There was a funny look. What?

Conway: It's just ... You seem a little young to be having such thoughts.

Mary: Yeah, maybe. Maybe I've just led a different kind of life.

Conway: Ok.

Mary: You were in Iraq, weren't you?

Conway: Well, eh...

Mary: It's ok. And don't worry. I don't think anyone really cares.

Conway: Yeah. I was in Iraq.

Mary: What happened you?

Conway: Shot down.

Mary: You were a pilot?

Conway: Yeah.

Mary: Wow, that's...

Conway: Do me a favour. Don't say it's amazing or something like that. It was ... you know, it was my job, that's all. The wonder went out of it years ago, believe me.

Mary: You were badly hurt.

Conway: Pretty bad. I – uh – I had to eject quite near to the ground, well below the safety limit. It was fifty fifty if I ... And then I was lying out on the sand. Couldn't move. They had sent out a rescue crew for me but the – the enemy was closing as well. Another minute or two and I'd have been taken prisoner. You might have been reading about me on the news. My head could have ended up on the Internet. What?

Mary: I'm sorry.

Conway: Thanks.

Mary: Will you go back?

Conway: To Iraq? Don't think so. Don't think I'd want to. I'm not one of those guys, you know: get back in the saddle, prove some dumbass point. I realise I was lucky. Don't push your luck.

Scene 9

**F/X: Dissolve to waves crashing for a few seconds, then Mary's monologue again, accompanied by the same guitar as before.**

Mary: You never know why you fall for somebody, not really. I suppose that first conversation told me what I thought I knew: that here was the loneliest man in Galway. Maybe that's me. There has to be a cause, a lost puppy to save. But that wasn't all of it, of course. There has to be more, doesn't there? I can remember the rain eased off after a while. The college bar got noisy so we went for a walk. Out by the cathedral and into town, past the pubs, up into Shop Street and the Quays, Spanish Arch. It stayed dry so we went all the way out to Salthill. Somewhere ... I think it must have been on the beach in the moonlight. Was it really like that or did I imagine it after? He took me in those huge arms and kissed me. We broke apart. He



was ... He was so apologetic. I reached out to him again. I pulled him towards me and the world went away. And when we stopped it was a different place, a different life.

Scene 10

**FX: Conway in the room with the two agents.**

Conway: Why doesn't he ever speak? Why is he sitting there like a goddam brick?

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: He doesn't speak because he doesn't have to.

Conway: Some job. All he does is bore holes in me with those piggy little eyes. You think I'm afraid of you? You think I'm intimidated?

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: Please, Captain.

Conway: What? What's the problem? I'm not reacting the way I should? You tell me all and I come back like a good little boy, my tail between my legs? Screw you. Screw you and your brick.

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: This isn't helping.

Conway: What the hell do you want? Why won't you tell me?

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: We're getting to that. I promise.

Conway: Hope I don't die first. What? What's he doing?

**[FX A sound of a case being zipped open, soft items like paper being removed.]**

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: He's not just here to sit still.

Conway: What? **[FX The items are being passed across a table.]** Photographs. Jesus!

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: Yes, photographs.

Conway: [Examining them] Photographs of Mary and me. Jesus, you had us followed. This is what the tax dollars pay for.

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: Among other things.

Conway: How long?

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: Long enough.

Conway: Is this it? Jesus, you guys are the government.

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: Yes sir, as you say, we're the government. You see this picture?

Conway: What about it?

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: It's a picture of your friend, Miss Brady, with another man.

Conway: So what?

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: I need to know if you've ever met that man.

Conway: No.

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: Look again, sir. Please.

Conway: What the hell for?

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: This is important.

[Pause]

Conway: No.

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: No what?

Conway: No, I have never seen that man before.

1<sup>st</sup> Agent [to 2<sup>nd</sup> Agent]: He's saying he hasn't met him.

Conway: So what? Why is this important?

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: You told Miss Brady things, things about Iraq?

Conway: Answer my goddamn question.

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: We will sir. We will. But for the moment, we're in the asking business. I'm asking you to cooperate.

Conway: What if I don't?

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: [Sighing] Tell you what, sir, tell you what. Believe it or not, I'm kind of going out on a limb here. I'll be frank sir, my superiors said no. They want to throw the whole goddamn book at you. There's talk of dishonourable discharge, maybe even prison time.

