

THE WILD BLUE

"Pilot"

Written by

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White Production Draft
Full Blue Draft

2/10/12
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THE WILD BLUE
REVISION HISTORY

<u>Draft/Revision Color</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Revised Pages</u>
WHITE PRODUCTION DRAFT	2/10/13	Full Draft
FULL BLUE DRAFT	2/17/13	Full Draft

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"PILOT"

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CAST LIST

CAPTAIN RANDALL "STICK" HENLEY
LIEUTENANT PILAR "MAYTAG" ROBLES
LIEUTENANT DEREK "VANDAL" FREHLEY
REAR ADMIRAL CAL MERRICK
SENIOR NCIS INVESTIGATOR ALLISON BURKE
COMMAND MASTER CHIEF DONALD BOWMAN
JAMES KINCAID
JOAQUIN TATE
EXECUTIVE OFFICER
MOLLY "SHEPHERD" CROOK
BAMBI
FEMALE JUNIOR RADIO OPERATOR
TRACKING OFFICER
LANDING SIGNAL OFFICER
PETTY OFFICER/BURKE'S ATTACHÉ/TONY
~~MESS CREWMAN*~~
~~BRIDGE CREWMAN*~~
AIR BOSS
ND SAILOR
CAPTAIN'S AIDE/DONNY
~~NEWBIE SAILOR*~~
~~LESS-NEWBIE SAILOR*~~
JESS*
LEWIS SYKES*
RYAN FARLEY*
AIDE #2*

ND SAILORS (NON-SPEAKING)
CREW (NON-SPEAKING)
PILOTS (NON-SPEAKING)
AIR CREW – "GRAPES" (NON-SPEAKING)
AIR CREW – "SHOOTERS" (NON-SPEAKING)
WEAPONS OFFICER/WORLEY* (NON-SPEAKING)

ORDYS (NON-SPEAKING)
FIREMEN (NON-SPEAKING)
~~MILITARY POLICE (NON-SPEAKING)*~~
NAVIGATOR* (NON-SPEAKING)
2 WORSHIPPERS* (NON-SPEAKING)

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"PILOT"
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SET LIST

INTERIORS

USS LEXINGTON

- THE BRIDGE
- HANGAR BAY
- CIC
- CAPTAIN'S STATEROOM
- NCIS COMMAND BERTH/HALLWAY
- ORDY WING
- SMOKER PIT
- SQUADRON READY ROOM
- "BLUE TILE" CORRIDOR
- ~~ADMIRAL'S QUARTERS*~~
- COMMAND MASTER CHIEF'S OFFICE
- CORRIDOR
- CORRIDOR OUTSIDE THE BRIDGE
- ENLISTED MESS HALL
- ~~EXERCISE ROOM*~~
- OFFICERS' MESS HALL
- ~~ORDY ELEVATOR*~~
- PILAR AND SHEPHERD'S BERTH
- ~~LADDER AND CORRIDOR*~~
- ~~VANDAL AND BAMBI'S BERTH*~~
- CHAPEL*

EA-18 GROWLER

PILAR'S F-18

~~BAMBI'S F-18*~~

VANDAL'S F-18

~~NORTH KOREAN MIG*~~

EXTERIORS

USS LEXINGTON

- FLIGHT DECK
- FLIGHT DECK/CATAPULT STAGING
- VULTURE'S ROW
- EA-18 GROWLER
- PILAR'S F-18
- SKIES OVER THE SEA OF JAPAN
- SKIES OFF BAENGNYEONGDO ISLAND
- SKIES OVER BAENGNYEONGDO ISLAND
- SEA OF JAPAN
- HIGH ABOVE THE LEXINGTON STRIKE GROUP
- ~~NIGHT FALLS ON THE PACIFIC*~~
- NOTHING BUT SKY
- ~~RESCUE HELO/SEA OF JAPAN*~~
- SHEPHERD'S F-18

TEASER

INT. USS LEXINGTON - CAPTAIN'S STATEROOM - DAY

Captain's Stateroom. Not luxurious by any reckoning, but some attempts at comfort over the cold grey steel frame.

Find CAPTAIN RANDALL "STICK" HENLEY, CO (Commanding Officer) of the *USS Lexington*, good-looking 40s, seen it all -- a NAVAL AVIATOR himself, with all the confidence that brings.

He's on a VIDEO-CHAT call with JESS, good-looking 40, talking about their son --

JESS

You're busy. It's fine, I'll let you get back to it.

HENLEY

I can talk to him later, when gets home from school.

JESS

I *hope* he's at school.

Henley reacts, Jesus. Trying --

HENLEY

Okay. Look -- he gives you a hard time about it, tell him his father wants a word with him.

JESS

And hope he remembers who that is?

That stings. She sees it, feels bad. This is not the first conversation they've had like this.

JESS (CONT'D)

Look, I didn't mean that.

HENLEY

I'll check in with you later today. Well, tomorrow. Eight a.m. okay?

She nods. Neither satisfied, but nothing more to say --

JESS

Be careful out there.

HENLEY

I will.

(CONTINUED)

Disconnect. Henley sighs, rubs his eyes. Moves to a metal DRAWER nearby, pulls it open, rummages. What he's looking for isn't there. He gets up, exits --

RADIO OPERATOR (PRE-LAP)
Make a hole! Coming through!

OMITTED

INT. USS LEXINGTON - CORRIDOR - DAY

Downstairs, inner hive of the Big Lex. Tight corridors, SAILORS tucking sidelong to let one another pass.

A FEMALE JUNIOR RADIO OPERATOR, early 20s, moves through in a hurry. Close to a run as she can get, expertly negotiating the metal KNEE-KNOCKER interior doors. Swings herself onto a ladder, clambering up to --

OMITTED

OMITTED

INT. USS LEXINGTON - CORRIDOR OUTSIDE THE BRIDGE - DAY

-- the corridor leading to the Bridge.

As she approaches the Bridge, the XO (EXECUTIVE OFFICER, 30) comes out.

RADIO OPERATOR
Looking for Captain Henley, sir.

EXECUTIVE OFFICER
Not here. Try the Flight Deck.

The Radio Operator turns, heads back out, into --

INT. USS LEXINGTON - BELOW FLIGHT DECK - DAY

Following her track now as she dons a CRANIAL (noise suppressing headgear) and LIFE JACKET, still moving the whole time, urgent. Passing --

JOAQUIN TATE, 19, black, urban. He's a red-shirt ORDY, the guys who load bombs and missiles on planes. With his buddy JAMES KINCAID, 20s, polar opposite in every way -- white, Deep South, quiet.

JOAQUIN
Yo, Sarah, what's the hurry?

(CONTINUED)

RADIO OPERATOR
Can't talk, Joaquin.

JOAQUIN
All in a bustle. Something going
down?

She shakes her head, can't say, keeps going, exits --

EXT. USS LEXINGTON - FLIGHT DECK - DAY

-- onto ANOTHER PLANET -- the flight deck under FULL FLIGHT
OPS, JETS taking off and trapping every thirty seconds.
Intense, dangerous, chaotic.

So loud up here, she motions to the LANDING SIGNAL OFFICER
(LSO). He gets in close, yells something we can't hear. The
Radio Operator nods as a JET RIPS BY OVERHEAD, just off the
deck. The Radio Operator hurries back inside.

OMITTED

INT. USS LEXINGTON - BLUE TILE CORRIDOR - CONTINUOUS

This hallway's a little different than the rest -- LEATHER
WRAPPING on the handrails, CARPETING and WOOD creeping into
the austere decor. "Blue Tile" Quarters, the upstairs of the
ship, where the brass lives and works.

She peers into one stateroom, sees --

INT. USS LEXINGTON - CAPTAIN'S STATEROOM - CONTINUOUS

CAPTAIN'S AIDE, male, 18, seated at a low desk --

RADIO OPERATOR
He here?

The Aide shakes his head no.

RADIO OPERATOR (CONT'D)
Oh, come on--

The Aide mimes smoking. The Radio Operator nods her thanks,
tears off.

INT. USS LEXINGTON - SMOKER PIT - DAY

The smoker's ghetto onboard -- basically a hollow space in
the hull with a stellar view of ocean racing by the giant
open PORTHOLE, some fifteen feet across.

Several ND SAILORS smoking, shooting the shit on a rare break
in the action. Young -- most of them barely in their
twenties, moving through the haze of SMOKE.

(CONTINUED)

SETTLE on Command Master Chief DONALD BOWMAN -- 50s, hard, direct bridge between Upstairs and Downstairs here -- senior enlisted man, responsible for every non-officer on board.

Middle of a story, a few SAILORS nearby laughing, appreciating --

BOWMAN

So this kid doesn't know which way is up, been sent all over the ship looking for a "BT punch." No idea what the hell it is, and he doesn't want to ask, 'cause they make it sound like he's supposed to know.

Among those present are LEWIS SYKES, 30, a CIVILIAN DEFENSE CONTRACTOR on the ship to oversee the company's bombs, missiles and their guidance systems (making him new to ship culture), and RYAN FARLEY, 20s, a red-shirt Ordy and science fiction/fantasy geek.

LEWIS

Wait, what's a BT punch?

FARLEY

Let the Chief tell the story, Lewis, damn.
(to Bowman, explaining)
Contractor.

BOWMAN

(nods, continues)
He's gone through the whole squadron, the chiefs, even asking just random hey-yous in the mess hall, "where can I find a BT punch? I gotta have a BT punch." Finally somebody takes pity, tells this poor nugget, BT is Boiler Tech. He thinks, ah. Hauls ass all the way down to the engineering wing, finds the first tech he sees, ready for success. Says, "I'm here for a BT punch." And sure enough --

REVEAL HENLEY there as he interjects. He knows this story all too well --

HENLEY

Boiler Tech says sure -- punches him in the stomach, leaves him there curled up on the deck, walks away like "there you go."

(CONTINUED)

The other Sailors laugh.

BOWMAN
Guess that nugget got the last
laugh, though, huh?

Henley smiles, shakes his head. Checks his watch --

HENLEY
You got any more of those?

Bowman looks at him, shakes his head. Taps a cigarette out
of his pack with some false grudging, hands it off.

BOWMAN
Said you were gonna quit.

HENLEY
I did quit.

BOWMAN
More like quit buying your own.
Which means now I gotta be a party
to your nasty habit.

HENLEY
Yours taste better.

BOWMAN
Ought to. They're Canadian.

HENLEY
Canadian! On a United States
naval vessel. Oughta be a law...

BOWMAN
Fine, give it back, then.

Henley is about to light up when the RADIO OPERATOR steps up,
out of breath, harried from her search. Stops short at the
sight of Henley -- SNAPS OFF A SALUTE, crisp and perfect.

RADIO OPERATOR
Captain Henley, sir.

Henley returns the salute --

HENLEY
Nothing on fire, is it?

