

This scene is the first in which Tyson appears, immediately following Anne's speech that opens the play, and the scene with Anne, Nicholas and Seth which follows that - showing their process of writing coded letters to maintain contact, available here in excerpts 1 and 2...

Seth is a young Marine serving during wartime. Nicholas is his civilian husband who waits back home. In addition to the strain on their relationship caused by distance and absence, they must hide their love for one another behind code words and secret identities because of the "don't ask, don't tell" policy barring gays and lesbians from serving openly in the United States military. Seth's mother Anne assists them by providing the cover of a woman's handwriting for Nicholas' daily letters, but Nicholas and Seth's resolve is starting to weaken. Tyson, a former Army soldier who got fed up with "don't ask, don't tell" and didn't reenlist, now works alongside Nicholas, providing temptation as well as a reality check.

Emphasis shifts as --

TYSON, a man, late 20s/early 30s, former Army, appears and walks over to NICHOLAS.

TYSON

I've been meaning to ask you. What's all this stuff about dogs in your letters?

NICHOLAS

You read my letters.

TYSON

Just over your shoulder here at lunch.

NICHOLAS

They're private. Do your crossword puzzle.

TYSON

I'm bored.

NICHOLAS

Read a book.

TYSON

We work in a library. I come out here for lunch to escape books.

NICHOLAS

So you read my letters instead.

TYSON

You won't talk to me. You're always writing and reading. So I thought I'd peek, just to pass the time.

NICHOLAS

That what they teach you in the Army?

TYSON

No, if I used what they taught me in the Army, I'd just demand the letter from you at gunpoint.

NICHOLAS

Guess I'm glad you resigned.

TYSON

Discharged. Honorable.

NICHOLAS

It's not a dog, it's a puppy.

TYSON

Big dog, little dog, whatever. You don't have one, he doesn't have one, I don't even think his family has one. So why all the chatter about dogs?

NICHOLAS

It's code.

TYSON

For?

NICHOLAS

Me.

TYSON

You're the puppy.

NICHOLAS

It's a nickname. He calls me Pup.

TYSON

Why? Is your nose cold and wet?

NICHOLAS

It's short for Studpuppy.

TYSON

Oh dear. What's your nickname for him?

NICHOLAS

Tyson. Please stop.

TYSON

If I don't find out now, I'll just find out later.

Pause.

NICHOLAS

Thumper.

TYSON

I'm assuming it has nothing to do with the rabbit in the Disney cartoon.

NICHOLAS

No. Though Seth does have big feet.

TYSON

And we all know where that indicator leads.

NICHOLAS

Pup needs to write to Thumper now. Do your crossword.

TYSON

Speaking of lots and lots of letters...

NICHOLAS

This is the only one today.

TYSON

You write him every day? Literally.

NICHOLAS

He's in a war zone.

TYSON

Well now you're just making me sound shallow.

NICHOLAS

Do your crossword.

TYSON

I know what a war zone's like.

NICHOLAS

I know.

TYSON

That's why I got out.

NICHOLAS

I know.

TYSON

That's why I understand what you're going through.

NICHOLAS

What he's going through. I'm not going through anything.

TYSON

Bullshit. It's no easier being a soldier's wife.

NICHOLAS

I'm not being shot at.

TYSON

No. But he's forcing you to live in the closet, too.

NICHOLAS

No one's forcing me. I love him. He loves me.

TYSON

You just can't say it out loud, either of you.

NICHOLAS

He writes me, too.

TYSON

Every day?

NICHOLAS

He's in a war zone.

TYSON

Every other day?

NICHOLAS

As often as he can.

He doesn't get regular lunch breaks.

TYSON

Why do you think none of my relationships ever worked out?

NICHOLAS

Because you're an asshole?

TYSON

Aside from that.

NICHOLAS

Because you're constantly interrupting people when they're trying to do personal business on their personal time?

TYSON

I can keep coming back to this question until you answer it.

