

**Excerpt from "MIA (Missing In Action)"
Written by Bruce J. Robinson**

Scene Three

(It's later that evening in the Schooler living room - warm, worn and brimming with little statues, dishes, framed pictures, etc. On a coffee table in front of the overstuffed couch are photo albums.)

(Pouring over one of the albums is RANDALL "RANDY" SCHOOLER. He's 19 years-old. Frank's in pajamas covered by a robe.)

Wow, Pop. This is a great shot.

RANDY

That's your brother with his buddies.

FRANK

Is that the Eaker Base?

RANDY

Nope. That's Diego Garcia.

FRANK

Oh. Where they were heading that night.

RANDY

Yup.

FRANK

(Randy smiles and nods his head affirmatively.)

What?

RANDY
(handing over picture)

Just that Mike looks all...happy.

FRANK

He was, Randy. Your brother was happy doing what he did, being what he was.

RANDY
(taking back picture and contemplating it)

Captain in the 97th Bombardment Wing of the U. S. Air Force.

FRANK

And damn proud of his contribution to Operation Desert Shield and the defense of his nation.

RANDY

Welp, I guess that'd make me happy, too.

FRANK

There's nothing ever wrong about doing the right thing.

RANDY

You know I gave my word to you and Momma I wouldn't...
(quietly to ensure Emmy doesn't hear forbidden topic)
you know.

FRANK

What?

RANDY

Enlist.

FRANK

I wasn't sure, 'cause you gave your word not to do a whole crap-load o' things.

RANDY

I guess I have, but I been thinking.

FRANK

(joking)

Uh-oh.

RANDY

Going back to Barker...

FRANK

(serious)

Uh-oh.

RANDY

I don't think that's for me either.

FRANK

It's a fine school.

RANDY

It's a shit-hole community college,

FRANK

Randall.

RANDY

but even if it was Brown University itself, that ain't the point. I tried my best last year.

FRANK

Was that your best, Randy?

RANDY

I just can't cut it in school, Pop. I'm sorry. I wish it was otherwise.

FRANK

Was that your best with the drinking and god-knows whatever else you were doing?

RANDY

Maybe I was doing that 'cause I... I... Oh, shoot.

FRANK

Son, you always underestimate yourself.

RANDY

You think I got left back in 5th grade 'cause I was so fuckin' smart?

FRANK

Watch that mouth in your Mother's house.

RANDY

Sorry, sir. I just don't want you to waste any more o' your money.

FRANK

Let me worry about my money, okay? 5th grade was a long time ago, son. Things can change; old mistakes don't need repeating.

RANDY

Yessir. I know that, but I'm doing you a favor. Believe me.

FRANK

Thanks a lot. What would you do?

RANDY

I dunno.

FRANK

That's reassuring.

RANDY

Hey, I'm good with my hands. I know cars and stuff. You had a job when you was my age.

FRANK

I had Polio. You want that, too?

(He doesn't answer.)

It was a different time. You have opportunities I never had. Don't turn your back on all you can be.

RANDY

Would it be so bad if I settled down here and just got a job and maybe – I dunno – got married?

To that girl? FRANK

She has a name. RANDY

She does. FRANK

Zephyr. That's her name. RANDY

That's part of the whole damn problem. FRANK

Zephyr? I thought you liked her. RANDY

FRANK
Her name; her name: and people worrying about what's different instead o' what works. She's a sweet girl, Randy. I'm sorry. I know her name. Zephyr. I like Zephyr.

(The difficulty with which he pronounces this name breaks Randy up.)

RANDY
 I gotta tell ya, it's a tough name for me. You can guess what the guys say about her.

What? FRANK

That Zephyr blows. RANDY

FRANK
Blows, gotcha-gotcha. (jokingly mussing son's hair)

Sorry, son. (grabbing another photo album)

Hey, look at these.

(He opens it and points out pictures.)

This is Mike when he was at Ohio State. At school. Enjoying school. Happy at school. In the "Rotcy" program he could've only found at school.

RANDY
At school. He does look happy.

FRANK

I think that was the happiest time of his life. That's at the fraternity. That's his girlfriend. Barbara, Diane... not Zephyr for damn sure. You remember that smile?

