

The Sugar Ridge Rag

A Play by

Philip Middleton Williams

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CHARACTERS:

PETE GRANGER: Age 17. Well-built; headstrong.

DAVE GRANGER: Age 17. Pete’s identical twin. Muscular, determined.

DEB GRANGER: Late 30’s. Their mother. Pragmatic and protective.

HAL GRANGER: Late 30’s. Their father. Stoic, but not invincible.

PLACE and TIME:

The Granger home in Sugar Ridge, Ohio, and various times and places from May 5, 1970 to May 4, 1975.

THE SUGAR RIDGE RAG was first presented by LAB Theater Project in Tampa, Florida, on April 28, 2022. It was directed by Caroline Jett; Peter Zaliniak, assistant director. The setting and lights were by Owen Robertson; set dressing, scenic artistry, and stage management by Beth Tepe-Robertson; sound design by Catherine Hagner; costumes and prop design by Vanessa Reynolds. Videography by Kristy Pike. Original music by Miles Randolph. The cast, in order of appearance, was as follows:

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|-------------------|-------------------|
| PETE GRANGER..... | Ricardo Fernandez |
| DAVE GRANGER..... | Tyler Wood |
| DEB GRANGER..... | Heather Cole |
| HAL GRANGER..... | Nathan Juliano |

PRODUCTION NOTES:

Pete and Dave Granger are identical twins. For purposes of casting, the actors do not have to be identical, but they should bear a strong resemblance in size and appearance.

The music cues in the play are Scott Joplin piano rags and should be played on a solo piano, not orchestrated, and played as scored. The music itself is in the public domain and is available in sheet music form. Recordings such as those by Joshua Rifkin on the Nonesuch label are protected by copyright and can only be used with permission or by license. It is the responsibility of the producers to obtain the rights to use any recorded material and pay the licensing fee.

“The Sugar Ridge Rag” was composed by Miles Randolph. The program must note “Original music by Miles Randolph.”

Subsequent productions must include this note in the play program: “Originally produced by LAB Theater Project.”

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The Sugar Ridge Rag

The scene is a house in rural northwest Ohio, depicted in three simple settings. Upstage Center is an upstairs bedroom with a bunkbed next to the window that looks out over the farm fields. A small dresser/nightstand is under the window, and there's a radio/alarm clock on top next to a small bedside lamp. A small study desk with a chair completes the room. This is the twins' room. Stage Right is the living room, depicted by a pair of easy chairs with a table and lamp between them, and an old upright piano against the SR side. Stage Left is the kitchen, depicted by a kitchen table with four chairs around it and a kitchen counter, sink, stove, and refrigerator. The appliances are old-fashioned – perhaps from the 1960's – but still in good condition. A rotary wall phone is mounted over the counter, and a wooden bench on the on-stage side indicates a place to sit next to the back door. Down Center is an open area. It is empty, and it can depict any place that doesn't require being in the house.

At rise, the stage is dark except for faint light coming in through the bedroom window. It is the morning of May 5, 1970. Two people are asleep in the bunkbed. These are the twins, PETE and DAVE. They are seventeen and about to graduate from high school.

A faint solo piano is heard playing a simple and slow beginning of Scott Joplin's "The Maple Leaf Rag." It sounds as if it is being played by someone who is just learning to play the piece. After a few bars it fades away. PETE, in silhouette, sits up in the lower bunk and turns on the radio.

RADIO: This is WJR Detroit, your home for Tiger baseball. It's seven o'clock. Now the news for this Tuesday May 5th. It's currently 69 degrees in Detroit with anticipated storms this evening from the west. There's more information this morning about the four students shot and killed at Kent State University yesterday. Reports are coming from witnesses...

(PETE turns the volume down so the announcer is barely audible. He listens for a moment. DAVE, in the upper bunk, stirs.)

DAVE (*sleepily*): Hey.

PETE: Hey, twin.

DAVE: Tigers win last night?

PETE: Lost eight to five against the Twins.

DAVE: Damn.

PETE: They were up against Tiant¹. He's five and oh. Not a chance.

DAVE: Well, it's only May. Season's just getting started.

PETE: Yeah, I guess so.

¹ Pronounced "Tee-ahnt."

(PETE turns on the bedside light, revealing him to be wearing a t-shirt and boxers. DAVE throws back the covers, showing him dressed the same. Both boys are in good physical shape, although DAVE carries a bit more muscle than PETE.)

DAVE: Hmph. Anything else going on?

PETE: Nah, just a lot of coverage about the shooting at Kent State yesterday.

DAVE: They say what really happened?

PETE: Sounds like there was a demonstration against the war, someone threw something at the guardsmen, someone shot, and four kids are dead.

DAVE: Fuck. Arrest anyone?

PETE: Like who?

DAVE: Like the guy who threw the rock, maybe?

PETE: Maybe they should arrest the guy who shot back.

DAVE: They were probably scared shitless.

PETE: Right, a bunch of college kids waving signs are a real threat to the Ohio National Guard carrying rifles.

DAVE: Not saying that, twin. What I'm thinking is those guardsmen are probably undertrained and –

PETE: And they shouldn't be out there with live ammunition to contain a peaceful demonstration.

DAVE: Goddam hippies.

(PETE glares at DAVE, but DAVE grins and flashes the peace sign, and PETE chuckles and shakes his head.)

PETE: All we are saying is give peace a chance.

(They both giggle-snort, then playfully bat at each other as they exit to go to the bathroom and get ready for school. As they do this, the lights cross-fade to the kitchen area. DEB, the boys' mother enters. She is in her late thirties, dressed in a nurse's uniform. She puts coffee mugs, cereal bowls, cereal and a coffeemaker carafe on the table.)

DEB: Boys! Let's go.

PETE *(off)*: Coming.

DAVE *(off)*: On the way.

(HAL enters. He is the boys' father, dressed in work clothes. He is carrying a newspaper which he puts on the table and pours a cup of coffee. He looks at the paper, shakes his head, and sits down.)

HAL: What a waste.

DEB: What?

HAL: Those four kids.

DEB: I know.

HAL: I'm sure I'll get an earful down at the Vee tonight. "Liberal commie pinko fairies" and shit.

DEB: So, don't go.

HAL: I have to. It's the monthly meeting and I'm the vice-commander. And the VFW is starting a major push for more money for the V.A. from Congress. I gotta be there to start the letter-writing campaign. And it's spaghetti night. You and the boys wanna come?