NICHOLAS

What do you want me to say? That I wish he wasn't in the Marines? That he wasn't in danger? That we didn't have to hide? That I didn't have to worry about stupid things like, oh, I don't know, the fact that if he ever got captured, and they knew he was gay, they'd kill him faster than if he was just your run-of-the-mill average everyday straight American soldier?

TYSON

Ah, ah, ah, careful now.

NICHOLAS

God! OK. Marine, not soldier. Always Marine.

TYSON

Even I know that. They never let you forget that.

NICHOLAS

Marines are Marines. Army men and women are "just soldiers."

TYSON

Hilarious.

NICHOLAS

He's going to hate you.

TYSON

Of course he is. I'm here.

[2]NICHOLAS[/2]

You quit.

TYSON

I woke up.

NICHOLAS

Somebody has to fight.

TYSON

That's a different argument. But the minute they acknowledge me as a full human being, I'll be more than happy to pick up a gun and a knife and start fighting again. Until then, they can find someone else to go do their killing for them.

NICHOLAS

Finish your crossword.

TYSON

His poor mother's hands must be about ready to fall off.

NICHOLAS

If it keeps her son alive and sane, she's happy to do it.

TYSON

She writes him every day. You write him every day. Then she copies your letter over again in a woman's handwriting. Don't they get that it's the same person writing both sets of letters?

NICHOLAS

She uses different paper, different envelopes. She only handwrites the address and return address on her own letters. Mine she has printed labels I make for her. Her letters are in cursive. Mine, she prints. Every now and again, one or the other or both of us will type it up on a computer instead and print it out. She still does the signatures, though.

TYSON

Damn. That's quite an elaborate set of checks and balances you've got for yourself there, Skippy.

NICHOLAS

I won't pick up a gun. But I can pick up a pen. So can she.

TYSON

What's your girl name?

NICHOLAS

My...?

TYSON

You don't sign your letters Nicholas. Or rather, his mom doesn't.

NICHOLAS

Nikki.

TYSON

Clever.

NICHOLAS

The simpler the lie, the better.

TYSON

He teach you that?

NICHOLAS

Why are you busting my balls today?

TYSON

N-I-C-K-Y?

NICHOLAS

N-I-K-K-I.

TYSON

Oh Lord, that's priceless.

NICHOLAS

I'm thrilled our response to crippling prejudice in the military can provide you with your chuckles for the day.

TYSON

Nikki is a lovely name. Really. You sound like you should be mounting a stripper pole.

NICHOLAS

I think we need to work on getting you transferred to another department.

TYSON

Stripper girlfriend. Very butch. Perfect camouflage.

NICHOLAS

There's only one pole I'm gonna be mounting, smartass. And we both know who it belongs to.

TYSON

What do you have to write about every day? You don't do anything.

NICHOLAS

Screw you. I do, too.

TYSON

You work in a university library all day.

NICHOLAS

So do you.

TYSON

But I get out at night.

NICHOLAS

I have a Marine.

TYSON

And a very limber left hand.

NICHOLAS

I've been told you can kill a man with a ball-point pen.

TYSON

I dare you. Pansy-boy.

NICHOLAS

Why do I bother with you?

TYSON

Because I've been there. Where he is.

NICHOLAS

Different war.

TYSON

Wars are ridiculously similar. Nobody learns anything.

NICHOLAS

Not even you?

TYSON

I'm your little Marine surrogate.

NICHOLAS

Do not say things like that when he gets home.

TYSON

If he gets home.

NICHOLAS

Do not say things like that. Ever.

TYSON

OK. I'll just let you think them.

NICHOLAS

The world is the way it is. Me worrying all the time but doing nothing isn't going to change anything one way or the other. It certainly isn't going to make things better. So I write, and I try to stay positive. No sense in me throwing extra shadows. Someone has to hold up a candle somewhere.

TYSON

Even candles throw shadows.

NICHOLAS

Finish your crossword.