RADIO OPERATOR
Admiral Merrick is flying a helo
over, be here in an hour. Said he
wants to meet with you the second
he lands.

HENLEY

He say what about?

RADIO OPERATOR

No, sir. He just said recall all your birds and get ready to work. He said to tell you, "It's gonna be another fine Navy day."

Henley and Bowman exchange a look.

HENLEY

Thank you, shipmate.

She salutes, leaves. Henley hands Bowman back the cigarette.

HENLEY (CONT'D)

Been a long time since I tracked down that BT punch.

Bowman grins. Henley pulls his CAPTAIN'S HAT from under his arm, dons it. Squares it. Bowman shakes his head.

BOWMAN

(the gold bars)

That -- is still gonna take some getting used to.

HENLEY

I don't know if they got the fit right. Oh, well.

(off Bowman's grin)

Thanks for the smoke, Chief.

Henley tips his hat to Bowman and the others, heads off.

EXT. USS LEXINGTON - FLIGHT DECK - DAY

ROAR! -- A twenty-ton F/A-18 drops at 150 mph onto the flight deck, smashing down onto an area the size of a 7-11 parking lot. A CONTROLLED CRASH -- shearing metal-on-metal as the tailhook snags the 3 wire and the bird slams to a stop. It's absolutely insane -- and in this world, completely routine.

EXT. USS LEXINGTON - FLIGHT DECK - MOMENTS LATER

LT. PILAR "MAYTAG" ROBLES, 27, taxis to her spot, pops the canopy, climbs out onto the deck. Shields her eyes from the sun, gazing up at the sky --

JAMES (O.S.)

Hey, Maytag!

Pilar looks down, sees JAMES, one of the two Ordys we met in the corridor below-decks.

(CONTINUED)

PILAR
Not now, shipmate.

James is stung by the brush-off, but Pilar has other things on her mind, watching the next plane coming in --

PILAR (CONT'D)
Come on, Shepherd. You got this...

EXT. NOTHING BUT SKY - DAY

As ANOTHER F-18 SLIDES INTO VIEW -- the graceful, almost delicate lance of its nose giving way to the COCKPIT, the pilot inside illuminated by the orange glow of instruments. Two enormous air intakes, twin tailbooms canted outwards for stability, giant EXHAUST PORTS glowing orange. Driven by --

MOLLY "SHEPHERD" CROOK, 25, a "nugget" on her first deployment, greener than Pilar, not yet totally accustomed to the absurd maneuver she's about to undertake. Her BREATHING, measured but hard, loud in her head --

SHEPHERD
Okay. Easy, little flaps...

Vectoring in to land on the tiny flight deck heaving in the Sea of Japan -- toughest maneuver in aviation, just deadly. Shepherd honing her approach with the LANDING SIGNAL OFFICER (LSO) on deck guiding her in--

LSO (O.S.)
ONE-ONE-TWO, YOU ARE UP AND ON THE
GLIDE PATH. CALL YOUR NEEDLES.

SHEPHERD
Needles, right and centered.

LSO (O.S.)
INCREASE YOUR RATE OF DESCENT, CALL
THE BALL.

SHEPHERD
One-One-Two, ball.

As she angles the plane down, just above stall speed, trying to match the pitching deck with her approach --

LSO (O.S.)
YOU'RE TOO LOW. A LITTLE POWER --

But she's too hot as she SMASHES into the deck --

(CONTINUED)

LSO (O.S.) (CONT'D)
BOLTER, BOLTER, BOLTER! --

-- Her TAILHOOK MISSES THE WIRE. She blasts her Hornet full power, rocketing off the bow into the sky again. The Hornet rises and banks, afterburners glowing bright, into the sky --

SHEPHERD (PRE-LAP)
I don't want to talk about it.

EXT. USS LEXINGTON - LADDER AND CORRIDOR - DAY

Pilar and Shepherd coming down a ladder --

PILAR
Second bolter in three weeks.

SHEPHERD
Said, I don't want to talk about it.

PILAR
You'll find the slot. Don't let it get in your head --

MAN (O.S.)
Hey, whoa, fellow aviators! Slow your roll!

Pilar knows what's coming, rolls her eyes and ushers Shepherd along. And what's coming is...

An AVIATOR shooting down the ladder, hands and feet sliding down the railings. He hits the corridor deck with a bang. This is...

LT. DEREK "VANDAL" FREHLEY, 25, pretty sure he's the hottest thing ever to kick in afterburners. Hell, he just might be -- definitely got the charm and the looks. Right behind Vandal is his wingman, call sign BAMBI, 25, Kentucky boy, too big to fit in the cockpit. They catch up with Pilar and Shepherd --

VANDAL
That was a class-A bolter, Shepherd. About knocked the landing gear off, kudos.

SHEPHERD
Bite it, Vandal. Seen you bounce off the deck more than once.

(CONTINUED)

VANDAL

Ooh, the nugget's growing a pair, I
like this.

SHEPHERD

This how it's gonna be from now on?
Every time I trap, wondering if
you're gonna be all --
(Nelson from the Simpsons)
HA-ha!

BAMBI

Wow, good Nelson. Spot on.

SHEPHERD

Thank you, Bambi. It's a gift.

It's generally good-natured, professionals flipping one
another shit -- but you get the feeling Pilar's not feeling
love for Vandal, as they walk on --

INT. USS LEXINGTON - PILAR AND SHEPHERD'S BERTH - DAY

Only two females in their squadron, this is their stateroom.
Austerely decorated, just a few personal items. The merest
hint of femininity in all this hard grey steel.

Pilar and Shepherd enter. Shepherd sets her kit down heavy,
channeling exasperation.

PILAR

Listen. I knew a nugget boltered
six times during quals. Six times.
Wound up one of the best we got.

SHEPHERD

This aviator wouldn't be named
Pilar Robles...?

PILAR

Please. Like I ever boltered.
Caught the four wire a few times...

Pilar's hoping for a smile at least, gets none.

SHEPHERD

The hell am I gonna do if I wash
out?

PILAR

You are not going to wash out. I
won't allow it.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

PILAR (CONT'D)
(off her look)
Think I want to be left alone here?

Shepherd nods, but remains grim.

PILAR (CONT'D)
I can see my attempts so far to
cheer you up have failed. I must
now go to phase two.

Pilar goes to where an IPOD is hooked up to some SMALL
SPEAKERS that have been duct-taped to the wall.

SHEPHERD
Not going to work.

PILAR
When has it ever not worked?

Pilar presses PLAY and out of the speakers comes something
along the lines of Beyonce's "Run the World (Girls)." Pilar
sings along, trying to goad Shepherd into joining. And,
eventually, the song being just such a damn ear-worm,
Shepherd can't help but join in. Loosening up, like kids at
summer camp, as we go to --

INT. USS LEXINGTON - ORDY WING - DAY

MUSIC UP: PITBULL, "Don't Stop the Party."

LOUD in here where the kids who arm and load the weaponry for
the aircraft onboard berth and hang. The ORDY MAFIA,
tightest group on the ship, marked by their red shirts and
insular credo: You Ain't Ordy, You Ain't Shit. They're
blasting music from a small BOOM BOX as --

LEWIS, the defense contractor we saw earlier, hanging with
these guys but not part of them, raps along expertly using an
upside-down .50 CAL ROUND as a mic --

LEWIS
"Yeah yeah yeah que no pare la
fiesta/Don't stop the party..."

The jam wraps up, Lewis DROPS THE "MIC," all gangster.
Everybody's like "ho!" as the live round hits the deck, but
it's all play, this is everyday shit for this crew.

JAMES
Hold on, hold on, I got one --

(CONTINUED)

FARLEY

James, not one of your hillbilly
cracker joints --

JAMES

Nah, this one's good --

JAMES heads up, grabs the giant BULLET off the deck, cues up
his own song --

MUSIC STARTS: WILLIE NELSON, "The Red Headed Stranger."

The Ordys react -- Awwww, booooo, etc. James shouts them
down, starts singing --

JAMES (CONT'D)

"Red-headed stranger/from Blue Rock
Montana/Rode into town one day..."

He's awful. The Ordys start pelting him with whatever is at
hand. James sings on, undeterred --

INT. USS LEXINGTON - CAPTAIN'S STATEROOM - DAY

Quiet. Henley at his computer, struggling to compose an
EMAIL on the screen. We see bits and pieces, stuff like --

"Trying to make it work... know it's been harder than
usual... Miss you and the boys so much..."

It's no good. He sighs, frustrated, as his AIDE pokes his
head in --

CAPTAIN'S AIDE

Admiral's helo is five out, sir.

HENLEY

Thank you, Donny.

CAPTAIN'S AIDE

Also, Ms. Burke is waiting to speak
with you.

Off his nod, the Aide leaves. Henley sighs again -- DELETES
the email. Shuts his laptop, stands and heads out into --

INT. USS LEXINGTON - HANGAR BAY - DAY

An enormous room full of FIGHTER PLANES, HELICOPTERS, and
RADAR PLANES... it's controlled chaos, everything moving at
once, the intricate ballet of manpower and machinery -- an
absurdly dangerous work environment.

(CONTINUED)

Henley, who's sharpened up his look somewhat for the Admiral, is walking through with --

ALLISON BURKE, 35, attractive but wrapped tight -- senior NCIS INVESTIGATOR, responsible for investigating all crime aboard. A civilian, possessed of significant power here nonetheless. Walking and talking --

HENLEY
He didn't say.

BURKE
Emails me every day, do I have a suspect?

HENLEY
If anyone was sabotaging the weapons--

BURKE
Nine times bombs either fell short or didn't go boom--

HENLEY
Not this deployment they hadn't. For all anyone knows, whoever was doing it left the ship months ago.

BURKE
I hope so.

HENLEY
(sighs)
Listened to Jess, I'd be retired, driving the Vegas run for one of those cut-rate airlines. Or maybe, I dunno, a courier--

BURKE
Unless they start catapulting cargo jets off a flat top, I don't see it.

They stop at the threshold.

HENLEY
I look all right?

BURKE
You sure that hat fits?

He shoots her a look, moves on. She goes with.

EXT. USS LEXINGTON - FLIGHT DECK - DAY

A HELICOPTER just setting down on the pad near the stern. Henley dons his hat, holds it on his head against the rotor wash, heads out to meet the helo.

As he approaches, REAR ADMIRAL CAL MERRICK (50s) disembarks, moving hard towards Henley, who snaps him a smart salute. Merrick whips one back, nods to Burke.

HENLEY

Admiral.

MERRICK

Captain. Special Agent Burke, you come all this way to see me?

BURKE

Figure you may've come to talk about the sabotage investigation.

MERRICK

Do you have anything?

BURKE

Well, no, I--

MERRICK

Then you made the trip for nothing. Not here about that.

(to Henley)

Let's meet in your quarters. Special Agent Burke, we'll catch up tomorrow.

