

Excerpt from *'America's Daughters'* (c) Lara Morton, 2013

SCENE: Mini and Matt (both age 17)

Lights rise on a podium with an Academy of Michigan Charter High School emblem on the front. MINI, now 17, stands at the podium, holding up a document from the Department of Defense.

MINI

Contrary to what my opponent would have you believe, the Department of Defense is actively investigating methods of combatting the problem of Military Sexual Trauma in its affected divisions.

MATT

Which is just... *all* of them.

MINI

(Rolling her eyes) I was *about* to say that a 2009 West Point Conscientious Bystander campaign has just been cited by the DOD as an effective defense weapon against MST with potentially widespread applications for all service personnel. Both male and female cadets are assigned Battle Buddies, and chief among their responsibilities to one another is to alert to situations where a buddy may be more susceptible to victimizing or being victimized, particularly when one or both parties is inebriated.

MATT

Friends, the studies show Conscientious Bystander training doesn't work in the active divisions of the military in the same way it works on educational campuses. The Department of Defense estimates that only 30% of military-related assaults involve alcohol consumption, as opposed to 67% of assaults taking place on college campuses. The DOD also estimates that 65-70% of all women who serve in the military are sexually assaulted. Thus, 70% of those attacks having absolutely nothing to do with alcohol consumption; rather, they were crimes of opportunity created by the trust that goes hand in hand with military personnel training.

MINI

Those percentages have not, and cannot be proven, as they are merely conjecture. They also cannot speak to the percentages of reported attacks that are false.

MATT

My opponent is blaming the victim now! The fact is, a soldier is trained to view his or her fellow soldiers as 'family.' Thus, a predatory sexual act within that environment has been compared by trained psychiatric professionals to incest in terms of damage potential to the individual's psyche.

MINI

I take offense to the suggestion that the United States Military creates sexual predators.

MATT

My opponent is reading into my comments. There is no research to support or suggest the idea that the US Armed Forces creates predators. It does, however, enable them by failing to enforce consequences. The same crimes perpetrated in any sector of civilian society would result in arrest, trial, imprisonment, rehabilitation and inclusion on the National Sex Offender Registry. It's as if the military passes out a 'Get out of rape free card' to enlisted men, and prosecutes the victims instead.

MINI is starting to show some signs of agitation and defensiveness.

MINI

This is a ridiculous argument, not to mention offensive to me personally. Soldiers are heroes, not criminals. As the sole member of the third generation of a military family, soldiers like my father and grandfather are the reason you can stand here freely and enjoy your right to free speech without being dragged off to prison or hanged in the street! My father is a decorated military hero with an honorable discharge and a Purple Heart for injuries sustained in defense of the American dream that you and others like you take for granted. Do you know why he served? To protect what he refers to this country's "precious resources": It's kids. Us. You. Me. Because he believes in the right to raise his daughter in safety and liberty, where I can receive an education and lead my generation into the future, a better future. We are the future. My father risked his life and

gave his leg for every one of you in this room. I dare you to do better with your lives.

MATT

I stand firm in my assertion that my opponent's paradigm is colored by her family history and future designs on military service.

MINI

And yours is colored by your family's liberal anti-war agenda. Next point?

MATT

Touche! While I appreciate the sacrifices my opponent's forbearers have made for all of us, I must remind her that as a woman enlisting in a division of the US Armed Forces, she stands a greater chance of being sexually violated than not. Perhaps she believes she will be exempt from victimization due to her family's glorious history of service and love for the American flag? Perhaps she believes she is so evidently competent and dedicated that an equally competent and dedicated rapist will pass her over in favor of someone less....patriotically inspiring?

MINI

I absolutely agree that part and parcel with military service come numerous challenges and dangers, but I object to the thinly veiled suggestion of weakness on my part, as well as an attack on my ability to discern my own safety. Perhaps my opponent thinks me silly and naïve?

MATT

On the contrary, I find you exceptionally smart, which is why I have a tough time comprehending your determination to ruin your future.

