

This is the first time these three characters appear onstage together, in a scene immediately following Anne's speech which opens the play (excerpt 1)...

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.

Emphasis shifts as --

ANNE walks toward NICHOLAS, a man in his late 20s/early 30s, appearing out of the dark. He is writing a letter, finishes, hands it ANNE.

On the opposite side of the space, perhaps separated from the others by darkness, appears SETH, a Marine, late 20s/early 30s. Desert duty.

As they speak, SETH and NICHOLAS look at each other, maybe even reach out to each other, but there's no way to bridge the divide.

Between them, in the vast space between, ANNE, writing. Copying the note from Nicholas into her own handwriting, comparing the two as she goes.

ANNE

Another year.

NICHOLAS

Happy Anniversary, Seth.

ANNE

Your puppy's birthday.

SETH

How did you pick that day? I mean, it's not when we met, Nicholas. We've known each other forever.

NICHOLAS

First time you kissed me.

SETH

How do you remember all that stuff?

NICHOLAS

When I got home that day, I went to my desk calendar with a big red marker and circled the date -- stars, fireworks, smiley faces, you name it.

SETH

Scrambling around in the woods down by the river.

NICHOLAS

Damn, it was humid.

SETH

Both panting, winded.

NICHOLAS

I was squatting. You were standing, hunched over, your hands on your knees, looking at me.

SETH

(foreplay)

How was I looking at you?

NICHOLAS

I knew you were going to kiss me. Part of me was terrified. But the way you looked at me, I knew I'd let you do anything you wanted.

SETH

That is, if I hadn't gotten excited and lost my balance.

NICHOLAS

Well, you leaned in too far, you big dope.

SETH

If you hadn't been squatting --

NICHOLAS

Hey, you still landed on top of me, that's all that counts.

SETH

And I did kiss you.  
How long'd we do that?

NICHOLAS

That day?

SETH

I mean kiss. Just kiss. How long did we just kiss -- a week, week and a half?

NICHOLAS

Three weeks, five and a half days. I thought I was going to explode.

SETH

Where'd you get the extra half day from?

NICHOLAS

It was after lunch sometime. We had soft pretzels. Your mouth tasted salty. And you still had mustard on your hands.

SETH

Sorry.

NICHOLAS

Didn't hear me complaining at the time, did you?

SETH

No. But your mom taught you never to talk with your mouth full.

ANNE

Took your puppy down to the river, where you always used to walk him. So much time. You may not recognize him anymore. But he'll know you. He always looks around, as if you're still there, somewhere, about to pop over the rise of the next hill, down the next bend in the stream.

He doesn't smell you anywhere any more, not like right after you were gone. He'd burrow his nose into the oddest things, if there was even a whiff of you left. Dogs are cursed with longing.

But they're also blessed with joy. The minute you walk through that door again, all the lonely waiting vanishes. He'll leap on you, and lick you. He won't let you out of his sight.

Til then, we'll mark the days together.  
Stay safe.  
Nikki.