

Hit Men

Lights rise on a six count on an empty stage. After a brief moment ANGELA enters.

(Note: All dialogue is addressed to the audience)

ANGELA

Just so we understand each other, I need you to know one thing without question, regardless of what you might have heard. Robert is a good man. Was. Is. Well he still is to me...anyway. I don't deny in this household that just might be a minority opinion at this particular moment. I don't care. The children will respect their father. That's not negotiable.

(Beat)

He was a good provider. He took an active and loving interest in his children. That counts for something in my book. He met his obligations and conducted himself like a man should.

(Beat)

Did he did he have his cares and his worries? Of course he did. So do I. So do you. Was he down sometimes? Admittedly, yes. He was sometimes. Winston Churchill had his down moments, he used to call his bouts with sadness his "black dog." Probably because it followed him around. At least that's what I assume he meant. And like the Lord of the Admiralty, Bob did self medicate. He drank.

(Beat)

But make no mistake about it. It was a private matter. He was...haunted...some times by the could of's and should of's of his life. The roads not taken as it were. So when he was overwhelmed he drank but he had the good grace to do it in the privacy of his study. Quietly. He never once appeared to be sloppy or out of control.

(Beat)

I am grateful for that.

ANGELA exits. After a moment, ROBBY enters.

ROBBY

He was a baseball fanatic. Completely off his fucking nut about it. The game, the history, the stats, you know like who did what when. And they got that info all the way back to the beginning of time, the Neolithic era. He'd watch every White Sox's game he could, even after we moved to North Carolina. He came to every one of my games in school. Every single one. Always supportive, always positive.

(Pause)

Except he was completely blind to the very obvious fact that I didn't give a shit about baseball. Watching it, discussing it, playing it. Absolutely oblivious. He insisted I play. And Mother would say, all Susie Homemaker: "Listen to your father. Sports build character"

(Beat)

So that was that.

(Beat)

Apparently he had always wanted to be some sort of b-ball God stud or something, I dunno. I think he made a big play in a game when he was a little guy in school. He mentioned it a couple of times. Maybe he wanted me to ask more about it. I never did. Just didn't care really. He never asked what my interests were, so why would I? Because if he had, he would have discovered that all I wanted to do was play music. Music. The piano.

ROBBY exits, MADISON enters

MADISON

To this day, my heart flutters a bit when I think of going into Daddy's study. It was huge with handmade bookcases and his big drafting table and all those tools he would use to make those so exact measurements. He designed kitchens. All sorts but mostly big ones. For rich people. It was always Daddy's study. Now I guess it's called a man cave. That seems like a stupid name to me. There were no cavemen there. Just him. And sometimes me.

(Beat)

One day, he shows me an old video. Its a baseball game with kids running around the bases and stuff. Then it focused on a boy looking kind of scared but very determined too. He was at bat and just as the pitch came he closed his eyes and swung as hard as he could. He hit the ball! Everyone watched as the ball climbed farther and farther away and the base runners dashed for home then everyone came out of the dug out all happy. They won. Daddy just kept looking at the screen even after the video stopped.

(Beat)

That's me, he said softly. I knew I had to hug him tight then, he looked so sad. But proud at the same time. Its the only hit he ever got but it won the game and the championship.

(Beat)

There were tears in his eyes. I hugged tighter.

MADISON moves upstage. ANGELA enters.

ANGELA

Robby is a good boy but he was listless and unfocused. I was so happy when Bob decided that enough was enough and decided to make him apply himself. I thought it would be good for both of them. Robby had this little keyboard in his room he made noise with at all hours of the day and night but Bob decided that sports was what he needed. Exercise, sunlight, being with boys his own age, being a part of a team. All positive experiences. I wholeheartedly approved. Sports builds character.

ANGELA moves upstage. ROBBY enters.

ROBBY

Maddy told me the baseball story. How Dad was a hero in his little film. Won the game with a homer to right field. It was nice but wasn't exactly a giant achievement. It was the eighth grade state intramural championship in...I dunno...the middle ages or something. Anyway, we are seriously brawling about my alleged defects and imbecilities so I just said fuck it Dad, I'm done. You win. You are the winner. So I'm off to the school's baseball team tryouts.

(Beat)

I got on the team. The junior varsity. I was on the junior varsity team for precisely one game. Turns out...I was good at this stuff. Baseball is basically waiting around for something to happen, hours of boredom punctuated by moments of sheer terror. Like solid round objects being thrown at you as hard as humanly possible. But for whatever reason, the ball always seemed to be travelling slowly to me. Maybe it was just the way I perceived it. Turns out its a good skill to have. I went four for five with two home runs, a double and a single. I was out on strikes the last time because I was tired and bored and done for the day.

(Beat)

That was my first and last JV game. Because the varsity coach was at the game and afterward immediately promoted me to the show. He and the JV coach started beefing about it, slamming chests and bellowing like two walruses in rut. I laughed my ass off.

Afterward the varsity coach is getting all friendly like and wants to know what position I want to play. I said none. He put me in the outfield. And so the great peace between me and Dad was formed. I did however get some loot from the deal. They bought me a new electric keyboard with 100 presets. That's when I started to compose.