She nods, dismissed. Merrick pulls Henley away, Henley shooting a last glance over his shoulder as he's led off --

OMITTED

INT. USS LEXINGTON - OFFICERS' MESS HALL - NIGHT

Pilar, Shepherd, Vandal, and Bambi. Not a bad space; cloth napkins, real silverware, good chow. Middle of a story --

BAMBI

...so I'm vectoring in to land, first touch-and-go in the trainer. And right as I set down, this deer runs right out in the middle of the runway --

(CONTINUED)

VANDAL

Pow! Hits it, hundred-eighty miles
an hour --

BAMBI

Poor animal, just pasted it. Tore
up the T-45 something awful.
(shrugs)
I been "Bambi" ever since.

They laugh.

VANDAL

I know Maytag's Maytag 'cause
everybody thought she was gonna be
first to wash out. But Shepherd?
How 'bout you clue us in...

SHEPHERD

Last name "Crook," like a
shepherd's crook, get it?

PILAR

And, always looking out for
everybody else. Anytime anybody's
sick, you off getting chicken soup--

SHEPHERD

What about you, Vandal? How'd you
get yours?

VANDAL

"Sexy Beast" was already taken.

PILAR

Vandal here's a real live
blueblood; daddy's on two senate
subcommittees. Someday Vandal's
gonna go all John McCain, wind up
losing the election to whoever
becomes president.

Laughter. Vandal smiles thinly -- ha ha -- heads over to the
FREE SODA MACHINE that officers get.

CUT TO:

INT. USS LEXINGTON - ENLISTED MESS HALL - NIGHT

-- CLUNK! A soda can plops down into the well from a PAY
SODA MACHINE in the enlisted mess. James reaches in,
retrieves it. He cracks it open.

(CONTINUED)

JOAQUIN

Damn, James. Much of that crap as you drink, wonder you got any teeth left.

JAMES

Mr. Pure, always gotta be judging...

JOAQUIN

Like ninety grams of sugar in that can, alls I'm saying.

LEWIS

(approaching)

It true the Admiral touched down?

JOAQUIN

See, you don't know, 'cause you just a tourist. Defense contractors don't need to worry about when the Admiral's here and when he ain't.

LEWIS

Company likes to know every move the man makes.

JAMES

You should've been here last deployment, when Edgars was CO, Admiral was here *all* the time, trying to keep the ship from exploding.

JOAQUIN

Edgars was a straight-up tyrant. Set the air wing against ship's company, kept it all spun up like it was his own little movie --

FARLEY

(walking past)

They're showing Harry Potter on the movie channel.

LEWIS

Which one?

FARLEY

"Azkaban."

LEWIS

The best.

FARLEY

Better than "Goblet"? Anyone tell
me why we let this civilian breathe
our Ordy air?

INT. USS LEXINGTON - CAPTAIN'S STATEROOM - DAY

As good as it gets on a Navy ship, but still far from fancy.
Henley and Merrick have dinner alone.

HENLEY

Understanding was, I'd have two
months to pull this ship together.

MERRICK

I know --

HENLEY

This was a distressed ship, Cal.

MERRICK

This ship was *broken*. Surprised
the whole thing didn't go up like a
powderkeg.

HENLEY

But now you want us to go to war.

MERRICK

Not gonna be a war unless we screw
something up.

(then --)

Stick, if you don't think the ship
is ready, I can have you break off,
let the Nimitz take the lead. No
shame in it.

Off Henley; no way that's ever gonna happen --

INT. USS LEXINGTON - THE BRIDGE - DAY

Henley and Merrick step onto THE BRIDGE of the USS Lexington--
six stories up over the deck, the whole great ocean bearing
the Strike Group visible out GIANT WINDOWS all around, a hive
of UNIFORMED SAILORS of all ranks driving this city at sea.

PLANES LANDING out the windows right in front of us, the
nexus of this behemoth war machine.

(CONTINUED)

ND SAILOR
Captain on the Bridge!

All present SNAP TO, return to work. Merrick circles in front of the twenty-odd Sailors and Air Crew, holding court --

MERRICK
Everybody hear me?
(affirmative murmurs)
Shipmates, the great crazy state of North Korea decided this morning that they are laying claim to the Baengnyeongdo Island archipelago along the demarcation line with the South. If I'm even pronouncing that right, who the hell knows.
(polite chuckles)
Now there ain't any reason for anybody to want this miserable pile of rocks, except we and the South Koreans used them for bombing practice, last sixty-some-odd years. As such, neither we, nor our allies in Seoul, are prepared to cede these islands to the PRK, however much they threaten to whip our imperialist asses.

More chuckles from the bridge crew.

MERRICK (CONT'D)
You all know North Korea likes to hear itself talk. Right now they're saying their territorial waters extend past the Northern Limit Line accepted by most of the civilized world. We need them to back off this stupid-ass claim, and we need to make a show of force doing it. But we don't want a war, can't have China getting all spun up. What I'm saying is, we need to contain our response, so shipmates-- we're walking a tightrope here.

HENLEY
What are our orders, Admiral?

MERRICK
Tomorrow afternoon, we fly over to our island and we bomb the crap out of it, right under their noses.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MERRICK (CONT'D)

Just to remind them who owns it and
who's keeping it.

Murmurs from the crew -- they're READY, bring it on...

MERRICK (CONT'D)

Stick, since we're treading thin
ice with international waters, I
want you to personally select and
brief the squadron you trust most.

(off Henley's nod)

That's the job before us -- show
'em who's boss, but try and do it
without blowing things up into a
war. Think your crew is up to
that, Captain?

All eyes on Henley.

HENLEY

Admiral, I believe we're ready.

Off Merrick's nod -- let's get this done --

HENLEY (PRE-LAP) (CONT'D)

I honestly have no idea if we're
ready.

EXT. USS LEXINGTON - VULTURE'S ROW - NIGHT

VULTURE'S ROW, a jutting prow off the ship's tower
overlooking the FLIGHT DECK. JETS taking off and landing
mere yards below.

Find Henley and Burke overseeing the darkened deck, the RIOT
OF STARS overhead framing them --

BURKE

Then why did you say yes?

HENLEY

This is the Navy. Only one right
answer to the question "Are you
ready?"

BURKE

So much about "this man's Navy" I
will never understand. Until I
came aboard I didn't know the
difference between the ship's
company and the airwing --

(CONTINUED)

HENLEY

Ship's company comes with the ship.
Airwing can be assigned to any
carrier --

BURKE

I know that *now*. First day, my
attaché, Tony--

HENLEY

The one always sneaking up on you?

BURKE

Like some halfwit ninja. Anyway,
we're having a conversation, just
like this. I say come on in, sit
down, Tony says sorry, ma'am, not
allowed. Thought maybe it was a
rank thing, but no, it's boys and
girls can't be together.

A weird beat, both of them standing there, on opposite sides
on an invisible line they dare not cross.

HENLEY

You wishing you were still --?

BURKE

-- in D.C.? God, no. Weird as it
is out here -- still as far from my
previous situation as I can get and
still be on the planet.

HENLEY

Your "previous situation" still
trying to contact you?

BURKE

We talked the other day. It's...
complicated.

HENLEY

I did the video chat thing with
Jess.

BURKE

How'd that go?

Henley shrugs. Not ready to get into it.

BURKE (CONT'D)

Well. I gotta hit the hay.

(CONTINUED)

HENLEY

I'm gonna watch Night Ops.

BURKE

(starts off)

The pressure sucks, I know.

(nods at his hat)

Comes with the hat, Stick.

Off she goes. Henley watches her go. Then looks out at a Hornet taking off into the starry night.

INT. USS LEXINGTON - CAPTAIN'S STATEROOM - NIGHT

Henley in bed. Can't sleep. Grabs his iPad, turns it on. Starts reading one of Patrick O'Brian's Aubry-Maturin seafaring tales. Can't concentrate.

Goes to his photos, looks through -- him with Jess, his kids, two BOYS. Then goes deeper into photos, he stops, looks at one of... HIS FATHER a young aviator in Vietnam. Scanned from an old and cracked Polaroid, he runs his finger over it --

INT. USS LEXINGTON - VANDAL AND BAMBI'S BERTH - NIGHT

Bambi sleeps, bottom bunk. Up above, Vandal is DRAWING on a PAD, shading with PENCIL. See -- it's THE DUOMO in Florence, exquisitely rendered and shaded -- he's really good...

INT. USS LEXINGTON - PILAR AND SHEPHERD'S BERTH - NIGHT

Similar to Bambi and Vandal, only here it's PILAR snoring softly above as SHEPHERD can't sleep. But she has no distractions, just lying there staring wide-eyed at the metal of the bunk over her just a few feet away. SCARED...

HENLEY (PRE-LAP)

Gonna be earning your hazard pay today. Ride you all stood in line for, here.

INT. USS LEXINGTON - SQUADRON READY ROOM - DAY

Henley is briefing the PILOTS, suited up, chewing gum, eyes on the board, the EDGE in their eyes. Pilar sits with Shepherd. Vandal sits with Bambi.

HENLEY

Some of you've seen action already, some of you this is gonna be new. Now all we're calling for is a series of bomb runs on the island.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

HENLEY (CONT'D)

Because we're looking to make an impression on our friends up north, we're going to be deploying live ordnance. We don't know how they're going to react, so be ready to dust off your dogfight skills in case we get into a scrape.

VANDAL looking at Shepherd, who's watching Henley. Feeling the look, she glances over, meets his eyes -- he holds them, doesn't look away -- flashes that million-dollar smile.

PILAR sees this, eyeballs Vandal --

HENLEY (CONT'D)

You will be flying sorties right at the edge of their demarcation line. Which means you need to be aware of your positions at all times -- stray into disputed airspace, we got an international incident. Let's not end up watching ourselves on Fox News because we screwed up.

(serious)

Telling you we need to be careful out there is an understatement. Fly hard, fly aggressive, but watch your six and be ready for anything.

INT. USS LEXINGTON - HANGAR BAY - DAY

James and Joaquin come out of an elevator rolling a STACK OF ORDNANCE.

BOWMAN (O.S.)

Afternoon, shipmates.

Bowman's waiting for them, walks with them as they move the ordnance.

BOWMAN (CONT'D)

This rack for today's air ops?

JOAQUIN

It is.

BOWMAN

Any problems with the ordnance I need to be aware of?

JOAQUIN

All right as rain, Master Chief.

(CONTINUED)

BOWMAN
How about you, Kincaid?

JAMES
How about me what?

BOWMAN
Are there any problems with the
ordnance I need to be aware of?

JAMES
I know what this is, Chief.

BOWMAN
Yeah? What is this?

JAMES
I was investigated, I was cleared.
Had nothing to do with bad ordy
last deployment...

BOWMAN
I never said you did.
(to Joaquin)
Did I say he did?