Conway: That's completely nuts.

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: That's what I told them, sir. I read the brief and I told them there's nothing here that justifies the disgrace of a decorated war hero. To put it in language they understand, I said there's nothing here that justifies throwing away an asset like you, or losing a qualified combat pilot at a time when the nation faces so many enemies. So I stuck my neck out, sir. But my career won't survive you turning your back on your country, any more than yours will.

Conway: You'll forgive me, but I don't think that's going to keep me up nights.

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: I understand that, sir, of course I do. All I want you to realise is that there's very much two ways we can do this. One way is no harm done. We sort it out. Put it behind us.

Conway: Right

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: Your wife – uh – she's from a military family?

Conway: Look. Let's nail this. It wasn't just my body that was broken in Iraq. The marriage was too. Has been for years. There are things I have to do, I know that. But I couldn't face them, not after what happened. There just wasn't enough of me left. I needed to get away, get strength from somewhere.

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: I understand, sir, and I'm sorry. But I need to know: you told Miss Brady about Iraq, didn't you?

Conway: How could I not?

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: What do you mean?

Conway: I'm human, goddammit. I'm still a human being.

Scene 11

**F/X: Dissolve to the soundscape of Scene 1, the cockpit, the jet engine noises and the voice on the com link urgently warning Conway to abort, to eject now. The shrill voices are joined by deep breathing, gasping. Conway screams and comes awake. He and Mary are in bed together.**

Mary: Bobby, Bobby. What's wrong?

Conway: [Still gasping] I... I

Mary: You were crying. You were having a bad dream.

Conway: I – uh – sorry.

Mary: What was it?

Conway: I was – uh...

Mary: It was Iraq, wasn't it? You were dreaming about Iraq.

Conway: Yeah, um ...I

[He begins to weep. Mary gathers him into her arms.]

Mary: It's ok. It's ok. It's ok. Everything's fine now. You're safe.

Scene 12

**F/X: Conway and Mary are inside. Bare feet are heard on a wooden floor. Mary is moving to sit down near an open fire. Conway is already seated near the fire. The fire is heard crackling in the background throughout their dialogue.**

Conway: You want to dry that hair quick.

Mary: It's ok. The fire'll do it.

Conway: Don't want you getting cold.

Mary: Yes Daddy.

Conway: Huh!

Mary: I've been drying my hair in front of fires since before you were – I don't know – a fighter pilot.

Conway: Did you do it like this?

Mary: Like what?

Conway: Clothes off.

Mary: Ha, of course. Back in Donegal where we'd only the one change of clothes. Course I had to. Why d'you think I'm such a nudist?

Conway: That's cute. Or abnormal.

Mary: I was talking to Ann-Marie today.

Conway: Ann-Marie? Your flatmate?

Mary: My sort of flatmate.

Conway: Yeah?

Mary: She was kind of asking me what's the story like?

Conway: What do you mean?

Mary: Come on Bobby. I'm hardly ever there. I mean, I'm still paying rent but she never sees me. I think she was a bit worried.

Conway: Tell her the truth.

Mary: What's that?

Conway: You've been seduced and abducted by an evil American who's using you for his twisted sexual purposes.

Mary: Huh, she already knows that.

Conway: Really?

Mary: Girls do talk, Bobby.

Conway: What have you told her?

Mary: Enough.

Conway: Seriously. What?

Mary: You're worried about gory details? Don't fret. I've spared your blushes, some of them anyway.

Conway: Gee thanks.

Mary: But she did kind of ask me: what's the point like?

Conway: The point?

Mary: Why am I still paying rent if I'm hardly ever there? I mean, it's not fair on her. You share a flat for the companionship, you know?

Conway: Huh, I did my study in a barracks. You get very sick of other guys.

Mary: You like your solitude?

Conway: Sometimes ... It's pretty damn solitary up in the air, even with all the voices in your ear.

Mary: You don't like your dreams. You shouldn't be alone when you're having them.

Conway: Well, do you want to?

Mary: Do I want to what?

Conway: You know ... Move in?

Mary: Move in here?

Conway: Yeah.

Mary: But what about ...? I mean, we don't know how long you're going to be around.