ROBBY moves upstage. MADISON comes downstage.

MADISON

It was terrific when the fighting stopped. Daddy was sooooo proud of Robby. It was all he talked about.

(Beat)

We were happy...

(Beat)

...for a time. But then, it changed. The more Robby hit home runs, the more he was mentioned in the paper or on TV, the...quieter...Daddy got. I mean he was trying to be all chipper but I could see it. There was a darkness following him that scared me.

(Beat)

I wanted to help. So I took him to a ballgame. Just he and I. Our minor league team was called the Carolina Slaw Dogs and they were always running crazy promotions. On father daughter day I took him and as a surprise I paid some extra and they ran the video on the jumbo big screen during the break. Daddy looked hypnotized. When it was over the crowd cheered. He sat quietly for the longest time then suddenly gave me a hug. Then he said "Thank you Maddy girl, that's the nicest present I ever got."

(Beat)

When we got home he went down into his study, locked the door and stayed there for two whole days. And I knew in my heart of hearts that we were in big trouble.

MADISON moves upstage, ANGELA moves downstage.

ANGELA

The children were doing well, Robby was finally excelling and Maddy was her usual sweet self. I felt we were on a good path until the day came when Bob returned from the Slaw Dogs game and locked himself into his study. This was completely out of my wheelhouse. But I have found, in my life, that action bests inaction every time regardless of the situation at hand. So I spoke to our family physician who said that she would have a mental health worker over first thing in the morning. It seemed like a reasonable solution to the problem. I wished him a good night through the door.

ANGELA moves upstage, ROBBY moves downstage.

ROBBY

It was around midnight. I was working on a new song and was just taking my headphones off when I heard the garage door open. It was raining heavily. Dad's car literally roared out, he spun a hard left and was gone. Mom and Maddy heard it too. When I went downstairs they were staring at a note. It read, "Emergency at work. Home soon."

(Beat)

I never heard of a kitchen design emergency. I called the cops.

ROBBY moves upstage, MADISON moves downstage.

MADISON

No more than an hour later, the doorbell rang. I was closest to the door and when I opened it there were two policemen looking tired and very serious standing there and in that horrible instant I knew he was gone.

(Beat)

I fell apart.

MADISON moves upstage, ANGELA moves downstage.

ANGELA

He was, apparently, going a little too fast and had in fact been drinking. They wanted to rule it as "Death by Misadventure." That essentially means you did something stupid and wound up paying for it with your life. I was not having it. Fortunately we are well connected in this town. Our attorney reached out to some people and after a reasonable amount of time Bob's death was ruled accidental.

(Beat)

There was of course a great many matters to deal with, issues to be sorted, people to be contacted. I threw myself into the work. I need to be busy and I especially need to be busy when times are trying. I loved him but he left a big mess that needed thorough cleaning and those tasks brought me through the pain of his leaving. Life has no reverse gear and sometimes the best thing to do is to accept that and get on with things.

(Beat)

So I did.

ANGELA exits. ROBBY moves downstage.

ROBBY

It really pissed me off the way Mom just decided to tidy everything up. Like it was milk spilled on the floor. I went another way with it. After the mess and inquires settled down, I went to the cops and asked to see the records. Much to my surprise, they put me in a room and eventually a policewoman came in with a folder. She said “Just leave it when you’re done.”

(Beat)

I looked at every single piece of paper and image. Some of it was horrible. The car came off the road in a heavily wooded area and he had been decapitated by a tree. It wasn’t an accident. An interim report stated that he apparently sped up as the car entered the forest.

(Beat)

I closed the folder.

(Pause)

The next week was the finals for the State Championship. I decided to play even though I felt like shit and could barely get out of bed. We went 4 for 4 in a sweep. I helped. A lot. I left the field and walked home. All 27 miles. When I got home, I was new.

(Beat)

I am composing a musical elegy for him. And once done whenever I play it I will remember him.

(Pause)

I will remember him in light.

ROBBY exits. MADISON moves downstage.

MADISON

I know what happened. He heard “L'appel du vide”. It is French for “the call of the void” It’s that random sick moment when you think of destroying yourself when driving your car or standing in a high place. Someplace like that.

(Beat)

I know this for certain because I am my father’s daughter.

(Beat)

And I hear it too.

(Beat)

I don't blame him for it. He just needed the pain to end and when he heard the call, he answered. This is a feeling I understand completely.

(Beat.)

I grieved a long time for him. It is simply a state you have to pass through. You come out changed in the end but gradually the pain subsides to a manageable level. But that wasn't happening for me. I could hear the call and it grew louder and louder.

(Beat)

Mother saw it. In her no nonsense way she simply took me to a therapist one day and that woman, Melanie by name, saved my life. Gradually we decided that I could spend the day of his death in mourning but would live my life otherwise present and in the moment.

(Beat)

I am better now. Ultimately it seems to me that the span of your life is like a movie. You can choose to leave in the middle of it or you can see how it ends. I want to see how my movie ends. And I want to be surprised...

(Pause)

Don't you?

MADISON smiles wistfully and looks away as the lights fade on an 8 count.

Curtain.