JOAQUIN
(careful)
I would say the very nature of your
question implies as much, Chief.

BOWMAN
Y'all both got me wrong. I don't
suspect Kincaid. Or you, Joaquin.
It's just... Nine documented cases
of ordnance failing to deploy
properly in theater, that's nine
incidents of our soldiers on the
ground in danger. Angels on their
shoulders ain't worth a damn if the
bombs don't work. Today's the
first sorties we're going live this
evolution. Why I ask, Kincaid, are
there any problems with the
ordnance that I should be aware of?

JAMES
No problems, Master Chief.

BOWMAN
Excellent. Thank you.

Bowman walks off. REVEAL SEVERAL CREW who witnessed this exchange. They share a look with James and Joaquin. Then back to work...

INT. USS LEXINGTON - SQUADRON READY ROOM - LATER

PILOTS, gearing up, checking each other's gear. Pilar is with Shepherd. Shepherd is freaking the fuck out.

PILAR

Settle.

SHEPHERD

Settle, she says. Easy for you--

PILAR

Easy? For me? Look, just follow your training.

SHEPHERD

I have forgotten everything I ever learned. Seriously. Which ocean are we in? I don't know.

Across the room, Vandal is checking Bambi's gear and Bambi is clocking Pilar and Shepherd.

BAMBI

Shepherd's got the yips.

Vandal eyes the situation, heads over.

BAMBI (CONT'D)

Easy, bro...

Pilar sees Vandal approaching, gets a bad feeling.

PILAR

Not now, Frehley.

Vandal ignores Pilar, gets in Shepherd's space.

VANDAL

Little buggy, Shepherd? Thinking this was all a mistake? Oh hell, this ain't a video game, this for reals, I am not ready. Like that? Good. Because it's all true.

PILAR

Jesus, Vandal--

VANDAL

Hit me.

They all look at him. Huh? Vandal points to his shoulder.

VANDAL (CONT'D)

Right here. Hard as you can.
Don't think about it. Just do it.

Shepherd hauls off and slugs Vandal VERY hard, right in the shoulder, enough to rock him back. It actually hurts --

VANDAL (CONT'D)

Okay. Didn't know it was going to be that hard--

PILAR

I got next.

VANDAL

(to Shepherd)

How's your mind? Clearer?

Shepherd, surprised, nods.

VANDAL (CONT'D)

Something about physical violence and adrenalin or endorphins or something. I don't know, I got a C in bio-chem, but it works. Start feeling buggy? Just hit someone.
(nods at Pilar)
Preferably her.

Vandal heads back to Bambi. Pilar watching him go, trying to figure him the hell out --

MUSIC UP: AC/DC, "HELL'S BELLS," fuck yeah. Takes us to --

OMITTED

EXT. USS LEXINGTON - FLIGHT DECK - DAY

The host of AIR CREW responsible for the all-important JETS and their well-being -- red-shirt ORDYS loading bombs and missiles; purple-shirt "GRAPES" refueling; Yellow-shirt "SHOOTERS" catapulting these machines into the air --

PILAR is doing a walk-around of her F-18. Comes upon James, loading her ordnance, in particular a MAVERICK smart bomb. James sees Pilar, nods.

(CONTINUED)

JAMES
Maytag.

PILAR
James.

Pilar keeps walking.

JAMES
So, are we ever gonna talk?

PILAR
About what?

JAMES
About Pearl.

PILAR
Nothing happened in Pearl.

JAMES
You call that nothing?

PILAR
(fixes him with a stare)
Nothing. Happened. In. Pearl.

And off she goes. James watches her walk off, heartsick.

EXT. USS LEXINGTON - FLIGHT DECK/CATAPULT STAGING - DAY

PILAR'S F-18, her name and callsign stenciled below the cockpit seal, moves into position. Her nose wheel locked in the CATAPULT SLOT --

INT. PILAR'S F-18 - DAY

AIR BOSS (O.S.)
BLACK ANGEL ONE-ONE-TWO, YOU ARE GO
FOR CAT SHOT.

Pilar salutes the deck, tightens up in anticipation as she's--

CATAPULTED -- slamming her back in the seat, 0-120 mph in two seconds, rocketing skyward with unbelievable force.

Before she dons her O2 MASK, you can see it on Pilar's face -- the sheer JOY of flying at this velocity, it's like a drug. Then -- she puts on the mask and gets down to business.

OMITTED

INT. USS LEXINGTON - THE BRIDGE - DAY

Overseeing the action from the huge windows, Henley watches as an F-18 is cat shot off the deck. He watches it rise up and head off to join the rest of the squadron. His EXECUTIVE OFFICER looks over --

EXECUTIVE OFFICER
Squadron is in the air and hot.
Awaiting orders to deploy to theater.

HENLEY
Let's go make some noise.

Off Henley --

END TEASER

ACT ONE**EXT. SKIES OFF BAENGYEONGDO ISLAND - DAY**

Cloudy sky yields up A SQUADRON OF F-18s, stacked four-on-four in perfect formation, arcing towards the depopulated brown cliffs of the island ahead. PILAR flying point, tip of the spear, as we dip INTO HER PLANE --

INT. PILAR'S F-18 - DAY

PILAR

Coming up on our target run. Let's get into position.

VANDAL (O.S.)

Everybody roll up your windows, this is a crap neighborhood...

EXT. SKIES OFF BAENGYEONGDO ISLAND - DAY

The lead F-18s PEEL OFF, slowing, dropping into position for their target run.

INT. USS LEXINGTON - THE BRIDGE - DAY

Henley and Merrick overseeing the action, listening in on the UHF communications between the pilots on their run. Henley's XO (Executive Officer) moves over to report --

EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Birds are up and over the target.

HENLEY

The North Koreans --?

EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Scrambled MiGs. Mostly buzzing around their side of the line, but they're making no move to engage.

HENLEY

Any of 'em starts feeling froggy, comes over the line, we'll splash one for 'em. Meantime -- commence the attack run. I'll be in the CIC.

EXT. SKIES OVER BAENGYEONGDO ISLAND - DAY

The lead four F-18s rocketing by, 500 miles an hour, no room for error --

INT. PILAR'S F-18 - DAY

PILAR

Bambi, the target is yours.

(CONTINUED)

BAMBI (O.S., FILTERED)
Mavericks're hot, I'm ready.

PILAR
Light 'em up.

BAMBI (O.S., FILTERED)
Roger that. Fox one --

OMITTED

OMITTED

INT. USS LEXINGTON - CIC - DAY

A high-tech room of cool radar screens and low light.

HENLEY and his team watch events unfold on the SCREENS above--
Radar maps clearly demarcating the NORTHERN LIMIT LINE,
beyond which is North Korean airspace and maritime waters.
All our RADAR DOTS on this side of it. Hear the following
over the speakers:

BAMBI (O.S.)
Missile away.
(beat)
It's a hit.

PILAR (O.S.)
Shy, maybe fifty meters.

BAMBI (O.S.)
Laser sights are jinky --

PILAR (O.S.)
Put it on your FTN complaint list.
Circle back for another run.
Shepherd, tighten up. Our turn.

EXT. SKIES OFF BAENGNYEONGDO ISLAND - DAY

Pilar and Shepherd swoop down for bombing run.

INT. PILAR'S F-18 - CONTINUOUS

Pilar focused, intent -- TONE sounds in the cockpit -- RADAR
LOCK for her Maverick --

PILAR
I've got tone, target locked.
(presses FIRE button --)
Fox --

Suddenly, the tone CHANGES in Pilar's cockpit -- an ALARM,
something's wrong --

EXT. PILAR'S F-18 - CONTINUOUS

See the MAVERICK MISSILE as it MISFIRES -- the BOLTS HOLDING IT TO THE WING not giving way -- now it's spewing PROPELLANT and FLAME everywhere. Not good. Back to --

INT. PILAR'S F-18 - CONTINUOUS

Pilar SCRAMBLING to maintain control of her Hornet, the extra impulse from the MISFIRING ROCKET playing havoc --

INT. USS LEXINGTON - CIC - CONTINUOUS

Henley, Merrick -- everyone holding their breath, listening.

PILAR (O.S.)
I got a bad Maverick. Switching --

VANDAL (O.S.)
Maytag, break lock and jettison.

PILAR (O.S.)
Negative, Vandal, I can dump it --

VANDAL (O.S.)
Disengage --

PILAR (O.S.)
One more second --

And then -- IT ALL HAPPENS SO FUCKING FAST --

EXT. PILAR'S F-18 - DAY

The missile TEARS LOOSE UNDER THE G-FORCE OF THE TURN -- SHREDS her wingtip, sending her into a WILD FLAT SPIN.

PILAR
Oh sh--

Cut off as --

EXT. SHEPHERD'S F-18 - CONTINUOUS

Her DAMAGED MAVERICK MISSILE smashes directly into SHEPHERD'S TRAILING F-18, clipping OFF ONE WING --

SHEPHERD'S PLANE EXPLODES.

Vandal has to juke hard to avoid the plane debris. What's left of Shepherd's FLAMING F-18 hurtles northward, tumbling and spinning all the way --

(CONTINUED)

SHEPHERD (O.S.)
(panicked)
I'm hit! Can't get control--

INT. VANDAL'S F-18 - CONTINUOUS

Seeing the flaming WRECK of Shepherd's bird --

VANDAL
Shepherd, eject, eject! Get out of
there!

EXT. SKIES OFF BAENGYEONGDO ISLAND - CONTINUOUS

The crunched-up F-18 whips by us in a hellish corkscrewing ball
of flame -- NO CHUTE visible as it DISAPPEARS INTO CLOUD --

EXT. PILAR'S F-18 - DAY

As Pilar scrambles to control her own spin. Drops her
landing gear, slowing the violent rotation, keeping it from
corkscrewing out of control. Breathing hard, grunting
against the G-forces --

GETS THE PLANE BACK UNDER CONTROL, exhausted and beaten down
by the process.

PILAR
Who's got eyes on Shepherd?
Anybody see a chute?

VANDAL (O.S.)
Negative chute, Maytag. Disappeared
in the clag, visibility zero.

LEXINGTON CONTROL (O.S.)
BLACK ANGEL ONE-TWELVE, WHAT IS
YOUR STATUS?

PILAR
Wing's shredded. Aerodynamics are
shot to hell --

LEXINGTON CONTROL (O.S.)
BRING HER HOME, ONE-TWELVE. YOU'RE
NO GOOD UP THERE.

Pilar's face, desperate to stay, fighting to keep the plane
in the air -- it's no use, she can't win -- whips her
afflicted Hornet back towards the Lexington...

INT. USS LEXINGTON - CIC - DAY

HENLEY
Where's Shepherd?

EXECUTIVE OFFICER
Unclear, sir. They were right on the demarcation line when she went down.