Conway: I'll be around till the end of term.

Mary: And what about after?

Conway: After?

Mary: Yeah. After.

Scene 13

**F/X Conway still in his car, still journeying.**

Conway: What about after? It's got to be the stupidest, the saddest question. It was a question I got asked a lot over the next couple of years. Sam, my little boy, asked me more than once during the divorce: 'Dad! What about after?' And I couldn't tell him, I couldn't tell her, that there is no after. There is only now. You couldn't do this job if you could see the after.

Scene 14

**F/X Conway and Mary back in the sitting room, the fire still crackling. It is an hour or two after the conversation in Scene 12.**

Mary: Where in the world would you most like to go?

Conway: Mm?

Mary: If you could go anywhere you wanted, where would you go?

Conway: I'm having a hard time imagining anywhere but here right now.

Mary: Think about it. Maybe it's some place you've already been.

Conway: You forget I'm a military man. We don't have that much imagination. And no, they never really sent me fun places.

Mary: I'd go to Tahiti.

Conway: Tahiti?

Mary: Sea and sand. Sun and lazy afternoons. I'd love to spend my days scuba diving and looking at weird fish, that'd suit me just fine.

Conway: You tell me I'm a weird fish.

Mary: That just shows how much I like them, doesn't it?

Scene 15

**F/X Conway in the secure room with the two agents.**

Conway: You keep bandying these words around: 'security risk,' 'potential threat.' You haven't told me anything. Ok, I admit: I cheated on my wife. Go tell the President.

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: You're adamant that she never sought more information about Iraq, about details of your service in the military?

Conway: She isn't interested. She knows I don't like talking about it.

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: Yet you admit that you met her brother.

Conway: What has that to do with anything? Yes, I met her goddamned brother. So what?

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: What were the circumstances?

Conway: Jesus ... I agreed to take a trip with her. College was off for a couple of weeks so I said I'd drive her to her home place, up in Donegal. Bellarda. We were going to spend the weekend.

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: What did she tell you about her parents?

Conway: She said they were dead.

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: How did she say they died?

Conway: In a car accident. Her brother was the only person left at home. Why?

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: A car accident? That's interesting.

Conway: She doesn't like talking about it. [Small pause] Look. I'm sick of this. [Pause] I'm starting to feel like I don't want to answer any more questions.

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: Just a little more, Captain Conway. I promise you we're nearly done. But I need to know about that trip.

Conway: [A long sigh] It was the Easter break. We were supposed to set out early but slept it out, didn't get there till after dark. It was a bitch of a drive. I think it was ... after ten when we got there, just a little house all on its own by the side of a road, about a mile from the village. The lights were out. She went poking around to see if there was anything to eat. We thought there was no one there but he appeared. He must have been ... I don't know, asleep or something, sitting alone in the dark for all I knew. Anyway ... He came out and kind of grunted at us. A big guy, all hair and beard. Much older than her, I think. He said something about going out. He didn't come back until after we'd gone to bed. In the morning we got up. She started breakfast. I was watching the stuff on the pan while she ... I don't know. She went up to have a shower or something, then he appeared again.

Scene 16

**F/X: A kitchen at breakfast time. A faint sound of sizzling from a frying pan. A radio dimly heard in the background. A door opens and closes loudly. Footsteps across a hard floor.**

Conway: Oh, uh, hi.

Seamus: What about yeh?

Conway: Hope we didn't disturb you.

Seamus: Don't worry about me.

**[F/X Seamus walks over and turns on a kettle. Its hum joins the other noises in the kitchen.]**

Conway: Would you like some breakfast?

Seamus: No.

**[F/X He lights a cigarette.]**

Conway: It was – uh – some drive here. Wild country.

Seamus: Wild country? You think so, huh?

Conway: Well...

Seamus: You're a yank.

Conway: Yeah.

[Pause]

Seamus: You're not a kid.

Conway: I guess not. Why?

Seamus: She ... She's a kid.

Conway: She ... What?

Seamus: She's a kid. And you're not.

Conway: Listen, I...

Seamus: What's the story with you anyway? You're no scrawny wee student, that's for sure. To look at you, I'd think 'cop,' or maybe military. Which is it?

Conway: Military.