MINI gasps; A long silent beat the sound of uncomfortable shuffling and murmuring is heard in the room. Mini is holding back tears.

MATT

In preparation for today's class debate, I verbally polled male members of our student body for their opinion on the high incidence of rape and other forms of sexual assault in the United States Military, asking them to write down their responses on these index cards (*holds up a stack of cards and reads*).

"Women don't belong in combat anyway. Every time they get their period they'll probably shoot the guy next to them over a chocolate bar."

"Girls lie about rape all the time because they are embarrassed by their slutty behavior. My brother told me that, and he's in college."

"I think it's okay for guys in war to rape because they are far away from home and not getting it on the regular any more."

"It's just one of those shitty things that happens, like dying in battle. They should know what they signed up for."

MINI

With all due respect, where did my opponent take this poll? The in-school suspension room? Seriously, how in any way can this be considered research? These kids were clearly dimwits.

MATT

Honest dimwits. Certain types of individuals tend to speak--and act--freely when they know there are likely to be no consequences. Case in point: Sexual predators within military ranks who know nothing will happen to them because in 2010 alone there were 19,000 rapes committed and the only ones being court marshaled for it are the victims. They lose their careers, their community, their reputation, their self-respect, their veteran's benefits... often even their families and their lives, while their perpetrators go on to celebrated military and public service careers 'protecting' our society.

Even if the military is, as you've asserted, attempting to find inroads into prevention programs and methods of insuring justice for victims of this crime, it is clear to anyone who looks at the statistical patterns that it is grossly underprepared when it comes to dealing with the tangible reality of the issue. Many VA hospitals don't even offer women's bathrooms, let alone programs for women affected by MST-related PTSD.

MINI

What are you really saying here, Matt? I really have to wonder if we would we be having this debate if Jonah over there was the one about to

enlist? Are you suggesting that because my anatomy is vulnerable to invasion I have no business serving in the military at all?

MATT

(Gently, impassioned) What I'm saying, dear "opponent", is that you haven't thought this fully through. You are fixated on an ideal that just isn't the reality. I know how hard women have had to fight for the right to die-- to DIE-dead-sayonara-goodbye-- for our safety, and there's an irony there. Fighting for decades first to get the vote, then to have rewarding careers and reproductive freedoms, I get it. I also get that the culture of the military is just not women-friendly, no matter how many commercials with strong and pretty women jumping out of airplanes I see. They don't want you there. If they did, they would protect you and offer you justice when those protective measures fail. No one is questioning the honor of your father and your grandfather, or questioning the validity of their sacrifices. We are just looking out for you, and your future children. You say that your dad fought so his daughter could live a good life, get a good education, and be a productive citizen, right?

MINI

Yes

MATT

Well, at what point do you stop being viewed as a "precious resource" in the eyes of society and start being viewed as a spittoon?

MINI

That's a disgusting metaphor.

MATT

Maybe. But it's a clearly understood one, nonetheless. The fact is, the more research I do on this topic the more it becomes clear to me that you would stand a better chance of a living a normal life if like your father you were discharged for losing a leg rather than vilified as a rape victim.

MINI

That's a low blow and you know it. *(Raises her arm)* Mrs. Rinalto, I believe this practice debate is over. I need some air while the class votes on a winner. May I please be dismissed? Thank you.

MINI nods and 'steps down' with her notes in hand. She crosses to a table and calmly attempts to organize her materials.

MATT

Mini, I didn't mean to offend you. I'm sorry if you took it that way.

MINI

My name is Frances. My friends call me 'Mini.' You do not fall into that category today.

MATT

I'll take it, if you have heard anything I was trying to say here.

MINI

Well, I'm sure you won the debate, so enjoy your victory.

MATT

Have you responded to your acceptance letter yet?

MINI

Not yet... My family needs more time for the deposit, but my dad says he'll have it by Friday.

MATT

Don't send it. You don't have to send it. You got accepted everywhere you applied. You are so fucking talented in so many ways. You've been offered a full scholarship to Michigan State for your music, for Christ's sake—go there! Go anywhere else but West Point, please.