HENLEY
(to TRACKING OFFICER)
Beacon?

TRACKING OFFICER
No, sir.

MERRICK
(before Henley continues)
Stick, a word?

Merrick pulls Henley aside.

MERRICK (CONT'D)
You can't go after her. Not in North Korean waters. Not with their Navy and Air Force close enough for us to spit at.

HENLEY
What are your orders?

MERRICK
This is your ship.

HENLEY
Your fleet.

MERRICK
Your call.
(beat)
Unless you want me to make it for you.

HENLEY
(beat)
Listen. I know you didn't want me to have this command, Admiral --

MERRICK
Thin ice here, Stick.

(CONTINUED)

HENLEY

You wanted Simpson. Boat-yard Navy man like yourself...

MERRICK

That cracking sound you hear is the thin ice breaking.

HENLEY

You didn't want another aviator, like Edgars.

MERRICK

Stick, you're one of the finest aviators I've ever seen--

HENLEY

But driving a carrier isn't the same as driving an F-14.

MERRICK

A lot of very smart people looked your record over with a microscope and determined you were the best man to captain this particular nuclear-powered aircraft carrier. If you think you can rescue that downed aviator from North Korean waters without starting the next Korean War, do it.

Henley nods, walks off, hailing his XO.

HENLEY

Get every Angel we have in the air looking for her.

(to NAVIGATOR)

Turn hard to starboard, carry us up as far as we can go. We'll hold an inch shy of their damn line.

EXT. HIGH ABOVE THE LEXINGTON STRIKE GROUP

As Strike Group Lexington heaves sharply as one body to the right, in PERFECT FORMATION to search for their missing aviator...

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO**INT. USS LEXINGTON - CIC - DAY**

Henley watches one of the screens showing a HORNET on approach. The plane flying jagged and awry, just wrong --

HENLEY
Come on, Maytag...

EXT. USS LEXINGTON - FLIGHT DECK - DAY

Pilar's violated F-18 limps towards the flight deck, the tattered wing SMOKING, barely keeping air under it --

LSO (O.S.)
WATCH YOUR NEEDLES. STEADY --

The Hornet SMASHES INTO THE DECK -- the LANDING GEAR COLLAPSING under the weight of the impact, SKIDDING and sparking along the deck to be caught --

-- by the "Five Wire" -- the giant NET strewn across the bow to keep crashes from hurtling into the ocean beyond. FIREMEN in silver safesuits race over, spraying FOAM on the white-hot wings and fuselage.

TIGHTER as Pilar exits, immediately clambering out and putting some distance between herself and the wrecked F-18. Moving across, she sees --

VANDAL walking towards her, pulling off his helmet. Their EYES MEET across the deck, the look between them fraught.

ACROSS THE FLIGHT DECK, see JOAQUIN and JAMES, eyeing the severely damaged airplane. James watching...

PILAR, walking with Vandal. Joaquin grabs James, pulls him off, taking us to --

INT. USS LEXINGTON - CORRIDOR - DAY

Joaquin and James enter, pull off cranials and life-jackets --

JOAQUIN
Once again -- it's our heater goes south, causes all this mess --

JAMES
Right, 'cause missiles don't ever break on their own --

(CONTINUED)

JOAQUIN

You seriously gonna lay this on the machine?

JAMES

Why do I got the crosshairs on my back? Huh? Why doesn't anyone suspect you?

JOAQUIN

(darkening)

Why would they suspect me, shipmate?

JAMES

I'm just saying --

JOAQUIN

Most full of crap phrase in the English language -- "I'm just saying." Either just say it or shut the hell up.

JAMES

You know, your... situation.

JOAQUIN

You think I'm suspect because of my *situation*?

JAMES

No. I don't. And you know why? Because I trust you, Joaquin.

James starts off. Joaquin brings him back.

JOAQUIN

I got my rating, James. Worked for it, studied, got the promotion. What that means is, now I got to watch your ass and mine. You screw up now, it's on me.

James turns his back, done. Joaquin sighs --

JOAQUIN (CONT'D)

Look, you know I got your six, bro, I always have. But if this is on us, I need to know now.

James turns, steps up in Joaquin's face --

JAMES

Tell you what. Next sonofabitch says ordnance ain't going off and it's my fault?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JAMES (CONT'D)

Don't care who he is, I'm gonna
push in his damn teeth for him.

He walks off, pissed. Off Joaquin --

INT. USS LEXINGTON - CIC - DAY

Somber, watching the screens for any hope. Merrick enters,
moves over to Henley --

MERRICK

What's the word?

HENLEY

Still no beacon from Shepherd.
What do you hear from our friends
in the People's Republic?

MERRICK

Asked politely if we could enter
their airspace to look for our
aviator. They said no. Asked,
what about just an unarmed plane
and a rescue helo? Said, no.
Even under North Korean overwatch?
Asked. Denied.

Henley looks up at a CLOCK showing elapsed time in the water.
Something REGISTERS with Henley, looking at it. He checks
his watch, looks back at the clock. Then --

HENLEY

I'll be in my quarters for ten.

Off Merrick's nod, Henley moves off quickly --

INT. USS LEXINGTON - SQUADRON READY ROOM - DAY

Pilar extricating herself from her flight suit and helmet.
Just DEVASTATED, fighting the shit off her body like it's
vines trying to drag her down. Stops, breathing hard, the
whole thing hitting her all over again --

VANDAL enters, the door banging shut in his wake. She jumps
at the sound --

VANDAL

You all right?

Pilar says nothing. Vandal passes her, drops his gear in a
flight chair nearby --

(CONTINUED)

PILAR

You were right up there. Should've broken off and dumped the ordy --

VANDAL

And I should've followed her into the clouds.

PILAR

She's my wingman. My nugget.

VANDAL

Still. None of it would've happened if your heater'd worked in the first place.

PILAR

Saying what?

VANDAL

Saying we got a problem that just now put one of ours in the water.

PILAR

You actually believe we got Lexington ordys sabotaging loads?

VANDAL

Ship's got a nasty reputation, Maytag. When it was flying ops into Afghanistan, people called her "Halftime Lex" -- 'cause that's how often the bombs worked. And the Ordy team that was eye of the storm back then -- same team loaded your Hornet, isn't it?

Pilar's thinking about it now.

VANDAL (CONT'D)

How well do you know your Ordys, Maytag? Because if you're not gonna sort this out, I will.

On Pilar, a RUSH OF NOISE growing in her head --

INT. USS LEXINGTON - CAPTAIN'S STATEROOM - DAY

Henley trying to establish a video-chat connection with Jess. Keeps getting CONNECTION FAILURE. Tries one last time --

HENLEY

Come on, dammit --

His AIDE appears in the doorway behind --

(CONTINUED)

CAPTAIN'S AIDE

Sir?

HENLEY

Just a minute.

CAPTAIN'S AIDE

Need you in CIC. Shepherd's beacon
is on.

Henley turns, holy shit. Abandons the computer, out into --

INT. USS LEXINGTON - CIC - DAY

Henley moves in fast, addressing the Tracking Officer --

HENLEY

Location?

TRACKING OFFICER

(eyeing screen)

Thirty miles, north-by-northeast...

(the bad news)

...North Korean side of the line.

HENLEY

(anything but --)

Fantastic.

TRACKING OFFICER

Hold on -- signal just went dark.

All attention on *that*.

HENLEY

Say again.

TRACKING OFFICER

We had a beacon for sixty seconds,
then we lost it.

EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Possibly damaged in the collision
or when she punched out --

HENLEY

(realizing)

She did it.

(off their looks)

Shepherd's smart. Knows she's on the
wrong side of the line, doesn't want
the PRK to find her.

EXECUTIVE OFFICER

GPS data is encrypted --

(CONTINUED)

HENLEY

So she lets it run for a minute,
give us a heads-up. Any longer,
encrypted or not, the North Koreans
could triangulate on the signal.
And night's coming down. She knows
we might miss her in the dark.
Pops a flare, she's as good as
caught by the bad guys.

(to tracking officer)

What time was the transmission?

TRACKING OFFICER

1800.

HENLEY

Straight up? Not 1801 or 1759?

TRACKING OFFICER

Straight up, sir.

HENLEY

(thinks)

She waited...

(eyes elapsed time clock)

...an hour and ten minutes to activate
it. Bet you tomorrow morning, 0600 --
beacon goes off again. Textbook
survival behind enemy lines.

MERRICK

If she's still over the limit line,
still can't go in after her.

HENLEY

(to XO)

Pull up everything we have on
currents in these waters. Maybe we
get lucky and she drifts to the
good side of the line before the
North Koreans find her.

BURKE enters the CIC.

BURKE

Captain, Admiral? Could we speak
somewhere private?

Off Henley's look --

OMITTED

OMITTED

INT. USS LEXINGTON - ORDY WING - DAY

James, Lewis, and Farley.

JAMES

Captain's an aviator, ain't gonna
leave one of his own in the drink.

LEWIS

Risk a war with a nuclear-armed nation?

JAMES

Navy spent two million dollars
training that pilot. One of us red-
shirts went in? Different story.
Shepherd's like a national treasure
next to our bomb slingin' asses.

FARLEY

Besides, they ain't got missiles that can
hit the States, whatever crap they say.

LEWIS

They don't need to hit California.
They just need to hit us.

A beat as they think about that. Then, Farley sees --

PILAR enter, officer in an enlisted world. Ordys SNAP TO as
she comes through, getting out of her way, eyeing her askance
-- she doesn't BELONG HERE. Farley gets up, moves off --

INT. USS LEXINGTON - CHAPEL - DAY

A MUSLIM PRAYER RUG on the deck of the Foc'sle. Find JOAQUIN
bowing to Mecca, silently intoning his prayers. Two other
WORSHIPERS performing same nearby.

JOAQUIN

Allahu Akbar. Subhana rabbiyal
adheem --

Farley bursts in, violating the peace --

FARLEY

Joaquin. You need to get in here.

Off Joaquin, annoyed but on duty nevertheless --

INT. USS LEXINGTON - ORDY WING - DAY

Pilar moving through the red-shirted mass, finally spying --

(CONTINUED)

JAMES. Heads towards him -- he sees her coming, the heat coming off her. Moves to meet her in the middle of the bay. Ordys noticing, moving closer to see --

JAMES

Maytag --

PILAR

You load my Hornet, last hop?

JAMES

You know I did.

PILAR

Yeah, I know you did. What I need to know now is, I pull the trigger up there -- am I gonna get my boom?

JAMES

Long as I been on your crew, ever been a time you didn't?

PILAR

Not until today, all of a sudden I'm up there with a Maverick won't pickle. Now we got one in the water because of it --

Her anger boring into James, one more person who doesn't trust him. He shakes his head, eyes going hard --

JAMES

Maytag -- somebody gets wet because you can't keep track of your wingman -- that ride's on you.

