

LOVE AND WAR

Written by

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INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY - PRESENT

TIK! TOK! TIK! TOK! -- This is the only sound CANDICE (15) can hear. Underneath it, is a drone humming with an unpleasant frequency.

Her blurry vision is starting to clear up, and she can now see what seems to be numbers. There are 4 digits flying around - 4, 5, 4, and 5.

It's a Stop Watch App that's making the sound. It's ticking 45 seconds and counting down. Candice jolts back to reality and then SILENCE.

We are in the living room of an above-middle-class house in suburban Dallas. Candice sits on a student desk-chair. She stares blankly at her scratch paper full of math equations too complicated for us ordinary people.

Her head is DRIPPING with cold sweats. Her mind is SPINNING, and her eyes SWITCHING to random directions. To her left is AMIRA (15) tall, attractive, and dressed in a black suit, white bow-tie, and black pants. Candice tries to copy answers from the her, but it's just looks all blurry.

Amira's look is copied from Le Smoking by fashion designer Yves Saint Laurent -- but, Amira wears a white silk Hijab, to go with her beautiful Arabian eyes -- She is Palestinian.

AMIRA
(softly, Arabic accent)
Blondie. Are you okay?

To her left is MARCO (15), also tall, attractive, and dressed in a black Armani suit. Candice glances at him breezing through his answer sheets. The sound of his pencil scribbling gets louder and louder -- 27 seconds left.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. BATHROOM - DAY - EARLIER

Candice is staring blankly at herself in the mirror. She has a handful of pencils on the left, and a bottle of pills on the right. She is wearing the same black suit as Amira's.

She washes her face and repeats to herself "I'm ready" again and again in front of the mirror. She then puts lipstick on and blows a kiss to herself -- everything is fine.

The label on her bottle is peeled off, so we are unsure what she's taking. She pops one pill in.

She tries to pop a second one -- NOTHING. It was the last one -- PANIC! Now she's repeating "One is enough" again and again in front of the mirror.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY - PRESENT

As the camera glides away, we see more people in the room. We have 4 parents anxiously watching their kids. We have JULIA (30) the examiner, walking around and throwing random smiles to parents from time to time.

And on the dark corner of the room, are 3 people wearing custom-tailored suits, sipping whisky. Two of them are 30-35ish, standing around the "throne" of a 60-65ish man smoking a cigar -- their faces are half-hidden in shadow.

Candice looks at her mom SALLY (40), but what she gets back from her is a "death-stare". She looks PISSED. You can read her lips saying, "What the f---?!!!", but Julia will smile at her, so she has to stop and smile back -- 15 seconds left.

She jolts back to reality again, but this time -- IT IS ON. Scribbling quickly, her face glows like she's close to the solution. But her hands cannot write as fast as her mind can think -- 10 seconds left.

RING! RING! RING! RING! Time is up.

Amira and Marco drops their pens down at the same time, as if they rehearsed it, while Candice is still scribbling. Julia calmly tells her to stop, but she's not responding.

JULIA
(screaming)
Blondie!

She RATTLES! And all of her stuff SCATTERS to the floor.

The examinees then stood on queue by the Sheet Scanner. They slide the sheets in, and out comes their scores. Amira got 155, Marco got 153, and Candice got the lowest of 146.

TIME CUT:

INT. OFFICE - LATER

We are in a beautifully decorated room in the house. It's modern. Not Blade-Runner-modern, but Italian-Vogue-modern. And Julia is dressed like she came out of the magazine.

CANDICE
 (sobbing)
 I knew where I went wrong.

JULIA
 (skeptical)
 When did you figure that out?

CANDICE
 Right after. I know the answers, I swear! I just got a little nervous.

JULIA
 (inspecting the sheet)
 Okay. Which questions?

CANDICE
 (very certain)
 Question 12. The answer is A.

JULIA
 Explain.

Candice grabs a fresh sheet of blank paper from Julia's table, and starts scribbling.

CANDICE
 1, 31, 391, 89, 11, 45, 922.

She starts creating equations that would make a normal brain bleed just by staring at it. After consuming half the page of equations, she shows Julia the final answer.

