

MAJOR

How did it happen? Well, all we know at this point is that your son was on patrol when his unit was ambushed. A fire fight broke out. His unit came under mortar attack and—

Breaks off, checks printout again. Reads aloud from it.

"Keep explanations brief. Be factual. Do not embellish. Explain that more details will follow."

Puts printout down, resumes dressing.

His body? His body--the remains--are still overseas. The Marine Corps would like to know where you want them shipped. To a private funeral home? Or would you prefer that the Corps handle everything, arrange for military honors--?

Breaks off, hit with a wave of pain.

I can't, I can't! This kind of thing isn't for me! I never liked funerals, wouldn't go to them as a kid, not even when my grandfather died.

He relives that episode.

No--I won't go! I don't want to see grandpa dead! I don't want to see him in a wooden box, all stiff and --

He is nearly in tears.

I won't go, you can't make me! I don't care what you say, I'm staying home, I won't go with you!

Fights back his tears. Finishes knotting his tie, then slips into his dark-blue dress jacket. As he buttons it up he quotes from the printout.

"There are financial advantages if the family allows the Marine Corps to handle all funeral arrangements--the dressing and casking of the remains--"

Breaks off.

Hate that word. "Remains." Remains. All that's left of your son. Bits and pieces. Scraps gathered up on the battlefield and put in a body bag and shipped home. To be boxed here. Casked. A tisket, a tasket, I lost my little casket...

Breaks off, upset with himself.

What the hell is the matter with you? Why are you acting like this? Are you a man or a--? Do your duty, Major! Shape up! Be strong. Resolute. Conquer your fears!

Adjusts his jacket, then puts his cap on and squares it.

Casualty notification is a solemn event, a noble event. Honor the Corps!
Honor the uniform. Honor the dead. Honor the family! Assuage their
pain. Provide support! Give them strength! Let them know their son has
not died in vain. Make them see that the Corps cares about its own.
Point to the red stripe that runs down the sides of your trousers!
He addresses the parents, pointing to the stripe.
See this? It represents the blood shed by Marines in the war with Mexico
in 1847. The battle for the Halls of Montezuma! The blood shed by
Marines in countless wars since then. The shores of Tripoli! Iwo Jima!
Okinawa! Korea! Viet Nam! The glory of battles won and the pain of
brothers lost.

Sisters lost. Sons lost. Daughters lost. Nephews. Nieces. Girlfriends and
boyfriends. Parents. Fathers and mothers. Lost in battle. Killed in action.
Injured in battle. Reported missing. Shot down over-- Captured at--
Blown up during--

Ambushed. Boobytrapped. Stepped on a mine. Came under fire. Was hit
by. Enemy bombs. Friendly fire. Suicide bomb. Helicopter crash. Missile
attack--!

Incoming, incoming!

The Major ducks, as if back in battle. He breathes hard as he tries to recover equilibrium. Suddenly he
straightens up and snaps off a salute.

Yes, sir. I'm fine, sir. No problems, sir. Thank you, sir.