Pilar gets up in James' face. Her fingers clench into a fist. This is going to be bad --

JOAQUIN (O.S.)

What the hell is this?

Joaquin steps up, pulls James away. The scrum dissipating as he moves in -- right in Pilar's face --

JOAQUIN (CONT'D)

You need to leave now, ma'am. Before this turns into something bigger. Understand?

Pilar, the rage draining, looks around at ENLISTED FACES. One last hard look at James -- then she TURNS AND STORMS OUT, leaving the Ordys polarized in her wake. Off James watching her go --

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

OMITTED

INT. USS LEXINGTON - CAPTAIN'S STATEROOM - DAY

BURKE

We need to consider that the ordnance failure was intentional.

Burke with Henley and Merrick, hunkered down --

HENLEY

I'm getting a little weary of the notion my sailors are capable of sabotage, Agent Burke. There hasn't been one incident since I've been aboard.

BURKE

Until now. I did a walk-around of Maytag's Hornet with Chief Bowman and an ordy-tech. Does not look accidental. If it is sabotage, we need to get to the bottom of it. I need your blessing for us to run an operation, should answer some questions.

Merrick notices the heat from Henley --

MERRICK

Stick, none of this is on you. Nobody's looking at ancient history over this.

Burke shoots Henley a look. What? Then, an AIDE pops her head in --

AIDE #2

Admiral. CNO wants a word?

Merrick gets up, leaves them alone --

BURKE

What's he talking about, ancient history?

HENLEY

Merrick served with my father on the Midway, Vietnam. Dad flew A-6s, bombing along the Laotian border.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

HENLEY (CONT'D)

Nobody wanted to fight by the time he was up, this is '73, everybody's sick of the war. Sailors start throwing wrenches in the works, get their deployments reduced, get 'em out of action. Had these symbols, the kids willing to do the dirty work. A matchbook with one match turned down, or a sailor'd wear a coat without a pocket button? Let people know, he's willing to break something, keep from having to fight.

BURKE

What's that got to do with your father?

HENLEY

My dad got caught up with some of these idiots, lost his way. Got himself and a few other men killed trying to gum up the works. It was bad -- bad enough it's a miracle anybody with the name Henley even got a commission in this Navy, much less a Captain's chair. Merrick hadn't forgotten. Always wondered if that was another reason he never wanted me on this post.

Burke takes this in. Wow. Off which --

HENLEY (CONT'D)

How about you tell me about what kind of operation you and Bowman have cooked up.

Just then, a PETTY OFFICER, 20s (Burke's attaché) appears.

PETTY OFFICER

Captain, Agent Burke? There's been an incident.

HENLEY

What kind of incident?

PETTY OFFICER

An aviator got into an altercation with an ordy, almost punched him.

BURKE

Where?

(CONTINUED)

PETTY OFFICER
In the face, I think.

HENLEY
No, where on the ship.

PETTY OFFICER
Ordnance deck, sir.

Burke grimaces -- shit -- shares a look with Henley.

OMITTED

INT. USS LEXINGTON - THE BRIDGE - NIGHT

JAMES escorted in by M.A.s. Finds PILAR already waiting.
They share a look, then both stare at the floor, waiting on --

HENLEY to finish what he's doing. Looking out over the ocean
with BINOCULARS. Starts talking while he's still at it --

HENLEY
Want to know what I'm looking at out
there? I'm looking at the People's
Republic of North Korea. Who'd love
nothing more than to parade around
one of our highly-trained naval
aviators as spoils of war for our
supposed incursion on their
sovereign territory. She's right
out there. But we can't go get her.

He lowers the binoculars, looks at them both.

HENLEY (CONT'D)
This is real, it's happening right
in front of you. You understand?

PILAR/JAMES
Yes, sir.

HENLEY
You both know what this ship was
like last deployment.

They nod.

HENLEY (CONT'D)
Don't nod. That was a statement,
not a question. You know the bad
feeling between air wing and ship's
company. Right?

(CONTINUED)

They don't react.

HENLEY (CONT'D)
That was a question.

They nod.

HENLEY (CONT'D)
So. Knowing that, you still found
it prudent to get into each other's
faces, ready to throw down?

PILAR
Sir, Kincaid didn't do a
thing--

JAMES
Sir, Maytag didn't lay a hand
--

HENLEY (CONT'D)
Stop. The fact you two didn't
actually trade blows is the only
reason I'm not having the both of
you dragged behind this ship on a
dinghy all the way back to face a
tribunal in Japan.

PILAR
Sir, if I could just --

HENLEY
You can shut your mouth,
Lieutenant, that's what you can do.
I swear, you so much as breathe too
hard on a shipmate I'll see to it
you never fly so much as a crop
duster the rest of your natural-
born life. And you --

(to James)
If I find out you're diddling with
my ordnance, son, I will sink your
traitorous ass so deep under this
ocean nobody'd find you if they
even cared enough to look.

(both of them)
Whatever it is between you, bury
it. Right here, right now. Muster
on station and do your damn jobs.
Dismissed.

Pilar and James, chastened, exit. Stay with Henley, eyes
peeled over the vast heaving ocean before him. He pats his
pockets, looking for a cigarette. None there.

HENLEY (CONT'D)
(to his XO)
Back in ten.

INT. USS LEXINGTON - OFFICERS' MESS - NIGHT

Henley eating ICE CREAM, basically alone in the place.

BURKE

XO thought you were smoking.

HENLEY

This bad habit was closer.

Burke fills a GLASS with soda, joins him.

BURKE

So. All your efforts to heal the divisions on the ship, you still end up with an aviator threatening to punch an ordy.

HENLEY

What do you think, put 'em on bread and water, confine 'em to quarters?

BURKE

You're the captain. Can keel-haul them, the mood strikes.

HENLEY

Do you know what keel-hauling is?

BURKE

(realizes)

No, I don't.

HENLEY

Couple hundred years ago, you committed an infraction, they'd run a rope under the ship, tie you to the rope, then pull you under, haul you over the keel. If the rope was tight to the hull, the barnacles would tear you to shreds. If it was slack, no barnacles, but the trip was longer and you'd probably drown.

(beat)

I was going to say I kinda feel like I'm being keel-hauled, but the truth is, I'm sitting here eating ice cream while Shepherd's out there in the water.

BURKE

It's an awful situation, Stick.

(CONTINUED)

HENLEY
Comes with the hat, right?

Burke gets the reference, smiles softly. Beat.

BURKE
So. What do you do?

HENLEY
Nothing I *can* do. Even if Shepherd
pops her beacon again, we get her
location, I send anyone across the
line to find her -- North Koreans
will respond in force. Any more
planes go down, I'm testifying
before Congress and Shepherd's in
some Pyongyang hellhole.

BURKE
What if they don't find her?

HENLEY
Come dawn she'll've been in the
water fourteen hours. About to
reach the point we're gonna be
praying they find her.

It's killing him. She sees it. She agonizes a beat, then
reaches out -- PUTS HER HAND ON HIS HAND. Face to face, both
feeling the TOUCH like FIRE --

But then a thought comes to Henley; the moment is gone.

BURKE
What?

HENLEY
(as it locks in --)
I have to go.

He's headed out. Turns to look at her. An UNSPOKEN
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT passing between them, what they're capable of
with one another. Then he leaves Allison in the empty mess --

INT. USS LEXINGTON - ORDY WING - NIGHT

ORDYS gearing up, doing their thing. As PILAR steps in, all
eyes go to her -- the fuck is she doing here? She moves in
past them, awash in hostility, until JOAQUIN intercedes.

JOAQUIN
You lost, Maytag? Not sure this
the best place for you right now --

(CONTINUED)

PILAR

Looking for James. He here?

From behind Joaquin, in his rack --

JAMES

Let her back, man. Come on.

Joaquin lingers in her way a moment longer. Then steps aside. He and the others watch as she moves over to James, stands across from him, almost formal.

PILAR

I'm sorry I came after you. I was a jerk.

It hangs there waiting to be taken up or swatted down. After a long moment --

JAMES

Guys? Could you maybe --?

Joaquin moves off with the other Ordys, leaving James and Pilar relatively alone.

PILAR

I should've broken off and dumped the missile. You were right: this is on me, and me alone.

JAMES

You really think I'd screw around with your load, Pilar? Let me tell you something.

(she turns)

My sister, she's like a year older'n me? Name of Frida, but we call her Fudd, just to rattle her cage. She's with 204th Signal Battalion, Army. Anyway, back in '06, she drove over this IED in Sadr City? Pretty much vaporized her, like she's a mist. Hit my mama like a wrecking ball. She had a stroke right there when she heard.

(she waits)

I took a job on a ship 'cause I didn't want to turn out like her. Figure on a ship, ain't any IEDs or snipers. I'm a coward, Maytag, and I got to live with that.

(leans in)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

JAMES (CONT'D)

But I swear on the life of my
sister -- I did not, I would never,
damage a weapon that could've
helped protect her, or anybody like
her. I need you to know that. Do
you understand?

It hits her, the naked truth in his eyes, the real question
in his question. She holds his eyes --

PILAR

Why didn't you tell me this, you
know, before?

JAMES

(quiet)

Back at Pearl? Way I remember it --
we didn't do a whole lot of talking
at Pearl.

PILAR

Way I recall, all we did was get
drunk and swap some spit. Before
you passed out.

JAMES

It was late. I was tired.

PILAR

I put a blanket on you, left you
there, all cute, little bit of
drool coming out --

JAMES

What if I hadn't passed out?

PILAR

I like to think neither of us would
be so stupid as to risk everything
for a tumble.

James nods. Pilar nods. Makes to leave --

PILAR (CONT'D)

James, I don't see you as any kind
of coward. You should know that.

Just then they hear the sound of everyone standing up, going
silent, with Joaquin calling out:

JOAQUIN

Captain on the deck!

(CONTINUED)

Pilar and James turn to see HENLEY striding in, returning salute to Joaquin and all the Ordys.

HENLEY

As you were.

(then:)

Maytag, this's a pleasant surprise.
Brings you to the Ordy Wing?

PILAR

Came to apologize, sir.

HENLEY

Glad to hear it. Now, come with
me, the both of you.

Henley heads out. Pilar and James share a look -- WTF? -- then follow Henley out, everyone else sharing the same thought -- what the hell...?

OMITTED

OMITTED

EXT. USS LEXINGTON - VULTURE'S ROW - NIGHT

VULTURE'S ROW, a jutting prow off the ship's tower overlooking the FLIGHT DECK. JETS taking off and landing mere yards below.

Find MERRICK overlooking flight operations under the roiling sky. Talking to SOMEONE, but we don't see who it is yet --

MERRICK

I'm gonna miss being out here. The swells, that churning of the world beneath me. I belong on a ship, Derek, not behind a desk.

(beat, grins)

Unless it's the right desk.