CANDICE (CONT'D)
 92. The next derivative is 92.
 Question 15. The answer is D, none of the above. The distance is--

She's scribbling again. This time, she needs more sheets of paper. She shows the answer to Julia -- 2,432,356.72 miles.

CANDICE (CONT'D)
 B would've been the closest one, if not for the decimal.

To her shock, Julia discovers that not only did Candice memorized all questions, she also memorized all choices.

A.) 2,732,431.21 C.) 2,536,243.45
 B.) 2,432,356.71 D.) 2,563,674.23

CANDICE (CONT'D)
 Question 24. In Trigonometry, find the (isosceles that--)

JULIA

(over)

That's okay. Alright.
You know what, screw it.
When I say you pass, you pass.

(beat)

But I'll have to check with Victor.

I.Q. is just number you know.
My ex, he's got 135. But then he
started doing marijuana, and it all
went downhill from there.

On the wall is a board that says Dallas House. Amira's picture frame hangs from top and center. Her label says -- Lady of the House. Under her is Candice as Squire, and Marco also as Squire.

Julia gets up and removes Candice's picture from the wall.

JULIA (CONT'D)

Because then, he started to do real drugs, and within weeks he started to look disgusting. Like his land lord hasn't kicked him out yet, but he already looks homeless. He had a job at Wendy's. 135 I.Q., working at Wendy's -- Never do real drugs.

CANDICE

(nervous)

No Julia. I've never done drugs.
Not even weed.

Julia puts her hands around Candice's cheeks and dries her tears. Then she kisses her on the head.

JULIA

(gives her the picture)

That's my good girl.

(hugging her)

We should change this, I don't like your hair -- 146 I.Q., and you're not happy? You're only 15, and as smart as Obama.

TIME CUT:

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT - LATER

We are at a long dinner table inside the same house. Everyone seated is wearing either a suit or a cocktail dress.

It's a full-on fine dining experience -- French cuisine with a 3-course meal, and everyone's hair looks fabulous.

At the head of the table is VICTOR (60) the guy seated on a "throne" from earlier. Beside him is Julia. While everyone is chattering, we listen to their private conversation.

VICTOR
 (British Accent)
 (Curious, Whispering)
 To the last decimal really?
 And you are good at math?

JULIA
 (Whispering)
 I like Science more.

TING! TING! TING! TING! Victor tips his glass. SILENCE.

VICTOR
 (Playful, Satirical)
 I'm sorry to interrupt your meal.
 Ladies and gentlemen, before I
 introduce tonight's entertainment,
 allow me tell you a story about how
 this all started.

30 years ago, my wife Danica left
 me for another man. 3 days later,
 I bought a one-way ticket to Texas.

I had in my bag a stash of those
 little bottles of whisky. I had 16
 bottles, one for every hour, for
 the 16-hour flight.

But who am I kidding. I drank it
 all within 5 minutes of take-off,
 and that's all I can remember.

(everyone laughs)
 Ahmed. Fatima. Welcome to America.
 Do you believe in God-given talent?
 "And unto one He gave five talents,
 to another two, and to another one;
 to every man according to his
 several ability." Matthew 25:15.

AHMED (50) and FATIMA (50) are Amira's parents that just flew from Israel, and both dressed in traditional Muslim wear.

Unfortunately, God didn't spare any
 for me, or for the other 2 guys in
 the parable.

(MORE)

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Instead, God saved all those 8 talents, and waited, for Amira to be born.

However, what I lack in my gifting, I make up with my calling.

(leans closer to Ahmed)

If you allow me, I will take those 8 talents, and make 8 more.

(LONG BEAT)

Amira. Will you pause and play something for us?

Amira excuses herself, and heads to the piano in the living room and plays a soft Beethoven Classic.

AHMED

(Arabic Accent)

It must have been a very smooth plane ride Mr. Hunt. And she must have been some kind of a woman.

VICTOR

Oh she was one of a kind. 5'6", blonde, blue eyes, smart. Really smart.

AHMED

Victor, my only concern is that my daughter has never lived outside our village. Then suddenly, America. I'm concerned about how she will adjust to things.

JULIA

(interrupts, but timidly)

Her mind doesn't work like ours. When she first got here and played her first note on that piano, she just knew what to press next.