Seamus: No shite? Bejaysus. Which branch?

Conway: Look. I don't want to ...

Seamus: Go on. I'm curious about these things. Which branch?

Conway: Air Force.

Seamus: Go 'way. Air Force. Don't tell me yer a feekin' pilot?

Conway: I won't tell you anything.

Seamus: You're the most exotic wee bird she's brought up here, that's for sure. And there's been a few, believe me. What's your name?

Conway: Conway. Bob Conway.

Seamus: Ever drop bombs on people, Bob Conway?

Conway: Listen. I'm in your parents' house, I don't want to be rude...

Seamus: Oh, you're not offending anyone, Bob Conway. My mother and father aren't around anymore. Their opinions don't matter. They're not here to fret about what you're doing with their daughter.

Conway: Look, this is...

Seamus: You'd think you fellas would be busy at the moment, wouldn't yeh? How come you're out here? Did something happen yeh?

Conway: Listen, Seamus, whatever your name is...

**[F/X Door opens and closes.]**

Mary: What's going on?

Seamus: I was just admiring what the cat brought back.

Mary: Oh Jesus, don't start.

Seamus: Don't start? Don't start? Jesus missy, you've got a cheek.

Mary: Have I now?

Seamus: Flouncin' around your mother's house with this guy. What d'yeh think they'd say if they were alive, huh?

Mary: [To Conway] Sorry about this.

Conway: It's ok.

Seamus: I know things about this fella you don't, or maybe you do. Is that the way it is now?

Mary: Jesus. Can I not come back home to me Mammy's house without listening to this shite?

Seamus: This fella's married.

Conway: What!

Seamus: He's married and he drops bombs on Iraqis. He takes billion dollar planes up in the sky and blows peasants and their goats to smithereens. He's a brave boy.

Conway: Ok, that's it.

Mary: Bobby, don't.

Seamus: Don't worry yerself, love. He's too busy playing the officer and gentleman, isn't he? He's not going to take a pop at me in your mother's house. That'd kill the romance, wouldn't it? And he's not ready to do that yet. Bet you wish you could kill me, though. Bet you wish you could fire a Cruise missile right through my gut. Make this nasty Irishman go away.

Conway: I wouldn't waste the hardware.

**[A jeer from Seamus.]**

Mary: I'm sorry about this Bobby. This normally only happens when he streams in from the pub. Usually he's snoring his brains out.

Seamus: You got awful smart since me mam and dad died.

Mary: And look at you. Stomping around your mother's kitchen taking pots at people who are too polite to hit you back.

Seamus: Tell you what, yank. There's a lot of people in this country think that any oul piss that falls on us from American skies is pure gold. Know what I mean? I'm not one of them, yank. You see: I'm a peasant, just like those stupid wee goat herds up in Iraq, and I don't like to see one of my own taken advantage of by one of you.

Mary: Oh would you ever ... This is my home too and I've a right not to be bullied by the likes of you.

Seamus: Everything's about rights now, isn't it? Everybody's got a right to be any oul shite they want, haven't they? But I'll tell you, little sister, there's some of us live by a different code, you know? You think you've got a right? You're no different from the hoors that sleep with the Brits.



**[F/X Mary has slapped Seamus across the face. Seamus moves as if to strike back. Conway intervenes.]**

Conway: Here now. That's enough.

Seamus: You going to hit me now, yank?

Mary: You're nothin' but a drunken scum.

Seamus: The two of ye should go. I don't want ye around. Neither would a lot of people.

Mary: I'll not be bullied by you.

Conway: No, Mary. It's ok. Leave it. [To Seamus] We'll be gone in an hour. Could you – eh – would you give us some goddamn space until then?

Seamus: Hear that, young one? He don't want any trouble. Why would he? What if it ends up in the papers? What would his wife say?

Mary: Just get the hell away from me.

Seamus: With pleasure. **[F/X He is moving past them.]** You take care now yank.

**[F/X The door closes.]**

Scene 17

**F/X Conway and Mary are in a car parked in some outside location. There is some sound of wind against the windows.**

Mary: [In floods of tears] Oh my God I'm so so sorry.

Conway: It's ok. It's ok.

Mary: I drag you up hundreds of miles for that. I can understand if you don't want anything to do with me.