(to companion)

That was a nice piece of flying, avoiding that crunch up. Your family would be proud.

MAN (O.S.)

I should've followed her down.

MERRICK

And then maybe it's you in the drink. No, you played it just right, son.

(CONTINUED)

And now we see Merrick is talking to VANDAL --

MERRICK (CONT'D)

Had dinner with your old man in
D.C. a month back. Told him I'd
check on you, I got the chance.
This ship a good fit for you?

VANDAL

Yes, sir.

MERRICK

How's Henley doing? From your
perspective?

VANDAL

What Captain Edgars did here? Long
climb out of a deep, dark hole.
Still, morale's improving...

MERRICK

Anyone can improve morale. Free
ice cream in the enlisted mess, a
couple barbecues on the flight
deck. It's easy to be liked.

(beat)

Your father sees you filling his
senate seat in ten years. What do
you think?

VANDAL

I think the idea of my father ever
giving up that seat voluntarily is
pretty funny, sir.

MERRICK

(smiles)

I was going to going to say the
same thing. What are your
ambitions, son?

VANDAL

Honestly, sir, I am just completely
and utterly stoked to be a Naval
aviator.

MERRICK

Good answer.

(beat)

Was a time, political aspirants knew
they had to log some service hours.
Kennedy did his time in the Pacific.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

MERRICK (CONT'D)

Johnson -- that weasely sonofabitch was on one flight under fire in New Guinea, campaigned for years on his wartime experience. Still, nothing wrong with ambition.

VANDAL

If I may, sir, what's your ambition? Chief of Naval Operations?

MERRICK

My ambition is to get every sailor and aviator under my command home in one piece. CNO would be gravy. Very nice gravy, I have no doubt, but gravy nonetheless.

The XO moves up on them --

EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Admiral, the Captain would like to speak with you.

Just then -- A SEA SPARROW MISSILE launches from the ship, arcing off brilliant and fast into the black night sky. Merrick, Vandal and the XO watch it arc into the black and disappear.

MERRICK

What the hell was that?

VANDAL

Sea Sparrow.

MERRICK

I know *what* it was. I want to know why we just fired one off --

EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Why Captain Henley needs to speak with you, sir.

The XO heads off. Merrick motions to Vandal -- come with me. Off they go --

INT. USS LEXINGTON - CIC - NIGHT

The place is alive, energized, a new sense of purpose. Merrick charges in, followed by Vandal -- sees Henley. Vandal notes that PILAR and JAMES are there as well.

MERRICK

You fired a missile?

(CONTINUED)

HENLEY
I did.

MERRICK
At what?

HENLEY
Nothing.

EXECUTIVE OFFICER
We got a signal!

HENLEY
Location?

EXECUTIVE OFFICER
126 miles north, right on the line.

HENLEY
(to WEAPONS OFFICER)
Nice shot, Worley.

The 25-year-old WEAPONS OFFICER nods, thanks.

MERRICK
You mind explaining, Captain?

HENLEY
(nods at James)
Ordy Kincaid put an EPIRG beacon on a dummy Sea Sparrow. Worley fired it a hundred-twenty-six miles up the line. The beacon's transmitting in the clear. We're going to storm its position, full speed, helos out in front, spotter planes up, whole strike group. Except for one destroyer. The McKenzie stays back.

MERRICK
(understanding --)
You're going to pull the North Korean forces up to follow...

HENLEY
They triangulate on the signal, come first light they're searching for someone who isn't there.

EXECUTIVE OFFICER
It's like "Lord of the Rings," sir.
(off their looks)
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

EXECUTIVE OFFICER (CONT'D)

At the end, Aragorn attacks the Gates
of Mordor to draw attention away from
Frodo and Sam on Mount Doom.

Merrick looks at the XO like he's from fucking Mars. Back to
Henley --

MERRICK

All this predicated on your guess
that at oh-six-hundred, Shepherd is
going to pop her beacon again...

HENLEY

Not a guess, sir.

MERRICK

And if she's still over the line?

HENLEY

We send in one unarmed Growler to
find Shepherd and a rescue helo
from the destroyer to pick her up.
And we do it fast, before the North
Korean MiGs can get back here.

MERRICK

And if you don't have Shepherd?

HENLEY

Not looking to start a war. We
pull back and regroup.

It hangs in the air. Merrick thinks it over.

MERRICK

Flying an unarmed Growler into
enemy territory is a tough sortie.

HENLEY

(nods at Pilar)
Lieutenant Robles has volunteered.
Shepherd is her Dash-2.

VANDAL

I'd like to volunteer to fly
backseat, sir.

All eyes on Vandal. Merrick looks at Vandal -- you sure
about this? Vandal just looks at Henley.

HENLEY

You have NFO training?

VANDAL

Yes, sir.

(CONTINUED)

Henley thinks, nods.

HENLEY
Go get your ride.

Pilar and Vandal head out into --

INT. USS LEXINGTON - CORRIDOR OUTSIDE BRIDGE - NIGHT

Pilar and Vandal walk fast.

PILAR
Why did you volunteer?

VANDAL
You asking why do I want to rescue
a fellow aviator from my squadron?

PILAR
Oh, God. I get it.

VANDAL
Get what?

PILAR
You're sweet on her. Aren't you?

VANDAL
"Sweet on her," listen to you. You
got an active imagination, Maytag.

PILAR
I can't believe you're risking your
life to angle for a date.

As they hurry off, we go back to --

INT. USS LEXINGTON - BRIDGE - NIGHT

Henley enters the Bridge with his XO and Merrick.

EXECUTIVE OFFICER
Captain on the bridge!

HENLEY
(to XO)
Relay the beacon's GPS coordinates
to the strike group.
(to navigator)
Full speed ahead.

OMITTED

OMITTED

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR**EXT. SKIES OVER THE SEA OF JAPAN - DAWN**

An EA-18G GROWLER in flight. Looks like an F-18, just RADAR PODS and ELECTRONIC COUNTERMEASURES instead of missiles --

INT. EA-18 GROWLER - DAWN

Pilar and Vandal, lit ORANGE by their HUD displays as they fly along the demarcation line with North Korea.

PILAR

Okay, having you as R2 to my Skywalker? I like it. Thing is? R2-D2 was an awesome backseat. So, how about it, Vandal. You any good?

VANDAL

I'm gonna tell you something which, you repeat it, I will totally deny. For a minute, just a minute -- looked like I might wash out of flight school. So I trained backseat, just in case.

Pilar has to smile.

PILAR

Vandal as a washout. This, I like.

VANDAL

And I will kill you if you ever bring it up again. I mean, murdered dead. Understand?

INT. USS LEXINGTON - CIC - DAWN

CLOSE ON A CLOCK: 06:00:21... :22... :23.

EVERYONE watching the clock. Silent.

ON HENLEY as the air starts to go out of the balloon --

MERRICK

Look, it's not what we hoped. We can still --

HENLEY

Just -- give it a second.

Waiting. The tension critical, please God --

(CONTINUED)

TRACKING OFFICER
We have a signal!

Cheers in the room --

HENLEY
Quiet.

They quiet. This is the decision point. Go or No Go.
Henley thinks for a moment longer, then nods to the XO.

HENLEY (CONT'D)
Go.

INT. EA-18 GROWLER - DAY

Pilar and Vandal get the command.

PILAR
On our way.

EXT. EA-18 GROWLER - DAY

The plane banks hard, heads north.

INT. EA-18 GROWLER - DAY

Eyeing their HUDs as they cross the limit line into North
Korean airspace.

PILAR
Where are the MiGs?

VANDAL
Oh, they're coming, I assure you.

PILAR
(looking down)
Okay, nugget. Where are you?

EXT. SEA OF JAPAN - DAY

Shepherd in the water. She is in bad shape, barely holding
on. PULL BACK until she is all alone in the sea, then
becomes a dot, then disappears altogether in the vastness.

INT. USS LEXINGTON - THE BRIDGE - DAY

The XO turns to Henley.

EXECUTIVE OFFICER
Four North Korean MiGs are headed
for Shepherd's signal.

(CONTINUED)

HENLEY
You're telling me the Nazgul are on
their way.

EXECUTIVE OFFICER
Exactly, sir.

I/E. EA-18 GROWLER/SEA OF JAPAN - DAY

Pilar and Vandal searching for Shepherd --

PILAR
According to the GPS she should be
right below us--

ALARM TONE in the cockpit.

VANDAL
(checking his HUD)
We got four bogeys, closing.

PILAR
How long?

VANDAL
Not very.

PILAR
Can you do something?

VANDAL
Watch this --

Vandal works a few buttons --

INT. USS LEXINGTON - CIC - DAY

All eyes on a screen showing the North Korean Limit Line and
one BLIP representing Pilar and Vandal and FOUR MORE BLIPS --
North Korea MiGs -- heading toward them when...

All of a sudden, the FOUR MIGS fly off in all directions.

HENLEY
Nice work, Vandal.

INT. EA-18 GROWLER - NIGHT

Vandal, elated --

VANDAL
Standoff jammer, crammed the signal
down their throats. Think they're
chasing a squadron of F-18s...

PILAR
Well done, R2.

EXT. SEA OF JAPAN - DAY

Shepherd sees the Growler flying above and onward --

INT. EA-18 GROWLER - DAY

VANDAL
Only got a minute or two before
they wise up, so we need to --

BEEEEEP!!! A SIGNAL in the cockpit --

VANDAL (CONT'D)
Incoming.

PILAR
Incoming what?

VANDAL
I don't know... but it's hot...
and coming from below us.

They both realize at the same time. Pilar puts them into a
hard bank --

EXT. EA-18 GROWLER - DAY

The Growler comes around and they see a FLARE arcing up.

PILAR (O.S.)
Lexington, we have a flare, we have
visual on Shepherd.

INT. USS LEXINGTON - THE BRIDGE - DAY

Cheers.

HENLEY
(to XO)
Where's the helo?

EXECUTIVE OFFICER
(gets info, relays)
On the line. Three minutes to
Shepherd.

(CONTINUED)

HENLEY

Send it.

The tracking officer gets information, relays, pointing to the radar display.

TRACKING OFFICER

Bogeys wised up. Coming back.

HENLEY

(realizing)

They'll get there before the helo.

OMITTED

INT. EA-18 GROWLER - DAY

Vandal eyes the returning MiGs on his HUD.

VANDAL

Gotta go, Maytag.

PILAR

I'm not leaving her.

VANDAL

Maytag. They got a fix on our position now, I can't hide us and we got no weapons on this ride--

PILAR

Vandal. I am not leaving her.

A beat, as Vandal processes.

VANDAL

Roger that. Staying on station.

Pilar's eyes fixed on the FIGURE IN THE WATER far below...

INT. USS LEXINGTON - CIC - DAY

Henley eyes the radar screen. Merrick is looking at him.