(beat)

And no, she doesn't have problems making friends. Are you worried that she might get bullied?

(laughs)

No, no, no, no-- not Amira.

Amira doesn't get bullied.

And I'll tell you why.

(lights a cigarette)

Have you met Candice and Sally?

Sally's hair is pony-tailed, under-dressed, and wearing a camo-blouse and blue jeans -- but, she's beautiful.

She stands up to reach for a hand-shake across the table. She hits the edge with her legs and shakes the table lightly. Candice looks away from embarrassment.

CANDICE

The piano is her favorite. She learned fast, I mean really fast.

JULIA

Tell them about Mexico. Go ahead.

CANDICE

When we were at camp in Mexico, I was the only white kid. The other kids call me "Blondie" for obvious reasons, but mostly because my eyebrows were also blonde. At daytime, they call me albino, and at night-time, they call me white lady--like the ghost.

One night, Amira woke me up, and she put some make-up on me. Of course I said yes, I didn't have any friends. She gave me Arabian Eyes, just like hers. The next day, everyone stopped teasing me.

JULIA

And they became bestfriends. Right?

AHMED

So you know my daughter really well? Then you probably know she prays 5 times a day, and that's just the default.

(he laughs first then everyone follows)

Tell me, does she still do that?

(LONG BEAT)

VICTOR

(politely)

Of all the things that make each culture unique, religion is one thing I will never allow to divide us more than we already are. Julia?

JULIA

(nervously talking fast)

Well, in some days. Just some, not most, a few in fact. The schedule kind of gets crazy, and we loose track of time?

(MORE)

JULIA (CONT'D)

You know these genius kids, and their genius ideas. There is no stopping them, I'll tell you that right now.

(giggling by herself)

(guilty)

Okay. Big deal. So she might have missed a few Hail Marys -- shit. oh my goodness I shouldn't have said that. I am so sorry. I meant the-the-the-what do you call that--the uhmmm--

FATIMA

Salat. We call it Salat.

(laughs)

You have quite a sense of humor.

(all laugh awkwardly)

You're not a religious man Victor?

Fatima looks elegant with her all-green silk Burqa and Hijab, wearing the same Arabian eyes as Candice and Amira.

VICTOR

I believe there is a God, but I know that for most people, that's not enough.

FATIMA

Believing that there's a God is one thing, and believing that He does matter, is another.

VICTOR

I don't blame God for war or AIDs. I'm not that kind of person. But, I don't thank Him for anything either.

(LONG BEAT)

We can talk about things that divide us, or we can talk about things that unite us, like classical music.

FATIMA

But we are talking about something that unites us--my daughter. Who I'm away giving to you. Who I'm not going to see for a very long time.

And I'm afraid, that one day she'd realize, it's time to take the silly head-dress off.

(interrupted by piano)

Amira heard the whole conversation from across the room this entire time. How? With her ability to divide sound waves.

Once the sound waves enter her ears, she focuses hard, until her brain separates them into different channels. Each channel, she can mute, increase, or decrease volume.

We are now inside Amira's head. We are Amira.

The sound from the piano is all we can hear, with very soft voices from the table. She then closes her eyes, and all sound slowly fades away in 5,4,3,2,1 -- SILENCE.

Then suddenly, the voices from the table start to build slowly. The piano is still heard, but it is now muffled.

Amira then SHIFTS into a faster, and more complicated Mozart piece. The notes are so fast, that everyone stopped eating to watch her play -- her parents were surprised.

She ends with a BANG!!! Closes the lid, and returns to the table. Everyone was shocked and their eyes followed her from the moment she hit the last note, to the moment she arrived at her seat -- SILENCE in the table.

VICTOR

(very calm, satisfied)

Then she must pray 5 times a day.
In one condition -- when you pray,
you have to mention me in it.

Amira just nods and smiles at Victor.

FATIMA

So Victor. Where's Danica now?

AHMED

(In Arabic)

What kind of question is that?
Don't be rude. Apologize.

VICTOR

(In Arabic)

No, no, no. It's not rude at all.
I love telling her story. But it's
rude to speak in a language that
other people in this table don't
understand.