DEB: We'll think about it. Davey has his cadet camp physical today. Can you drop him off after school? I'll bring him home.

HAL: Pete can take him.

DEB: No, he has to stay after for the recital rehearsal. He's got a solo.

HAL: Remind me again why we dropped fifteen hundred bucks on that '65 Mustang.

DEB: I don't want Davey driving after he has a blood draw.

HAL: Well, the dinner starts at seven, so let me know if you're coming.

DEB: I will. (*To off stage.*) Boys! Move it! (*To HAL.*) Where are you going today?

HAL (*like a game show host*): Ladies and gentlemen, today we are taking you on a fascinating journey as we survey the scenic highways and byways of Wood County for the ever-popular Ohio Department of Transportation. Specifically, that exciting stretch of US 25 between Cross Creek and Devil's Hole Road.

DEB (*deadpan*): That sounds amazing.

(*PETE and DAVE enter, dressed in school clothes: khaki slacks and blue button-down shirts. They take their seats at the table and pour out cereal.*)

HAL: Your tax dollars at work. Good morning, boys. How'd they do?

PETE: Lost eight to five to the Twins.

HAL (*playfully*): You two guys beat the Detroit Tigers? I'm impressed.

DAVE: I wish.

DEB: Davey, this is your last meal before your check-up today. From now on just water until you see Dr. Fraser.

PETE: Lucky dog. It's meatload day.

DEB: Meatload? Is that supposed to be meatloaf?

PETE: Supposed to be.

DAVE: We're gonna take it to the chem lab and have it tested.

DEB: Well, whatever it is, don't sneak a candy bar.

HAL: And it's spaghetti night at the Vee, so you can do your carbo and protein loading then. Get you all bulked up for summer camp.

DAVE: Dad, it's not summer camp. It's cadet training. Six weeks of it. It's gonna be like basic.

HAL: I really don't think six weeks running around a military school campus in Indiana is on the same level as the six weeks I went through at Fort Sill.

DAVE: Maybe not, but at least I'll be ahead of all the other guys when I actually do enlist.

DEB: You're really going to go through with it.

DAVE: Yeah, I am.

PETE: Why do you think he took those J-R-O-T-C classes?

DAVE: Better than waiting around for the draft. If I enlist, I at least have a shot of getting a decent assignment.

HAL: I don't know about that. When I went in, you have just as much a chance of being in the infantry as being assigned to some rear echelon post restocking the vending machines at Fort Dix.

DAVE: That was Korea, Dad. This is a little different.

HAL: All I'm saying is that you never know with the Army. You could end up in Germany playing peek-a-boo with the Russians or hiking up the Ho Chi Minh Trail in the middle of this... war.

DAVE: Yeah, but if I enlist, maybe I'll qualify for OCS. I'm not gonna take my chances with the draft, Dad.

HAL (*to PETE*): What about you? You guys are gonna be eighteen in a month and you'll have to register.

PETE: If I get drafted, I can play piano at the Officers Club.

DEB: Oh, shoot, that reminds me. Mrs. Hawkins dropped off some sheet music for you. Thought you might like to give them a try. I put them on the piano. She said you can take them with you this summer.

PETE: Great.

DAVE: So, what're you guys gonna do without us all summer with me off a cadet training and Pete up at that fancy-ass music camp up in Michigan.

PETE (*correcting him*): Full-ride fancy-ass music camp up in Michigan.

DAVE: Yeah, whatever. This'll be your first summer with both of us gone.

HAL: Oh, I dunno; sit on the back porch, drink beer, and listen to the Tigers.

PETE: In other words, the same thing you always do.

HAL: Pretty much. (*Beat as he looks at his sons.*) I'm very proud of both of you.

DEB: So am I.

HAL: And as much as we've gotten used to the pitter-patter of your size eleven feet all over the house, it's not gonna be the same without you. But we'll get used to it.

DAVE: You're not still pissed I turned down Ohio State, are you?

HAL: Nah. It would just turn you into some pointy-headed liberal commie pinko fairy.

PETE: Who could get shot by some National Guardsman on his weekend duty from changing oil at the Sunoco station in Bowling Green.

(*Beat.*)

HAL: Yeah, that too.

(*Lights fade on the kitchen and "The Maple Leaf Rag" simple slow version continues. The music fades out and lights then come up on the living room. PETE is at the piano. He sees the sheet music, looks at it, then sits and slowly starts to finger out the first few notes, one by one, of "The Maple Leaf Rag." He does this slowly, just a few notes at a time. As he plays, DEB enters and watches him.*)

DEB: Jenny said you would like those.

PETE: Yeah, they're really good.

DEB: Think you can play them?

PETE (*looking at the sheet music*): With a lotta practice. The Maple Leaf Rag is in A-flat.

DEB: Is that hard?

PETE: It ain't easy. But a lotta composers wrote in it, and most of Chopin's work is in A-flat. So, if Freddy could do it, so can I.

DEB: We're so proud of you.

PETE: Thanks, Mom.

DEB: I was thinking this morning... This will be the first time you boys have been apart since... well, forever.

(Lights come up on the bedroom. DAVE, now changed into Army fatigue pants and t-shirt, is packing an army duffel bag on the floor. An open suitcase is on PETE's bed.)

PETE: Yeah, I guess you're right.

DEB: You know, I was really scared when I found out I was having twins.

PETE: Why?

DEB: Well, we were only expecting one, and we weren't exactly rich, what with Dad being fresh out of the service when we got married. Then there you were, you and your brother, these two little pink scrunchy-faced bundles...

PETE *(embarrassed)*: Mom...

DEB: It's every mother's right to embarrass their children.

PETE: So far, you've got nothing to worry about.

DEB *(deep breath, then brave front)*: Good to know. So, are you all ready?

PETE: All set.

(PETE picks up the rest of the sheet music, closes the lid on the piano, and looks around the room.)

DEB: It's only six weeks. You'll be back before you know it.

PETE: And turn around and head off to the conservatory.

DEB: You won't be that far away. You can visit on weekends. Holidays. Christmas.

PETE: I know.

DEB: It'll make your dad happy. He'll miss you.

PETE: We'll miss you, too.