Conway: Come on. What kind of talk is that? I don't scare that easy.

Mary: I honestly thought ... I didn't think he'd be that bad.

Conway: Mary, it's fine. No harm done.

Mary: I'm mortified, Bobby. What must you think of me?

Conway: Mary, we've all got people in our families who embarrass the hell out of us. You should meet my Uncle Sean. [Pause] Was he always like that?

Mary: No. It's ... it's drink. He used to be fine. But he had ... I don't know, some bad luck I suppose. Now all he does is sit there thinking about it, blaming the world.

Conway: I'm sorry.

Mary: Oh, you shouldn't apologise. I'm – I'm awful sorry for those things he said to you.

Conway: It's not your fault.

Mary: There's no excuse.

Conway: Look Mary. I came here with you, to see your home place. I didn't come to see your brother.

Mary: Good for you.

Conway: What do you mean?

Mary: You can drive away and forget about all this. Just get on your plane and go, right? But me, I'm stuck with this ... reality.

Conway: You're not stuck. You have a choice. Everyone does.

Mary: Really? Tell me what my choices are Bobby. Do I climb on that plane with you back to the States? Would you let me? What do I know about your life back there?

Conway: You want to ask me something, is that it? You want to come out and ask me? Go ahead.

Mary: No I don't. I told you. I don't want to know anything you don't want to tell me.

[Pause. Conway lets out a sigh.]

Conway: Look, we shouldn't let him make us fight. We're still here. You said you wanted to show me around your village, why don't you? I'd like to take a walk on that beach of yours.

Mary: I think I just want to go.

Conway: [Another sigh] Ok.

Scene 18

**F/X: Conway back in the room with the two agents.**

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: Not nice.

Conway: He was right, wasn't he? I am married. I've been lying to her. I'm using her.

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: Is that what you think?

Conway: I should have told her then and there. She gave me an opening, I think. I should have taken it.

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: It's probably a good thing you didn't.

Conway: Why's that?

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: Leverage, I guess. Everyone keeps secrets in a relationship.

Conway: So you're an expert on that as well?

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: You don't agree?

Conway: I don't know. I don't know anything any more.

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: Anyway, speaking of secrets...

Conway: Yes?

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: I guess it's time for you to find out some of Miss Brady's secrets. Steve.

**[F/X The 2<sup>nd</sup> agent starts taking more photographs out of an envelope, spreading them on the table in front of Conway.]**

Conway: What's this? What are you doing? Who are these people?

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: This is Seamus Brady, right?

Conway: I think so. Who are these others?

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: She told you her parents were killed in a car accident, is that right?

Conway: Yes. So what?

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: Can't blame her, I suppose. Guess I'd say the same.

Conway: What? What are you saying?

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: These are Mary Brady's parents: Patrick and Irene Brady. Both were notorious IRA terrorists loyal to the dissident wing of that organisation. They were opposed to the current peace process. Patrick Brady was killed nine years ago, while thought to be in the process of planning an attack on a British Army base in County Antrim. Irene Brady was murdered five years ago, in what is thought to have been a revenge attack by Protestant terrorists. At the time you met him, Seamus Brady had just finished a sentence in Maghaberry Prison in Northern Ireland, again for terrorist offences. Mary Brady herself is known to have consorted with people in the dissident IRA movement, both at home in Donegal and here in Galway University.

Conway: She's ... she's just a kid.

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: The dissident wing of the IRA is committed to the overthrow of two friendly governments, one of whom is our closest ally. They are enemies of the State, enemies of national security. It's the same as consorting with someone from Al-Qaeda.

Conway: No way.

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: She never told you any of it, did she sir?

Conway: No.

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: She misled you.

Conway: Wait a minute, wait a minute. She didn't ... She never ... There's never been the slightest thing. This is ... this is guilt by association.

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: Of course it is, sir. And to most people who live in the real world, that should be it. But you and I don't live in the real world, sir. You know how it works. You don't take risks with assets. Guilt by association is still guilt.

Conway: She's not a terrorist. She's just a kid.

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: Any idea how young they are in Gaza or Afghanistan these days, sir? But you're right, of course. It's in her family. She can't help knowing these people. She probably wants to put it all behind her, forget about it. But it doesn't change things for you, for me.