MINI

It's my legacy, Matt. My destiny, my story. It's like *The Red Badge of Courage*. Bad things happen in war, but they make way for heroic things to happen too. It's the chance you take, just like the dimwit said.

MATT

Rape is not a natural consequence of war, Min. It's a function of a broken system. I know they are working on it, especially now with the lawsuit on, but it's not fixed yet. Even if you do go to West Point, you don't have to choose a military career. You know that right?

MINI

But if I don't go, and all across the country women like me stop enlisting because of the fear of what might happen, what then? There are two wars on. Who knows if there will be a third? Or a fourth? What happens when the volunteers get tapped? You get drafted, that's what. My grandfather was drafted-- and he came home to a bunch of hippies spitting on him as he got off the train. This country can't handle a draft-- we are too soft, too spoiled. It will tear us apart. I appreciate your concern, I really do... but I'm going, and that's all there is to it. As my friend, please try to be happy for me that I'm doing what I want to do with my life. Listen, I have to call my mom for a ride. I'll see you tomorrow, Matt. Please stop worrying about me. I've got this.

MINI puts her backpack on, pulls her cell phone out of her pocket and walks away.

MINI

Lights rise on Mini sitting with a guitar, working out a folk-rock style arrangement of 'America the Beautiful.'

And... crowned thy good. *(She starts again a half-step higher and with a vocal run on 'And')* A-a-and... crowned thy good.... With brotherhood.... With brother-HOOD!" *She hears a sharp whistle and looks up.*

NASH

Yo, Detroit!

MINI *(stops singing)*

Yo what?!

NASH

You busy?

MINI

Nah. Just practicing for Ft. McCoy Idol 2013, but I've got all month to plan my domination. What's up?

NASH

The shipment of funeral flags came in and I've got about fifty to fold. Can you meet me in Warehouse D in ten minutes?

MINI

Sure! I love folding flags.

NASH

Awesome! See you in ten. *(Starts to leave.)*

MINI

(Starts to pick up her things and looks down, noticing something next to her. We see a flash of recognition in her.) Hey Nash.

NASH

Yeah.

MINI

That's gonna take awhile. Is anybody else able to help out?

NASH

Nah, everybody's busy getting ready for Memorial Day stuff. It's just you and me this time. We'll bang it out in no time, though—best two flag folders in the Unit right here! Have confidence, girl!

MINI*(Smiles)* Okay. I'll meet you there in a little bit.

NASH

Cool. You're the best, Min. *(Points offstage)* See you over there.

MINI

Second best, Nash. *(She watches him leave and then resumes the last verse of her song, getting it perfect.)* 'And crowned thy good... with brother-hood, from sea to shining sea!' Annnnd the crowd goes wild for Mini Tiller, recording star and national hero!!!

MINI smiles and kisses her guitar before putting it carefully back in its case. She springs up, smooths her hair, checks her uniform and then stops, looking contemplatively in the direction in which Nash has just pointed. With a slight shrug and a shake of the head she laughs off the thought and heads out in the direction of Warehouse D. Blackout.

Curtain Call happens in front of a rolling montage of images and video clips set to 'I WAS HERE' by Lady Antebellum: Frontier women, Victorian-era footage of

*women in corsets, flappers, the suffrage movement, Amelia Earhart, women working during WWII making weapons and ammunition, the women's movement, Marilyn Monroe, Betty Page, the classic 1950's housewife, invention of the birth control pill, Gloria Steinem, the tampon, Woodstock, Vietnam, wartime nurses, women training for duty for American wars from WWII, Korea and Vietnam, headlines regarding women's inclusion in co-ed combat training in the mid-1970's, M*A*S*H*, Roe V. Wade, 1970's porn movement (Deep Throat, etc.), Geraldine Ferrera, Monica Lewinski, Desert Storm (women in combat), Sarah Palin, clips from military recruitment commercials depicting women in training and service, images of women now serving overseas in action, and headlines about women who have been murdered or gone missing as a result of coming forward about sexual assault.*