(They look at each other for a moment, then DEB crosses to the kitchen, which is in darkness. PETE crosses to the bedroom. DAVE is now looking out the window.)

PETE: Whatcha looking at?

DAVE: Benjie Edwards. He took over our job baling hay for his grandpa. He can barely pick 'em up.

PETE *(changing clothes to put on swim shorts)*: Neither could we when we started last summer.

DAVE: Yeah, but by the time school started, even you could pick one up with one hand and toss it.

PETE: Whadda mean, “even you”? I’m just as strong as you are.

DAVE: Oh, yeah, you’re the Hulk.

PETE (*flexing a biceps*): Brains and brawn, that’s me. You’re all packed?

DAVE: Yeah, pretty much. You?

PETE: Ready to go. (*He looks around the room.*) So, our last night in here.

DAVE: We’ll be back. It’s only for the summer.

PETE: Yeah, I know, but still. It’s been our room since...

DAVE: Time to move on. We’re eighteen. We graduated from high school yesterday. The world’s out there.

PETE: Lying in wait, ready to pounce.

DAVE: We can take ‘em. You’re not gonna get all weepy on me, are ya?

PETE: Me. Nah. You?

DAVE: Nah. (*He looks out the window again.*) Damn, last summer seems like yesterday. How many bales did we do?

PETE: I stopped counting at two hundred.

DAVE: I meant that first day.

PETE: So did I.

DAVE: That was one long-ass summer. But we finally made it to August, got some time off to go swimming at Lorenzen’s quarry, do a little fishing...

PETE: And then football practice started the next week.

DAVE: Oh, shit.

PETE: C’mon, you were the star quarterback. It was your senior year, your last chance to make all-state.

DAVE: Big deal.

PETE: And your last chance to impress Elaine Gruber.

DAVE (*shrugging*): Yeah, I think she’s more interested in you.

PETE (*chuckling*): She’s wasting her time. I think she suspects.

DAVE: Nah, she’s not that smart.

PETE: Well, it had to be one of us. That's the way it is with twins. One left-handed, one right-handed. (*PETE waves his left hand.*)

DAVE: Aw, that's bullshit. (*Beat.*) Hey, you thinkin' what I'm thinkin'?

PETE: All the time, twin.

DAVE: One last swim?

PETE: Bare-ass?

DAVE: I will if you will.

PETE: Then let's hit the quarry.

(*They grab towels.*)

DAVE: Look out, summer, here we come.

DAVE and PETE (*in unison*): Cannonball!

(*As PETE and DAVE exit, "Magnetic Rag" comes up while the lights in the bedroom cross-fading to the kitchen. DEB is standing at the table. She is looking at a letter lying on the table. Music fades. HAL enters.*)

HAL: Hi, hon.

DEB (*preoccupied*): Hi.

(*HAL gives her a peck on the cheek. She barely notices. HAL goes to the refrigerator and gets a beer.*)

HAL: How was your day?

DEB: Huh? Oh, good, good. A lot of school physicals. Blood draws, screaming babies, crying teenagers.

HAL: That time of year. Did we make a reservation for the Labor Day picnic at the Vee?

DEB: Two weeks ago.

HAL: Good. (*Sees the letter.*) Who's that from?

DEB: It's from the draft board. For Pete.

HAL: You opened it?

DEB: It was here on the table when I got home.

(*HAL picks up the letter and reads it. Lights cross-fade to the boys' room. It is late that night; the only real light is from the bedside lamp. PETE and DAVE are sitting on their beds in t-shirts and boxers.*)

DAVE: Twin, it's only for the physical. Doesn't mean you're gonna get called up.

PETE: My lottery number – our lottery number – is twenty. I'm gonna get called up.

DAVE: You'll get a student deferment.

PETE: I still have to go for the physical.

DAVE: So, what's the problem? It's not like you won't pass. (*Chuckling.*) You'll like it when they tell you to turn your head and cough.

PETE: What if they find out?

DAVE: How?

PETE: The psych profile. Don't they ask you?

DAVE: Yeah.

PETE: And?

DAVE: And you say no, sir, I am not a homosexual.

PETE: It's a federal crime to lie on the exam.

DAVE: It's also a federal crime to rip the label off a mattress cover. C'mon, twin, how're they gonna find out unless you tell them? You're not gonna, are ya?

PETE: No, course not. But if I go in and they find out, then I'll be dishonorably discharged and my life will be pretty much over.

DAVE: So, you be a good boy, you keep your dick in your pants, and when you get the urge, fly solo. From what I've heard over the last five years and sharing the same bedroom, you're gettin' really good at it.

PETE: I learn from the best. You're not exactly a monk in your bunk.

DAVE: Look, don't freak out. You'll be fine. You go in, you do the physical, then you double-time march down to the Wood County draft board and file for a student deferment.

PETE: Yeah. About that.

DAVE: What?

(*PETE pulls a letter out from under his pillow. He hands it to DAVE.*)

DAVE (*reading aloud*): "Dear Peter Granger: We look forward to welcoming you..." So far so good.

PETE: Skip that shit. Go to the second paragraph.

DAVE (*continues reading aloud*): "However, due to unforeseen financial conditions, we regret to inform you..." (*Beat.*) Oh, shit, twin. The whole thing?

PETE: Every penny. I'm still in, but I gotta pay my own way.

DAVE: So, how much is it?

PETE: Twelve thousand bucks a year when you throw in tuition, books, room, board, and that doesn't even cover things like... pizza or whatever else I need. Even if I had a full-time job, I couldn't do it, and I'm not gonna ask Mom and Dad. That's why they were so happy you got your ROTC and I got the full-ride. Dad barely makes twelve grand working for the county, and Mom about the same. I can't ask them for fifty grand.

DAVE: Fifty?

PETE: Over four years, and that's not even counting for inflation.

DAVE: This letter's two weeks old. How come you didn't tell me then?

PETE: You were still at camp and the letter from the draft board hadn't come yet. But there was this teacher at camp who worked at a small college in Waterloo and we got to be friends; he really liked my playing. So, I called him and told him about what happened, and... (*He pulls another letter out.*) He's offering me a slot in their program. They have work-study, and I'm also eligible for other financial aid and shit.

DAVE: Well, that's great. Problem solved.

PETE: Except for Uncle Sam.

DAVE: It's just the physical. Doesn't mean you're gonna be drafted.