Conway: She deserves a chance.

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: Of course she does, sir. Let's hope she gets it.

Conway: I could talk to her. I could explain.

1<sup>st</sup> Agent: I don't think that's a great idea, sir.

Conway: She doesn't want any of it, I'm sure of that. I could – she could come back to the States.

1st Agent: You're not really thinking just now, sir.

Conway: Why? Why not? What's wrong with it?

1st Agent: It'd be the end of your career, for a start, and even if you did avoid a court martial ... You're married sir, married into the most military family anyone can imagine. The world hasn't moved on as much as we'd like. We're still kind of – tribal in many ways. Even with all the fancy equipment, we're still tribal. The chances of you getting back inside the tribe with your Miss Brady, well, I'd wish you well, that's all I can say.

Conway: What are you saying? What do you want me to do?

1st Agent: I think it should be pretty obvious, shouldn't it sir? I want you to act in a way loyal to the good old US. I want you to show loyalty to that government which has invested substantial resources into making you who you are.

Conway: I'm still getting divorced, you realise that?

1st Agent: Of course, sir. And maybe some day ..? But just now, we need to do things by the book, the civil book and the military one. Imagine the alternative, sir. I'm not aware of anyone in this country who's successfully received political asylum from the States. You'd probably have to go somewhere. You'd never be able to go back. You'd never see your kids again.

Conway: You've got it all worked out.

1st Agent: Part of our job is being prepared, sir, just like the boy scouts.

Conway: I've got to talk to her.

1st Agent: That's not a good idea.

Conway: I can't even say goodbye? I've got things at the house.

1st Agent: They're being collected and bagged for you as we speak, sir. All going well, they should be with you on your flight back to the States this evening.

Scene 19

**F/X Dissolve to the sound of crashing waves again. This sound is held for a few seconds, then back to Mary's interior monologue. The same tune as before.**

Mary: I suppose I knew he was married. I did want him to tell me - that time in the car. Silly. I was being a silly girl. If he wanted to tell me he would have. I wonder would anything have changed if we'd told each other things. I think of Donegal, the long trip back, the way we made love that night and cried into each other. I think it was the start of our goodbye.

[Pause]

Not long after Seamus wrote to me to say he was leaving, getting out, going to Australia. He said the home place would be free now and he was leaving it up to me what I wanted to do about it. He even kind of apologised. I was glad for him, really glad. I get a wee card now and again. He met someone and they had a kid, a nephew I've never met.

[Pause]

I went back to Bellarda that summer. People told me I was nuts but I couldn't face Galway, not after everything. I decided to live in the house, go on the dole and have a real go at the art. It was hard. Jesus it was hard. But there was ... peace too, of a kind. My stuff started to get noticed. I sell a lot over the Internet so I don't have to travel that much. That kind of suits me too.

[Pause]

There've been men too. Of course there have. But they're ... They come in for a time and then they fade out. And I think that suits me too. **[F/X The music fades out.]**

[Pause]

But all that was after. I came back from college that night and sat in an empty house. I don't know how I knew so early something was wrong. When it was dark I went up to his room and found that all his things were gone. Not a trace of him left. I couldn't do anything. It was days before I was even able to cry. Ann Marie was great, when I was finally able. We did what girls do. We got drunk and we cried and agreed that all men are bastards and cheats and not fit to walk the Earth. I suppose they must have told him about the family, all that stuff I wouldn't let in to our precious space, just like he didn't let in his marriage. Maybe he even put up a fight, I don't know. The truth is I've spent my whole life trying to escape, just like him in a way. But it's no use. The past, other peoples' past, it always catches up, doesn't it? [Pause]

Sometimes in the night when I'm in bed I hear the phone ring and when I get down there's no message and I can't help wondering. You can't help it, anymore than you can help the past.

**[F/X: Fade back to wave sounds for a few moments, which themselves fade out.]**

Scene 20

**F/X: Dissolve to an interior location, something whose soundscape resembles a large office. There is the hum of computers. Electronic noises and beeps. Someone is typing on a keyboard. The electronic voice which speaks first is that of a woman, sounding for all the world like the voice in a telephone queue or an airport terminal.**

Electronic Voice: Pause for retina scan.