(In English)

You want to know what happened to
Danica? After she dumped me, she
went to college, met a Duke, became
a lawyer, married the Duke, and
became a Duchess.

(MORE)

VICTOR (CONT'D)

Had Danica not have the balls to
dump me, she would've still been
the wife of an alcoholic--
Not a Duchess -- Opportunity.

Victor CHUGS his glass of water and leaves a little bit. He
raises it to propose a toss -- everyone else had wine.

VICTOR (CONT'D)

My precious students. Whether your
fate decides that you stay with us
or not, either way, all is fair in
love and war -- To Opportunities!

EVERYBODY

To Opportunities.

VICTOR

(standing up)

Anyone care for some Cubans, on me.

Everyone follows Victor to smoke Cuban cigars, or eat cake.
Only Sally, Candice and Marco is left on the table.

SALLY

(mad but calm)

Are you still high?
How many did you swallow?

CANDICE

(melancholy)

It's prescription.

SALLY

Well, you didn't look so prescribed
earlier didja. You looked like you
were gonna get a heart attack.

CANDICE

You'd probably like that.

SALLY

Candice, if you mess this up,
you'll end up working night shifts
with me at iHOP.

CANDICE

(sarcastic)

I'm so sorry you'll have to put up
3 more years of me.

Sally gives a GESTURE to Marco sitting across from them. She wants him to leave the table, so she can enjoy a private conversation with her daughter. But Marco just puts his earphones on, and plays Classical Music. He plays it loud, and we can hear some of it. He keeps eating his cake, while avoiding eye contact with Sally.

SALLY

(loving)

Honey, you don't wanna live with me. Aren't you tired of eating left-over pancakes for dinner? The other day, my boss caught me taking home a whole jar of maple syrup.

He didn't fire me, but we won't have anything on our pancakes. So for awhile, it'll just be--pancake.

And even with maple syrup, I already hated them anyway. And I hate it when people keep asking me why. "Oh really? Well what about the ones with blueberry?"

Marco was just reading Sally's lips this whole time. When he noticed that she was done talking, he turns off the music.

MARCO

(Mexican Accent)

(calm, gentlemanly)

You don't have to worry about her Mrs. Cullen. Candice is fine.

SALLY

(calm, irritated)

What the hell did you just say kid?

CANDICE

Mom. Stop it--Marco!

SALLY

Wait. You two aren't-- And by the way, it's Miss Cullen.

MARCO

She gets panic attacks every now and then, but despite that, she's still way ahead of anyone her age-- way way ahead.

SALLY

(evil, sarcastic)

Thanks for the parenting advice.

(MORE)

SALLY (CONT'D)

Look Pancho--I'm sorry your mama couldn't come to America tonight. Maybe because of this border between us and Mexico? But I'm sure she'd love to be here, and be proud of you and all--like what I'm trying to do right now you see. So, if you don't mind, I'd like to play Mother tonight.

(to Candice)

I'm a single mom. I can't pay my mortgage, your brother hates me, and on top of that, I don't get second dates anymore. I could always lower my standards, but everyone down there is either a convicted felon, or worst--they're exactly like your father.

CANDICE

And you work night (shifts at iHOP)

SALLY

(over)

And I work night shifts at iHOP.

Sally SNUGGLES toward Candice, and she responds nicely.

SALLY (CONT'D)

Despite all that, I have a daughter that's delivered to me by storks from the heavens. From Athena, goddess of knowledge and beauty.

When I was 15, your 15 got nothing on me. Back then, I was basically Daisy Duke. But my time has passed, and now it's your turn. The only inheritance I can give, you is a pretty face.

MARCO

Daisy Duke didn't have a high I.Q.

SALLY

(ignoring Marco)

If Albert Einstein was a teenage girl, you'd look exactly like him. You're gonna cure cancer--and AIDs.

MARCO

You should be proud of her.

SALLY

I just did. I just mothered my daughter, you punk.

FADE TO:

INT. GARAGE - NIGHT - LATER

The 3 neophytes Amira, Candice and Marco are blind-folded. We don't know where we are, but we can hear people chanting some Latin spell. Then suddenly, someone removes the blind folds.