PETE: Doesn't mean I'm not. (*Holds up the letter.*) It doesn't matter. I'm going to college.

DAVE: Where's this college?

PETE: Waterloo.

DAVE: It's not that far. Waterloo, Iowa, is what, six or seven hours on I-80?

PETE: Not that Waterloo.

DAVE: What, the one where Napoleon got his ass kicked?

PETE: No, you goof. Waterloo, Ontario.

DAVE: Ontario.

PETE: Yeah. As in Canada.

DAVE: I know where Ontario is.

PETE: And if I do get drafted...

DAVE: Oh shit. Well, tough luck. You'll have to come back.

PETE: I can't.

DAVE: You don't have a choice, twin.

PETE: You're right. I don't.

DAVE: So, sorry about the college, but...

PETE: That's not the choice I'm making.

DAVE: What?

PETE: I'm not joining up. I'm going to college.

DAVE: Yeah, I don't think you get it. You get called up, you go.

PETE: I am being called up. This is my calling. You have yours, I have mine.

DAVE (*loud*): You're not gonna dodge the draft!

PETE: Keep it down, willya?

DAVE: Pete, you can't. You gotta go. You don't show up, they'll come after you.

PETE: Not if I'm already there.

DAVE: When are you gonna go?

PETE: When do you leave for boot camp?

DAVE: Next week.

PETE: Well, me too.

(DAVE is at a loss for words. He gets up, paces, thinking, then sits down, staring at his brother.)

DAVE: Y'know, once you go, you can't come back. You'll be arrested as soon as you try to cross the bridge coming back from Windsor to Detroit. Does it mean that much to you? Your music? More than...

PETE: Yes.

DAVE: It'll kill Mom and Dad.

PETE: They can come see me. It's not that far.

DAVE: That's not what I mean. People will know: Pete Granger, the draft dodger.

PETE: You think they really care?

DAVE: You're gonna have to explain it to them.

PETE: I'll try.

DAVE: So, this teacher at camp. Is he...? Did you and he...?

PETE: Huh? Oh, hell no. We never even... No. How can you think that?

DAVE: Well, fuck, Pete, I don't know. I'm trying to figure out why all of a sudden, you're talking about running off to Canada and never coming back! I just don't get it.

PETE: You don't? Hell, I thought you'd be the one person in my life who would get it.

DAVE: Well, I don't! Jesus, Pete. Look, I get it that you love your music and that giving that up is hard, but there are some things that are way more important than playing the goddam piano!

PETE: More important? Yes, it is. Playing the goddam piano is a lot more important than being taught how to kill other people or bombing the shit out of villages or setting them on fire.

DAVE: Is that what you think I'm gonna do?

PETE: Isn't that what they're training you to become? Some kind of war machine?

DAVE: It's about protecting our country from other people who want to kill us, bomb the shit out of us, and set us on fire. It's not all about war. And it's about doing it for people like you who'd rather not do it, so someone's gotta do it.

PETE: I get that. But you gotta get me, and as much as you believe in what you have to do, I believe in what I have to do just as much. As much as you want to protect our country, I want to give it something worth protecting.

(Pause. They look at each other sorrowfully.)

DAVE: You know that once you go, I can't see you again. I can't talk to you, I can't write to you, I can't answer your phone calls or letters.

PETE: Sure, you can.

DAVE: No, I can't. You'll be a fugitive. They'll question me about your whereabouts, whether or not I helped you go, what did I do to prevent you from leaving, any contact I've had with you and what we talked about. I'll have sworn an oath to uphold the laws and the Constitution of the United States. If I don't ... know anything about you, other than the fact that you're my twin brother, I can't lie about it.

PETE: Any more than I can lie about me being gay.

DAVE: Don't go, twin.

PETE: Don't enlist, twin.

DAVE: I have to.

PETE: So do I.

(Lights out quickly. Scott Joplin's "Solace – A Mexican Serenade" comes up. Lights slowly come up on the living room. DEB, in a full skirt, cardigan, and heels, is standing in front of the piano, looking at it. The lid is closed, the sheet music gone. She slowly opens the lid, then sits at the

piano. She rests her hands on the keys and slowly, quietly, plays a chord starting at Middle C: C-E-G. After a moment, HAL enters. He is wearing a suit and tie and polished shoes, carrying a small program. He smiles at DEB.)

HAL: I haven't heard you play in years.

DEB (*snapping out of it*): Huh? Oh. Yes. It's been a while.

HAL: Maybe now you can. It's all yours now for the first time in, what, ten years?

DEB: I know.

(She closes the lid on the keys.)

HAL: That was a nice ceremony.

DEB: It was. He looked so grown-up in his uniform.

HAL (*chuckling*): I remember my swearing-in. Nothing so formal; a bunch of us all trying to look like tough guys in our jeans and rolled-up t-shirts. "I do solemnly swear..."

DEB: That was twenty years ago. And your parents weren't there.

HAL: Nope. Just a bunch of pimply kids from the fields of Wood County all nervous in the service.

DEB: How long until they ship him out?

HAL: He's got six weeks of basic, then he's got his training. Six months, maybe even a year.

DEB: Maybe the war will be over by then.

HAL: Who knows. They've been holding "peace talks" for over two years now and about all they've agreed to is the size of the table and where to order lunch from. (*Sees the concerned look on DEB's face.*) But don't worry. He's not gonna be in the infantry. He signed up to be a medic. He won't carry a gun and there'll be a red cross on his helmet. And you can give him tips on how to do his job. Maybe he'll even go to med school when he gets out.

DEB (*slightly mollified*): I hope so.

HAL (*attempt at humor*): Then you'll have to take orders from him. "Yes, Doctor."

DEB (*small smile*): That'll be a first.

HAL: Something to drink to celebrate our independence?

(They cross to the kitchen, the lights fading on the living room as they come up on the kitchen.)

DEB: Sure. I wish Pete could have been there.

HAL: Hm. He missed the physical.

(HAL opens refrigerator, gets two bottles of beer, hands one to DEB.)

DEB: But with school starting and his new job and getting settled...

HAL: Technically he's AWOL. He could be court-martialed.

DEB: Court-martialed? He's not in the army.

HAL: Doesn't matter. Once you register for the draft, you fall under the Selective Service Act.

DEB: He can reschedule the exam. Can't he apply for a student deferment?

HAL: He has to do that in person here. At the draft board office in Bowling Green.