**[F/X A computerised noise like the sound of a camera clicking.]**

Electronic Voice: Welcome Major Conway. Please input identification code.

**[F/X More typing on the keyboard.]**

Electronic Voice: Stand by please.

**[F/X Office noise and sounds from Conway's computer terminal.]**

Electronic Voice: Now transmitting the coordinates of your craft. Prepare to assume control. Enter final access code.

**[F/X More typing on the keyboard. A beeping noise indicating confirmation.]**

Electronic Voice: Control successfully transferred. Downloading detailed terrain map to your terminal. Stand by for direct contact from Mission Command.

**[F/X A sound of metallic whirring, like a computer impersonating an aircraft in flight. The countdown music from Scene 1 begins again and slowly gains in intensity till the end of the scene.]**

Mission Command: [A male voice, alive] Bob. Target is very much live. Repeat: live. Adjust course Mark Zero three twenty. Transmitting target coordinates to you now. [Pause] Pursue course north north east no higher than two hundred. Watch your velocity. Repeat: strike has been called in. Target is live.

**[F/X: The metallic noise of flight varies in pitch as if representing Conway's course changes to the drone.]**

Conway interior monologue: A dream. An electronic dream. None of this is real.

Mission Command: Watch that valley. Don't go too close to those ridges.

Conway: I won't. Cutting speed.

Mission Command: Final ridge due north of current position. Swing high on ascent and take up firing position. Get your birds away and then get the hell out of there. That's one expensive aircraft.

Conway: Copy that. I see the ridge, I think.

Mission Command: Target reported stationary. With any luck, they won't have a clue.

Conway: Gaining final ridge. Beginning ascent ... now.

Mission Command: Protocol cleared for firing. Prepare to fire in five, four, three, two, one...

Conway: Birds away. **[F/X A corresponding noise from Conway's computer, indicating the release of missiles.]**

Mission Command: Get out of there, Bob. Out.

Conway: I'm out. **[F/X: More typing on keyboard. Noises indicating change of course.]**  
Pursuing designated course back to base twenty two. Did we get it?

Mission Command: Ground reports full impact. Repeat: full impact. You got them Major. Well done.

**[F/X: The computer and background noise of the control room fade out. The music swells to a single note, then fades quickly out.]**

Scene 21

**F/X: Conway is back in his car, on his way back from work.**

Conway: I do that and now I do this. Wonder if they still watch me. Wonder if they know how much liquor I put away at night. Good thing you don't have to be sober to fly a keyboard. [Sighs] I'm told there are people all over the world who wonder about the likes of me. What is it like to do what we do? What's it like to drive to work, sit at some clean computer console in Nevada and command something thousands of miles away to bomb the shit out of somewhere in Pakistan? The truth is I couldn't tell you what it's like. The truth is I'm dead, a pilot who lost his honour. They've reanimated me, up to a point, a semi-conscious zombie in a big, tragic video game. [Pause]

I think you get one test, one crisis to prove who you are, prove that dream of yourself you carry around. The problem is you never know what it is or when it's coming. I was stupid enough to think surviving Iraq would be proof enough, but of course that wasn't the real test. It's never what you think. [Pause]

The real bits in the dream are when I think of her, which I do every day, and occasional trips to see my kid, till the day he gets fed up and doesn't want to do it anymore. That's it.

Sometimes ... in bed at night ... when the liquor's failed to put me to sleep, I get this mad thought about going back to her. My mind takes wing and turns me into Snowden, a fugitive from my Government. But there's no way back now, not since I said yes to this, not since I agreed to administer death through a keyboard. There are no drone defectors. They make sure of that.

[Pause]

We didn't lie to each other.

**[F/X: The car engine is cut. Conway now seems to be speaking inside a room, but from this point, we hear Mary's voice also, as if this is a mantra they have both repeated, separately but together, many times.]**

We didn't lie to each other. There were just things we both chose not to let in, because we knew they'd end that quiet, that tiny garden of peace we'd made for ourselves. And we both knew it wouldn't last. Somehow the body knows when the mind doesn't. And what you've got to do is hold on ... Hold on and pray the memory of what you had will be enough, will take you through all those days that remain.

**[F/X: Pause for two seconds. Fade to end credits.]**