RANDY

Last time I saw him, I was four.

FRANK

You remember anything about 'im?

RANDY

His laugh.

FRANK

It was free...easy.

RANDY

But in another way...

FRANK

What?

RANDY

It's like I know him so well. He's like in here. Inside. And he's this... this thing I reach to but can't... can't ever...

FRANK

Your brother is a very special soul – but no more than you, Randall Schooler.

RANDY

He's a hero.

FRANK

He is.

RANDY

(spotting a new picture)

That's him on that canoe trip. He was only 16, wasn't he?

FRANK

Yup.

RANDY

Just a kid.

FRANK

Just a kid.

RANDY

Shoot, look at that haircut.

FRANK

We had words over it.

RANDY

Wow. That's a heckuva car.

FRANK

How he loved that. It was a '62 powder-blue T-bird convertible. Two-door. Fins. He had that thing humming.

RANDY

(lasciviously)

I just bet he did.

FRANK

Hey, no-no. Now he did know how to have fun – what man don't? – but he was serious about what demanded thought and attention.

RANDY

(pulling chain)

Like school.

FRANK

You been reading my mind.

RANDY

Pop, you're always selling.

FRANK

Son, this is my weekend, right?

RANDY

Yeah-yeah, sorry I even...

FRANK

No.

RANDY

It is your weekend, and I'm so proud o' you, you know.

FRANK

You know with all the pats on the back and the big trophy and all - the thing that would please me the most, the greatest gift..?

RANDY

I'm guessing me going back to Barker?

FRANK

No-no, this is America. You're a man - a very young man but a man. You do what you want – as long as you accept the consequences of your choices. That's what you been taught. But if you could just – with an open mind – before doing anything else, spend a few weeks judiciously weighing re-applying to school...

RANDY

Sure. Okay, sure.

FRANK

Thank you, son. That means a lot. With a little time, you'll come to the right conclusion - my conclusion.

RANDY

Your conclusion.

FRANK

Randall Jacob Schooler, sometimes...

RANDY

What, Pop?

FRANK

You look so much like your brother.

RANDY

Thanks.

(sarcastically)

And I remind you of him?

FRANK

In many ways you do, yes you do, Mr. Wisenheimer. You both have this love of detail and of order. Never had to get on either o' you to clean up. And cars. For both o' you, from the beginning, cars-cars-cars. He loved that T-Bird more than anything save family and country.

(spotting a new picture)

That's him with his pal Warren or Willy or something or other and his T-Bird. He had a name for that car. What-the-hell..? What-the-hell..?

RANDY

`t's okay, Pop.

FRANK

But I do remember this time - why, I dunno; it's crazy how the mind works - this one time. It was nothing special. It was the summer that he managed to put the finishing touches on the car; the summer he found the...the - yeah, the Town and Country radio, it was called. He had just gotten it, and it fit. And it looked fine. The look on Mikey's face. I see it. Late afternoon. I still see his smile. I looked at my boy and saw a man, proud of what he'd done. And I was proud, too. There he was - standing by this beautiful thing he had lovingly brought back - and it looked like a powder-blue jet. He was in charge, ready to take-off.

(Beat - as they silently look at the picture.)

And speaking of "taking-off," I better check on your Mother.

RANDY

And speaking of "taking-off," how you doing with the stuffed cabbage?

FRANK

It's surely great going down but once there causes quite a ruckus. Don't stay up too late. It's a tough job, kid: to sing my praises all weekend.

RANDY

Piece o' cake, Pop. I'll just knock around here a little while.

FRANK

Well, night. You take care, you hear?

RANDY

Yup.

(Frank has the wildly atypical impulse to hug his son. But he doesn't. Instead, he hits his son on the arm.)

(Frank exits.)

(Randy looks at pictures for awhile. He sees one that particularly entralls him and touches it – desperately trying to connect. Then, he crosses to a nearby breakfront. He opens the top drawer and removes a soldier's cap. Clearly, it's Mike's.)

(Randy puts on the cap, looks into the mirror on the breakfront, salutes sharply. BLACKOUT.)