DEB: I'll tell him the next time I talk to him.

HAL: Please. I'm okay with having both my sons in the army, but I'd rather not have one in the stockade. *(He lifts his beer in a toast, and DEB raises hers as well.)* To both of them.

DEB: We should be very proud of them.

HAL: I am.

(He hugs DEB affectionately, then takes off his coat and tie.)

HAL: Hey, now that we have the place all to ourselves for the first time in eighteen years, what do you want to do?

DEB: The last time we had the place all to ourselves and you had that look in your eye, we weren't alone for much longer.

HAL *(grinning)*: I don't have the slightest idea what you're talking about.

DEB *(grinning back)*: The hell you don't.

(They hug, and then begin to kiss. Lights fade on the kitchen and come up on the open area. PETE enters wearing jeans, sneakers, and a winter sweater. He is in his dorm room. He is holding a 1970's style desk phone, the receiver to his ear. In the background we hear one of the top 40 hits from the fall of 1970. In the kitchen, the phone rings... and rings... seven, eight, nine times. PETE is on the verge of hanging up when DEB, wearing a windbreaker over her uniform, runs in and grabs the phone.)

DEB *(winded)*: Hello?

PETE: Hi, Mom.

DEB: Oh, Petey! So good to hear from you.

PETE: You sound like you're out of breath. Were you out jogging or something?

DEB: No, I just this minute got home.

PETE *(looking at his watch)*: Wow, late day at the office. Dr. Fraser must be busier than usual.

DEB: He left at three but gave me a ton of lab work to do. (*Deep breath.*) So, how are you? How's school?

PETE: Good, good. Classes going well, lots of work, plus my job at the bookstore. Keeping me, y'know, busy.

DEB: That's good. Oh, I forwarded your bank statement. You should send them a change of address so you get it on time.

PETE: Okay, but I'm probably just gonna close out the account. I mean, I need to open an account here anyway. Doesn't make a lot of sense to be sending money from Canada to a U.S. bank, and there's a TD branch right nearby.

DEB: TD?

PETE: Toronto-Dominion.

DEB: Oh... Well, that sounds more impressive than plain old Bank of Wood County. So, are you coming home for Thanksgiving?

PETE: Thanksgiving was three weeks ago.

DEB: It's in three weeks. November twenty-sixth.

PETE: Mom, up here Thanksgiving is your Columbus Day: October twelfth. Up here your Thanksgiving is just another Thursday.

DEB (*chuckling*): I keep forgetting you're in a different country. I mean, we watch Channel 9 and listen to CKLW and think, well, it's just another TV station and Top 40 radio.

PETE: It's a different country, Mom.

DEB: Well, then Christmas, right? How long do you get off for the holidays?

PETE: A couple of weeks, but I have to work. They pay me hourly, and if I don't work, I don't get paid.

DEB: Well, you can come down for just one day, can't you?

PETE: No, I really can't. That's okay. I'll send you guys presents. Maple syrup, maybe.

DEB: Okay. Have you heard from Davey?

PETE: No, Mom.

DEB: Well, I'll send you his address.

PETE: Yeah, okay, thanks.

DEB: So, did you need something?

PETE: Huh?

DEB: You called. Do you need something?

PETE: No, I just wanted to, y'know, check in. See how you're doing. And stuff.

DEB (*knowing smile*): I miss you, too, Petey. I miss both my boys. The place is so quiet without you.

(*PETE gulps, gets a little choked up, then regains his composure.*)

PETE: Go play the piano, Mom. Maybe a polka or something.

DEB: I will. Are you practicing?

PETE: Oh, yeah, every day. I'm taking a piano class and music theory. And there's this place in town where they have a piano bar and a friend said he'd see if he could get me a shift, y'know, simple stuff; show tunes, standards....

DEB: How wonderful!

PETE: Well, it's just for tips, y'know.

DEB: But still...

PETE: Yeah.

(*Both are at a loss for words.*)

DEB: Well. Do you want to talk to Dad?

PETE: Is he there?

DEB: Well, no, I guess not. Otherwise he would have answered the phone.

PETE: Okay, I'll call you guys later.

DEB: Good. Maybe this weekend or something. And think about coming to visit. Just for a weekend.

PETE: Yeah, okay. Or you come up here. Show you around the school and ...

DEB: We'll see.

PETE: Okay. Well, talk to you later.

(*PETE hangs up without saying goodbye. He exits Upstage Right into the darkness.*)

DEB: Okay, I love you.

(*She realizes he has already hung up. She looks at the receiver, then hangs up. Lights fade on the kitchen, and "Solace" comes up. DAVE enters Upstage Left. He is wearing fatigues and an olive-drab t-shirt and Army boots. He is carrying a desk phone – a different one from the one PETE carried – and comes to the center of the open area. He puts the receiver to his ear and waits.*)

After a moment the lights come up on the kitchen. HAL is at the table in his work clothes. He has the phone receiver up to his ear. Music fades.)

HAL: We'll accept the charges.

DAVE: Hi, Dad.

HAL: How's it going?

DAVE: Good. It's intense, but I'm learning a lot. Tell Mom thanks for sending me her nursing school books. It's a big help.

HAL: So, how much longer do you have to go?

DAVE: We should be done by May, so five more months.

HAL: Then what?

DAVE: Deployment.

HAL: Any idea where to?

DAVE: No, but I'm pretty sure I can guess. I'm training as a combat medic and the only place where there's combat going on is –

HAL: Yeah. Well, you be careful.

DAVE: I'm still in Texas, Dad.

HAL: I know, but –

DAVE: So, how was Christmas? Get any snow?

HAL: Oh, some. It was nice. Big party at the Vee. Stan Tasker got drunk as usual and knocked over the Christmas tree in the ballroom.

DAVE: Typical. What an asshole.

HAL: Yeah. But we had a nice Christmas here at home. Quiet. First time without you boys.

(Beat.)

DAVE: Yeah. Sorry I couldn't get away, but they're really making us work our asses off, and getting leave was a no-go.

HAL: Well, maybe before you deploy...

DAVE: Yeah, we'll see.

(Beat.)

HAL: So. Have you talked to your brother?

DAVE: No.

(DEB enters and sits at the table. HAL looks at her and mouths "Dave," and she nods.)

HAL: Okay. You want to talk to Mom?