We see Julia with her batchmates MARY (30) and ALDO (35) wearing Red Robes. The room is surrounded with 77 candles. And on top of that, each of them is holding a Bronze Chalice.

JULIA

It's just the garage. Don't worry. You're probably wondering, what's with the costumes and all. None of these have special meaning, but what it does, is freak people out.

Because when they do, they become real honest. But, if you want them to be really really honest? Then you'll have to be really really freaky -- but don't freak out yet, this is just the Kool Aide.

(walks forward)

How badly do you want this?

NEOPHYTES

(in unison)

Like my life depends on it,
my lady.

She then lets each neophyte have a sip from her chalice.

ALDO

Will you make it your life,
like the others that have come
before you?

(they respond the same)

(they drink from his cup)

MARY

As a foreigner, would you serve the
United States of America with
loyalty, as you would your own
country?

(they respond the same)

(they drink from her cup)

JULIA
Are you working with the Russians?

CANDICE
Like my life depe--

ALDO
That's alright. There's no way you could be a spy. What if you have a panic attack? You call in sick?

Julia takes 3 passports from her pocket and hands it to them.

JULIA
When you're ready.

Marco looks at his passport. With no second thoughts, he grabs a candle, lights it on fire, and throws it to the bin.

Then Mary leads him to a green screen, and snaps his photo. On a table, is a laptop that shows a blank U.S.A. Passport-- she drags Marco's picture to it. She scans Marco's finger prints, and a mugshot where he was all smiles pops up.

MARY
Why do you look like you just won one of those big fake checks?
(typing)
Let's see. Damage to Property-- Vending Machine. Really? Possession of a schedule 1 drug. Possession with Intent to Sell. Unregistered Firearms. Unregistered Automatic Firearms, and Armed Robbery. I'm, impressed kid, so I'll let you do the honors. Go ahead.
(Marco Deletes All)
What name do you want?

MARCO
(with pride)
Erik Wolfe. --with an E.

Candice and Amira are still staring at their passports, while holding a candle.

CANDICE
(half-hearted)
Why are we even thinking about this? There's nothing to think about. I mean, it's either this, or prom night in juvy. And you, do you really wanna go back to Arabia?

Amira slowly burns Candice's passport with her candle.

CANDICE (CONT'D)

What the f--
 (blows off fire)
 I'm still thinking!!!

AMIRA

Then shut up.
 (beat)
 Can I ask you something? That
 night, when I put make-up on you,
 how'd you feel the next morning?

CANDICE

Itchy. Real itchy. When you didn't
 tell me I had to wash it off.

AMIRA

Sorry. I did that so you'll never
 do it again.

CANDICE

Honestly, I didn't feel like I was
 myself. But then, I looked hot.

AMIRA

(playful)
 The first time you walked into that
 room with make up on-- and
 everyone's eyes were on you--
 including that boy over there--
 (Pointing to Marco)
 Who then, stopped calling you
 "Blondie", and started calling you
 "Can-dice" -- you little she devil.
 (serious)
 I have no idea how I would feel
 after this. However it turns out,
 let's just promise each other that
 we won't keep bitching about it.

TIME CUT:

EXT. STREET - DAWN

We are outside the mansion at dawn. A black SUV is parked in the middle of the street with its engine running. Candice is sobbing, while Amira and Marco is comforting her. Julia and Victor is waiting for them to finish saying their goodbyes.

AMIRA
It's not yet time. It's okay.

CANDICE
(sobbing)
Why can't we work this out?

AMIRA
To every thing there is a season--

CANDICE
I need you. There must be a way.

AMIRA
(breaks hug)
--and a time to every purpose under
the heaven. Ecclesiastes 3:1.
(hugs him)
Marco.
(crying now)
Goodbye Blondie.
(hugs her tight)
As Salaamu Alaikum

Amira then walks towards the SUV. Julia gives her a final hug and opens the door. Amira's mom blew a kiss to both of her daughter's bestfriends she will never see again.

Victor looks frustrated about Amira leaving. He gives Julia an envelope that's sealed with red wax, and in big bold letters, the outside says -- "THE COLLECTIVE".

VICTOR
(To Julia)
Find a replacement.