MERRICK

You said, they're coming and we don't have her, you get out.

HENLEY

(beat, to XO)

Rattle their cage.

EXT. SKIES OVER THE SEA OF JAPAN - DAY

THE MIGS, now formed up as a unit, race towards the signal flare. Full afterburner, they'll be there in a minute --

INT. EA-18 GROWLER - DAY

Vandal eyeing his scope. Something growing on it in orange, a MASS of radar signal --

VANDAL

Uh, Maytag? Either I'm tracking a really fast-moving storm system, or we're about to have big company --

BAMBI (O.S.)

Come get some, bitches!

EXT. SKIES OVER THE SEA OF JAPAN - DAY

THE FULL COMPLEMENT OF STRIKE AIRCRAFT from the USS Lexington -- FIFTY PLANES in PERFECT FORMATION, stacked four-on-four, bearing down on the North Korean line like the wrath of almighty God.

OMITTED

INT. USS LEXINGTON - CIC - DAY

All eyes on the screen showing FIFTY PLANES heading fast toward the limit line. Henley feels Merrick looking at him.

EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Ten seconds to the limit line.

HENLEY

Keep going.

EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Five, four...

EXT. SKIES OVER THE SEA OF JAPAN - DAY

The FOUR MIGS keep on path for Shepherd...

The FIFTY LEXINGTON STRIKE AIRCRAFT keep on an intersecting course. And then...

The MiGs PANIC, peel off in all directions, running away from the American air wing --

INT. USS LEXINGTON - CIC - DAY

The dots representing the FOUR MIGS scatter.

HENLEY
Break off!

EXECUTIVE OFFICER
(relaying)
Break off, break off!

EXT. SKIES OVER THE SEA OF JAPAN - DAY

The FIFTY AMERICAN STRIKE PLANES execute an instant about-face in perfect formation.

INT. USS LEXINGTON - CIC - DAY

On the radar screen, the FIFTY AMERICAN PLANES don't cross the limit line.

OMITTED

INT. EA-18 GROWLER - DAY

Vandal and Pilar, the relief visible on them --

BAMBI (O.S.)
Maytag, Vandal, we got your six.
Clear to fly the friendly skies.

PILAR
Roger that, two-two-niner. Thank you, Bambi.

VANDAL
(looking down)
Here comes the helo.

INT. USS LEXINGTON - CIC - DAY

Tension relieved, everybody happy, proud, job well done.

EXECUTIVE OFFICER
Angel is on station. Diver's in the water.

HENLEY
Let me know when Shepherd's on the McKenzie.

Merrick nods to Henley -- a word? Henley steps off.

MERRICK
What if they hadn't blinked?

(CONTINUED)

HENLEY
They did blink.

MERRICK
If they hadn't?

HENLEY
I would've called them off at the
limit line.

MERRICK
So you got lucky.

HENLEY
I guess so.

MERRICK
Nothing wrong with luck.
(to XO)
See if you can get my helo over.

EXECUTIVE OFFICER
Right away, Admiral.

HENLEY
You don't want to wait for Shepherd?
She should be back in a few hours.

MERRICK
This is your ship, Captain.

Merrick walks off. Off Henley, watching him go --

INT. USS LEXINGTON - ENLISTED MESS HALL - DAY

SAILORS and ENLISTED AIR CREW milling around and eating,
everybody talking about what just happened out there --
Settle on Lewis, James, and Farley.

JAMES
Pretty cool, way he did it. "They'll
be looking for someone who isn't
there."

LEWIS
He said he was stealing the idea
from "The Lord of the Rings"?

JAMES
That was the XO, but he was just--

LEWIS
That was my family's favorite growing
up. We'd watch 'em all, every
Christmas.

(CONTINUED)

FARLEY
Too many endings.

LEWIS
You read the book? There's another
whole section with Saruman in the
Shire. Pretty awesome, actually.

JAMES
[cough] dork [cough] --

Reveal BOWMAN, crossing behind, having overheard their
conversation. Smiling, he moves on...

BOWMAN (PRE-LAP)
Found your BT punch today, did you.

OMITTED

INT. USS LEXINGTON - SMOKER PIT - DAY

Henley and Bowman -- Bowman smoking, Henley not.

HENLEY
Got lucky, is what I did today.

BOWMAN
Talk around the ship -- first time
I've heard the crew feeling like
they got a leader in a long time.

HENLEY
Hope I can prove 'em right.

Bowman holds out his pack of smokes.

BOWMAN
Last one I'm going to give you--

HENLEY
No, thanks. Why I came down. So
you didn't wonder where I was,
think I'd gone overboard, sound the
alarm. I'm gonna quit. Chew the
gum, wear a patch.

BOWMAN
Good for you. You mind my asking
how come? Other than it being a
horrible habit that can kill you.

HENLEY
They told me, my first job on this
ship was to get everyone to calm
down and cheer the hell up.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

HENLEY (CONT'D)

And I got started on that. Turns out, that's the easy part.

BOWMAN

Wasn't easy for Edgars.

HENLEY

Thing is, as of the last twenty-four hours, this isn't some software company needs team-building exercises. As of the last twenty-four hours, this is once more a fighting ship.

BOWMAN

Meaning they don't need a captain who smokes.

HENLEY

Just so.
(dons his hat)
If we so have a saboteur on board, you and Agent Burke gonna find him for me?

BOWMAN

That's the plan.

HENLEY

Keep me apprised.

Bowman nods. Henley heads out.

BOWMAN

Captain?

HENLEY

Yes, Chief?

BOWMAN

(nods at hat)
It fits.

Henley gives a small grin, heads out.

INT. USS LEXINGTON - NCIS COMMAND BERTH/HALLWAY - DAY

Henley stops before a door, sighs. Raps at the door. After a beat, the door opens, revealing -- BURKE. She smiles.

BURKE

Congratulations, Captain.

HENLEY

Thank you, Allison.

(CONTINUED)

BURKE
Feeling pretty good about yourself
right now, huh.

HENLEY
I've felt worse.

She sees it on his face, behind the relief --

BURKE
But that's not why you're here.

HENLEY
I quit smoking.

BURKE
Seriously, it was becoming kind of
gross. I mean, breath mints is one
thing, but --

HENLEY
Not the only thing I have to quit,
Allison.
(as she understands --)
I got to quit leaning on you, too.
You understand what I mean?

BURKE
What if I said no? What then?

HENLEY
I'd have to explain it to you. And
that'd suck for the both of us, I think.

It hangs there for a beat, the hard reality of it. Then she
nods, no fool. Gives him a weary smile.

BURKE
You don't have to explain anything.

Not much else to say, now it's awkward --

BURKE (CONT'D)
Okay. I'll see you up top.

HENLEY
See you up top.

She closes the door. He lingers there a moment. Then he
sighs, PUTS ON HIS CAPTAIN'S HAT, squares it -- and moves on,
lots of shit left to do --

OMITTED

INT. USS LEXINGTON - CAPTAIN'S STATEROOM - DAY

Henley video-chats with Jess.

(CONTINUED)

JESS

Well. Since you can't tell me anything, I'll say congratulations without knowing why.

HENLEY

You still want me to talk to Lucas?

JESS

Only if you want to.

HENLEY

You know I do. But I mean about --

JESS

I know what you mean.

(sighs)

It just weirds me out, our boy's got a girlfriend. Never thought I'd walk in on anything like that --

HENLEY

Bound to happen sooner or later. Is she cute, at least?

JESS

She has a pierced nose.

HENLEY

Hm.

JESS

I know, right?

(beat)

Look, I want to apologize.

HENLEY

For what?

JESS

The way I got, before. The reason I get so... mean some times is only because I miss you so much.

That kinda shocks Henley, not expecting that.

HENLEY

Thanks. But... If you miss me so much, why did you divorce me?

JESS

Because you're never here.

Off Henley, the pain of his choices --

INT. USS LEXINGTON - COMMAND MASTER CHIEF'S OFFICE - DAY

BOWMAN, JOAQUIN, and BURKE. Knock at the door.

BOWMAN

Enter.

In comes JAMES. He almost pukes when he sees who's waiting for him.

JAMES

Oh, come on. I didn't do anything--

BOWMAN

We know that. Sit.

Now James *really* doesn't know what's going on. He sits.

JOAQUIN

All the questions about the ordy,
before -- sorry about all that. We
just needed to set it up...

JAMES

Set what up?

BURKE

You want to help us find whoever it
is sabotaging the ordnance?

JAMES

Damn right. What can I do?

BOWMAN

You can take the fall.

Off James, wondering what the hell --

MUSIC UP: FLEET FOXES, "YOUR PROTECTOR" carrying over --

EXT. USS LEXINGTON - FLIGHT DECK - DUSK

Sunset. TIGHT on a HELICOPTER landing on the aft deck.
Setting down gently as THE DOORS OPEN, revealing --

SHEPHERD on a gurney, attended by MEDICAL AIRCREW. As she's
wheeled off the helo, we HEAR --

CHEERS from a throng of the Lexington's sailors and air crew,
and reveal --

ALL HANDS ON DECK, all present for Shepherd's return.
Bloodied, hypothermic, injured, she nonetheless raises her
hand to WAVE, as she's wheeled past --

(CONTINUED)

PILAR and VANDAL. She smiles at them. Pilar nods at her -- good to have you back, nugget. Then she's moved beyond them.

CLOSE ON PILAR. She reacts to something. Looks down.

A HAND is lightly touching hers. REVEAL the hand belongs to JAMES. Standing right next to her, watching Shepherd being wheeled off. Pilar doesn't pull her hand away.

Shepherd continues her journey toward THE BRIDGE TOWER, where the last man standing between her and indoors is --

HENLEY. As she draws near, he snaps to and SALUTES. She nods back at him, tears in her eyes. Henley leans in and whispers something to Shepherd -- we don't hear what. When he straightens up we see Shepherd grinning.

And then she's past Henley and inside, leaving us with the Captain, looking out over his crew on the deck --

HENLEY

All right, people. Let's get back to work.

The CHIEFS immediately echo their captain's orders to their various charges, putting the hustle in their step...

Off the crew of the Lexington falling in to muster on their various stations as the SUN sinks below the horizon and just as we think the pilot is over we go to --

INT. USS LEXINGTON - ORDY WING - DAY

MOVING PAST ORDYS working on assembling various weapons, bolting, ratcheting down, etc. Tracking along to find --

LEWIS, our civilian contractor, all alone over the GUIDANCE GYROS of a Sidewinder missile. Moving --

CLOSE ON HIS HANDS -- as he expertly DESTROYS A MICROCHIP in the ultra-delicate guidance housing, pulling it free of the motherboard, POCKETING the chip.

He looks around to see if anybody noticed. Satisfied, he then REASSEMBLES the nose of the missile, starts bolting down the housing. It looks like nothing's wrong at all.

As he walks off --

END EPISODE

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