DAVE *(shrug)*: Yeah, sure.

HAL: Just a sec.

(HAL hands the receiver to DEB, then gets up and gets a bottle of beer out of the refrigerator, sits down again.)

DEB *(a little too cheerfully)*: Hi, honey, how are you?

DAVE: I'm good, Mom. Thanks for the books. Big help.

DEB: Well, I know being a medic isn't the same as nursing, but the human body is pretty much the same and so...

DAVE: I'm finding that out.

DEB: So, did you have a nice Christmas?

DAVE: Yeah, a bunch of us got together here in the barracks and ... y'know.

DEB: We missed you.

DAVE: Yeah, Dad said you had a good time.

DEB: We missed both of you.

DAVE: Yeah, I got that.

DEB: Have you talked to him?

DAVE: No, Mom.

DEB: You should.

DAVE: Mom...

DEB *(hurriedly)*: All right, all right. *(Now at a loss for words for a moment.)* Well, it's good to hear from you. I guess Dad will fill me in on the rest of your news. So... thanks for calling.

DAVE: Okay, Mom.

DEB: Call again. Any time.

DAVE: I will. 'Bye.

DEB: G'bye.

(DAVE hangs up then exits Upstage Left into the darkness. DEB reluctantly hangs up. Silence.)

DEB: You didn't tell him.

HAL: About our visitors? No. No need to tell him. Not like he can do anything about it.

DEB: I'm going to go see him. See where he lives, maybe buy some things for his dorm room.

HAL: You mean Pete, right?

DEB: Yes, I mean Pete.

HAL: When?

DEB: Maybe this weekend. I don't know.

(HAL nods silently.)

DEB: You could come with.

HAL: No, you go ahead.

(DEB looks at HAL, holding his gaze. Long beat.)

DEB: All right.

(Another long gaze, then the lights fade on the kitchen, go to dark, as "The Maple Leaf Rag" comes up. Lights come up on the open area. There is a small table and two chairs like those in a fast-food place in the center. After a beat, PETE and DEB enter wearing winter coats and hats, carrying plastic trays with fast-food bags and paper cups of coffee on them. Music fades.)

DEB: This is a nice place.

(DEB takes off her coat and sits. PETE does the same.)

PETE: Yeah, Tim Horton's are all over the place, like McDonald's in the states. Good food.

DEB: And the campus is beautiful.

PETE: What were you expecting, igloos and log cabins?

DEB: Of course not. You look good.

PETE: Thanks, Mom.

DEB: I like your dorm room, too. Your roommate is very nice.

PETE: Yeah, I kinda lucked into it with Gordy. He's pretty mellow. We get along.

DEB: That's good.

(DEB takes a sip of coffee, starts to unwrap her sandwich. PETE is looking at her with a grin. DEB notices it.)

DEB: What?

PETE: Nothing. Just waiting.

DEB: Waiting for what?

PETE: C'mon, Mom.

DEB: What are you talking about?

PETE: The third degree. Okay. (*Holds up his fingers, ticking off as he goes.*) Yes, I'm eating well; the dorm food is okay. Yes, I have enough warm clothes; Waterloo is about the same latitude as Flint, Michigan, so I'm not on the Arctic Circle. Yes, I have enough money, and I get overtime. Yes, I have health insurance, and yes, I'm doing okay in school. I had a 3.67 last term because the music theory class is a real bitch. I could have told you all of that on the phone. So, tell me why you decided to hop in the car and drive four hours and spend the night at the Holiday Inn?

DEB: I just wanted to see you. Give you a big hug. Buy you a nice dinner. Maybe sit and talk.

PETE: About? (*He says it with the Canadian pronunciation: "Aboat." DEB hears this.*)

DEB: "Aboat"? You're fitting in, I see.

PETE: Oh, that's Gordy's influence, I guess. Sorry. (*He pronounces it "Sore-y."*)

DEB: You always did pick up things like that quickly. You started playing piano by ear. You learned to read music along with your A-B-C's.

PETE: So, what did you want to talk about? (*Making an effort to use the U.S. pronunciation.*)

(*DEB smiles, then gets serious.*)

DEB: We had a couple of visitors before Christmas. In uniform.

PETE: They weren't collecting for Toys for Tots, I'll bet.

DEB: No. Toys for Tots is the Marines. These were Army. They were very nice.

PETE: Glad to know it.

DEB: Well, one of them was Charlie Brickner. You know him.

PETE: Oh, yeah. He was in high school when I was in junior high.

DEB: He's now a sergeant.

PETE: Good for him.

DEB: He was just checking in to see when you're going to reschedule your physical.

PETE: Uh huh.

DEB: I told him you were in college now. He said that's great, and that you can apply for a student deferment, but you have to do it in person.

PETE: I know all that, Mom.

DEB: So...

PETE: So, I'm not going to reschedule.

DEB: Petey, you could get in terrible trouble if you don't.

PETE: I am already, Mom.

DEB: What are you going to do?

PETE: Finish school, get a job.

DEB: Doing what?

PETE: Be a professional musician, Mom. Or teaching. Something like that.

DEB: Here?

PETE: Well, maybe not here in Waterloo, but somewhere here. In Canada.

DEB: For how long?

PETE (*shrugs*): Forever, I guess. Once I graduate, I'll apply for permanent residency. Maybe even citizenship.

(*Beat.*)

DEB: That's an enormous decision, Petey. Are you sure?

PETE: Mom, I can't come back. I'll be arrested.

DEB: I don't understand. Why?

PETE: Why will I be arrested?

DEB: No, why are you doing this? Is it the war? Are you against it?

PETE: Well, I'm not totally in favor of it, but I'm not like a conscientious objector or those kids that were killed at Kent State last May. I just have different priorities.

DEB: Than serving your country?

PETE: Mom, that's Dad talking. By the way, why didn't he come with you?

DEB: I told him I wanted to come alone. What priorities?

PETE: Well, for one thing, getting a good education. Wasn't that what you wanted for me? For us? I busted my ass to get that scholarship at the conservatory, got Mrs. Hawkins and all those

people to write my letters of support, practiced until my fingers bled for that audition – hell, I can still play that goddam Chopin piece in my sleep – and then pfft, it’s gone. Dr. McKenzie went to the mat to get me in here, to get my student permit, and he’s the one who got me the work-study in the bookstore. This is what I’ve always wanted, Mom. You know how much I love music, and this is my dream come true.

DEB (*smiling in spite of herself*): I remember you waking me up at six in the morning with your practicing, clunking through “Eleanor Rigby.”

PETE (*grinning*): Oh, god, thanks for the reminder.

DEB: Have you talked to Davey?

PETE: Mom, he knows all this. Better than anyone.

DEB: But have you talked to him about staying here? Never coming home?

PETE: He knows.

DEB: When did you talk to him?

PETE: Before he enlisted.

DEB: Not since?

PETE: No. He won’t call, and I’m not reaching out to him.

DEB: Why not?

PETE: Because he could get in trouble with the Army. If they knew he had first-hand knowledge of me coming up here to avoid the draft and didn’t try to stop me, he could be court-martialed as an accomplice or something.

DEB: But that’s ridiculous. It’s not like he smuggled you across the Ambassador Bridge in the trunk of the Mustang.

PETE: Mom, that’s what he said.

DEB: But don’t you want to talk to him? He’s your brother. Your twin.

PETE: Jesus, Mom, don’t you think I know that? (*Choking up.*) I miss the fuck out of him.

(*DEB reacts slightly to this use of profanity but keeps listening.*)

PETE (*cont’d*): It’s like.... it’s like part of me is missing; it’s somewhere else and I can’t feel it. I’ve spent every moment of my life with him and now....

DEB: You may never see him again. He’s being deployed as soon as he’s done with his training. He’ll be shipped out, and then who knows –

PETE (*slamming the table with his fist*): Don’t say that!

(DEB motions him to keep his voice down, looks around to see if he's attracted any notice in the restaurant.)

DEB *(hushed)*: I only meant who knows when he'll be back.

PETE *(seething but quietly)*: Don't even think he won't be coming back.

(DEB reaches across the table to grasp his hand.)

DEB: I'm sorry. I only meant that if you can't come back, even after the war is over, and he can't be in contact with you....

PETE: You meant if he's killed.

DEB: No. He's going to be a medic. He won't carry a weapon. He'll be saving lives.

PETE: Mom, medics get injured. They get killed.

DEB: He won't be on the front line. He's new; they need to work in a hospital before they go out with a combat unit.

PETE: You know that for sure.

DEB: Yes. Dr. Fraser told me. He was a medic in World War Two.

(PETE looks at her doubtfully. She tries to look convincing. Gradually he accepts this.)

PETE: Yeah, I remember. He had his unit picture in his office.

DEB: And he made it through. Not a scratch on him.

PETE *(somewhat mollified)*: I guess.

DEB: Of course. That's why he enlisted. So he could choose his... what do you call it...

PETE: His M.O.S. Military Occupation Specialty.

DEB: That's it. He wanted to be a medic, and he's got the aptitude for it. He'll be safe.

PETE: I hope so.

DEB: So do I. *(Changing the subject, mercifully.)* So, tell me what you're learning in music theory.

PETE: Basic stuff. Composition, rhythm, syncopation, things like that.

DEB: Syncopation. Like ragtime.

PETE: Yeah, like that. But it's been around forever. Most composers use it.

DEB: Did you ever learn to play those Joplin piano rags that Mrs. Hawkins gave you?

PETE (*smiling*): Oh, wow, yeah. They're fun. Scott Joplin was an amazing composer, but you know what? A lot of people nowadays never heard of him because he was black. His music was popular, but in 1900 ragtime wasn't considered serious music, and Joplin wasn't considered to be as good as Ravel or Debussy. But he was, Mom. Hell, he influenced *them*. (*Shakes his head.*) It's so stupid, letting something like skin color – or anything else like that – have an impact on how someone's life work is perceived. But it happens all the time.

DEB: So, maybe you can change that. The perception, I mean.

PETE: I'd be happy just to get through the Maple Leaf Rag without screwing it up.

DEB: Well, now that you're in Canada, you'll have a reason to learn it.

PETE: I don't think that's why he called it that.

(*Beat.*)

DEB: I miss this.

PETE: What, having a sandwich in a fast-food joint?

DEB: No, talking with you like this. We used to do it all the time. Baseball, music, books, even politics once you figured out that it mattered.

PETE: Yeah, I miss it, too, Mom.

(*Lights go down, going to full dark, as "The Maple Leaf Rag" continues. Lights then come up on the boys' bedroom, just barely enough to see DEB sitting on PETE's bunk. It is twilight outside. Music fades.*)

HAL (*off*): Hon?

DEB: Up here. In the boys' room.

(*HAL enters and turns on the overhead light.*)

HAL: How was it?

DEB: We had a nice time. The town is very nice, the college is pretty, he's got a nice room in the dorm, his roommate is friendly. We had a nice lunch.

HAL: I thought you were going to stay another night.

DEB: Well, he has mid-terms to study for, so there wasn't much point in staying. It wasn't that long a drive.

HAL: Want me to order in a pizza?

DEB: If you like.

(*Beat.*)

HAL: What are you doing up here?

DEB: Just... Remember when we moved them in here? They were four and ready for the “big boy” bunkbed. They climbed all over it like it was a jungle gym, and it took forever to get them to go to sleep all by themselves. And then one night we had that big thunderstorm. I came in here to make sure the window was closed and that they were all right. Davey had gotten in bed with Petey and was holding him close, fast asleep. I wonder how long it took for him to get over sleeping in his own bed when it thundered.

HAL: Dave never did like loud noises.

DEB: So he joined the Army.

HAL (*chuckles*): Yeah. Funny thing. (*He goes over to the window and looks out over the yard.*) Charlie Brickner stopped by this morning just to let us know that Pete’s officially considered a draft-dodger. If he comes back, he’ll be arrested.

DEB: He knows that. He said he’s going to stay, finish school, and get a job.

HAL: Up there.

DEB: Yes.

HAL (*shaking his head*): Does he get it?

DEB: Get what?

HAL: That it’s not something he can change his mind about later on. It’s not like signing up for football and then talking about quitting when the two-a-days made you puke and the weight-training made you ache all over. This is a life-changing decision.

DEB: He knows that. But it was Davey who wanted to quit football after the first week. Petey stuck to it.

HAL: He’s eighteen. How can he know what he wants to do for the rest of his life?

DEB: How does anybody? You didn’t.

HAL: I was drafted, I went. I did what I was told.

DEB: Well, maybe Petey’s doing what he was told.

HAL: By who?

DEB: Not by the army but by something deeper inside him. It’s his calling. I... I can’t explain it.

HAL: I can see that.

DEB: Oh, come on, Hal. They both have it. Davey wanted to be a soldier since he was a little boy, marching around in the back yard like he was General Patton. At the same time, Petey was

hiking himself up on the piano bench and poking out the songs he was hearing on the radio. It's no different.

HAL: It is when you can get court-martialed for it.

DEB: Is that the most important thing?

HAL: I don't want to see my son in the stockade.

DEB: That won't happen. He's not coming back.

HAL: Never?

DEB: Probably not.

HAL: Jesus.

DEB: We can still go see him if we want.

HAL: Does Dave know?

DEB: Yes. He knows all about it. He knows he can't talk to him, write to him, see him. Maybe when the war is over. But until then... *(DEB stands.)* So. I'll go call in the pizza order.

(DEB exits, leaving HAL standing in the middle of the room. He looks around. The lights fade to black. After a moment we hear the faint sounds of a helicopter, the sound rising then falling as it goes by. The lights come up on the open area, their color suggesting that we are in a warm place. After a moment DAVE enters wearing a uniform with a Red Cross arm band. He is carrying a cassette tape recorder with a microphone attached. As he enters, he is speaking into the microphone.)

DAVE: Okay, hi, Mom and Dad. I'm trying out this new method of communications. You know how I'm not so good about writing, and it's a lot easier to talk into this tape recorder than sit down in the barracks and write, so...here goes. Today marks five months of deployment here in 'Nam. I'm currently stationed at a field hospital, but I can't tell you where because I can't, and 'sides, even if I could, you wouldn't know where it is. *(Beat.)* It's been pretty busy. I'm sure the nightly news is full of stories about how it's going but... you really don't get it until you see it. I've been sent out on a couple of missions to where the actual fighting is going on, doing relief at an aid station and... well, I'm learning a lot, Mom. I've seen some... *(He pauses, then stops the tape, takes a couple of deep breaths, then starts again.)* Seen some pretty bad injuries and stuff. Best thing we can do, though, is get 'em patched up as best we can and then evac them out to the hospital and let the pros take care of 'em. That's my job.

(Another helicopter flies by, this one a little closer. DAVE stops the tape, watches it go by, then restarts the tape.)

DAVE *(cont'd)*: Anyway, um, oh, I got a letter from Charlie Brickner. He's still stateside but he knows where I'm stationed. Said he was glad to hear I was doing my duty and that it was too bad that Pete didn't feel the same way. So, uh, Dad, when you see him again, could you please tell him to go fuck himself? Appreciate it. *(Pause.)* Been thinking about you guys a lot. I know you

won't get this for a couple of weeks... just in time for Halloween, I guess... but I want you to know that I'm okay and so far, so good. The beer here sucks; they ship in some crap from the states and it tastes like it's brewed through a horse. But I've got some good buddies here in my unit and we're just glad to be alive, makin' the world safe for General Motors. And it looks like the Tigers finished in second, twelve games behind the Orioles. (*Pause.*) Anyway, gotta go back on duty. I'll be talkin' to ya soon. And if you talk to you-know-who, you know what to say.

(*DAVE stops the tape, then exits Upstage, the lights cross-fading to the kitchen. DEB and HAL are sitting at the table, a padded mailing envelope and a cassette recorder in front of them. As the lights come up, HAL is shutting off the recorder.*)

HAL: Making the world safe for General Motors. Yeah, ain't that the truth.

DEB (*looking at the envelope*): Postmarked four weeks ago. I hope he's still okay.

HAL: He is. We would have heard otherwise.

DEB: Don't even think that.

HAL: No, what I mean is –

DEB: I know what you mean. And he's right about Charlie Brickner. He's a flaming asshole.

HAL (*chuckling*): Don't hold back, Deb.

DEB: I mean it. At the dinner at the Vee last week he made a point of asking me if Petey was coming home for the holidays and how proud we should be of Davey for doing his patriotic duty. I wanted to brain him with a beer bottle. They should ship him over there.

HAL: Oh, hell, he'd crap his pants the minute he set foot in Saigon. Don't pay him any attention.

DEB: He's got a big mouth. And he's talking to people at the Vee. What if he screws up your chances to be the post commander?

HAL: Let him talk. My world does not revolve around the Vee. If they want Stan Tasker to be the next post commander, then let them have him. (*Beat.*) You gonna call Pete? Pass along the message?

DEB: You can call him. Number's right there by the phone.

HAL: Maybe later.

DEB: Hal. Call him.

HAL: I will.

DEB: He's been gone over a year. You haven't spoken to him since he left.

HAL: I know that. I just... I don't know what to say.

DEB: Oh, for Christ's sake, Hal. He's your son. Make it simple.

HAL: Like what?

DEB: Well, start off with “I love you” and take it from there. It’s a real icebreaker.

(Lights fade on the kitchen, go to black, then come up faintly on the open area, suggesting night. DAVE enters with the tape recorder. He is now in an olive-drab t-shirt, fatigue pants, and combat boots.)

DAVE *(into microphone, softly)*: Hi, Mom; Dad. Sorry it’s been so long since my last tape, and I gotta make this short. I just wanted to let you know I’m okay, and thanks for the birthday card. Hard to believe I’m already twenty. I’m stationed at a forward unit called a Mobile Army Surgical Hospital. It’s a MASH, but it’s nothing like the one in the movie, believe you me. We’re working twenty-four-seven and I’m learning how to do a lot of things I didn’t get taught in medic school. I’ve been stationed here for almost a year. I was supposed to be rotated out back in December but they lost a couple of guys in a chopper crash so I’m still here. *(Pause.)* I’m sending this out with a buddy of mine who’s heading home next week, so he’s gonna mail it for me when he gets to the states. He’s also got a card for you-know-who. See that he gets it. *(Sound of a helicopter coming in close for a landing. He shouts the rest over the noise.)* Oh shit, we got wounded! I gotta go. Love you!

DAVE exits hurriedly upstage. The helicopter lands as the lights come down to blackout. As the sound of the helicopter fades, “Solace” plays.

INTERVAL.

The play is not over. To find out how it ends, contact the playwright at pmw@barkbarkwoofwoof.com.