

GIRL IN THE WAR

by Claire Hupy

EXT. THE SKY - DAY

We're flying. We pass over puffy white clouds and dip sideways, gliding over the air. Free.

GRACE (V.O.)
Everyone has an origin story, even
if they don't turn out to be
heroes.

Across the sky, we see a THUNDERBIRD JET PLANE burst through another cloud. It's as graceful as a ballet dancer and as powerful as a hurricane.

GRACE (V.O.)
It's what dares us, what defines
us, and, if we're not careful, what
destroys us.

A second Thunderbird follows. Then a third, fourth, fifth, and sixth. The six planes fall into formation.

GRACE (V.O.)
I guess this is mine. These were
the were the bedtime stories I was
raised on.

The Thunderbirds blast overhead.

EXT. UNITED STATES AIR FORCE ACADEMY - DAY

Graduation Day, 1989. 1,000 former cadets, now young OFFICERS throw their caps in the air as the Thunderbirds rocket through the sky above.

Among them is a young HENRY DAVIS - brown hair, blue eyes, here-comes-trouble grin. He's the picture of an all-American male dressed in an Air Force parade uniform.

EXT. USAFA QUAD - DAY

Moments after graduation. Henry poses for a picture with MEG, a scholarly young woman, smiling widely, an engagement ring sparkling on her finger.

Another new officer shouts at them from afar.

YOUNG OFFICER
Really, Henry? You brought your
pinko-commie girlfriend?

Henry flips the bird and shouts back with a grin.

HENRY

Nah, man, I brought my pinko-commie fiancé!

Meg mimics Henry, but she raises her ring finger instead of her middle one.

MEG

Checkmate, Boozie!

They all laugh, even the Young Officer. The friends that feel like family.

Henry picks up Meg and spins her around. They turn into:

EXT. STANFORD - DAY

Meg's Graduation. She's not just graduating, she's speaking to her classmates.

Henry stands in the back of the audience dressed in his Air Force Blues. He can't stop smiling.

MEG

We are the last class of the 1980s, approaching a new century. Just this year, the Berlin Wall came down, the number one television show is The Cosby Show - a celebration of Black Americans, and there are more women in Congress than there have ever been in our nation's history. We've entered a new age of equality, of democracy, of invention. Most of us were toddlers when Man first stepped onto the Moon - our generation will go beyond the moon and stars to see the wonders of the whole universe.

The crowd erupts into cheers. Meg beams and locks eyes with Henry.

They're on top of the world.

GRACE (V.O.)

You ever heard that poem by Philip Larkin? "They fuck you up, your mom and dad. / They may not mean to, but they do. / They fill you with the faults they had / And add some extra, just for you."

INT. COLLEGE BAR - DAY

The bar has a sign that reads CON"GRAD"ULATIONS CLASS OF 2017. GRACE DAVIS, 22, icy, independent, and graduating with a double degree in mathematics and cynicism, takes a swig of her beer.

Her roommate, TORI, a bubbly art student holding equally bubbly rosé, giggles. A wannabe hipster BRIAN sits next to them both holding a bourbon he doesn't actually like.

TORI

Grace, babe, c'mon. Could you be happy for like, three seconds? We're graduating. You have a job! You're a certified badass and for the record I think it's the sweetest thing ever that your dad's going to road trip to D.C. with you.

GRACE

I haven't spent time alone with the man since I was like six and now we're going to be stuck in a truck for five days. And that job? I'm going to be pushing spreadsheets for the Treasury Department, at best.

TORI

So? Still a smarty-pants.

Grace takes swig of her beer, emptying the bottle.

BRIAN

I get it - we all hate our parents.

Grace gives him a side-eye death glare.

GRACE

I don't hate my parents. I had a beautiful childhood. What the hell are you talking about?

BRIAN

I've seen The Great Santini. I know how Army fathers are, always ordering everyone around.

GRACE

God, Brian. You're such an idiot.

BRIAN

What?

GRACE

You're so wrong I don't even know where to start. First of all, The Great Santini is about a father in the Marines, not the Army. Second of all, my dad is in the Air Force, which is also not the Army. Third of all, do you honestly think some 70s sob fest film has anything to do with how things are today?

TORI

Grace, babe. Set phasers to stun, will you?

Grace rolls her eyes. She glances around the bar.

On the other side of the room, near a booth is ALEXANDER FINCH, 23, handsome in a surfer-chill way, like the All-American male as designed by Orange County. There's a half dozen GAGGLE OF GIRLS (18-24), all vying for his attention.

He's watching Grace. She glances away.

When she looks up again, he's wrapped an arm around a random girl next to him, obviously flirting.

Grace turns away and catches the eye of the BARTENDER.

GRACE

(re: her beer)

Can I get another one of these?

BARTENDER

Sure - I.D.?

Grace pulls a card out of her wallet. It's a pale blue military ID. Grace stares at a much younger Grace grinning back at her...

INT. CALIFORNIA LIVING ROOM - DAY

2001. Grace is almost 7; Henry is 35.

We pan over packed boxes marked MEG'S OFFICE and MEG'S BOOKS to see the former salutatorian in a mess of motherhood. Dirty dishes are on the table. Pajamas are on the floor.

Meg gestures with a half-eaten piece of toast as she tries to wrangle her two daughters: YOUNG GRACE (6, almost 7) and SAM (Samantha, 9). They're getting ready for school on an ordinary Tuesday morning.

MEG

Sam, why don't you pack the lunches? No - I don't know where your book is, you don't need that one for school. Lunches. Grace, come here.

Grace is dressed but her hair is a tangled mess.

MEG (CONT'D)

Sit down - no not over there, here, let me fix your hair, thank you. Yes, we can watch TV if you like.

Grace turns on the T.V.

The front door busts open as Henry walks in. He's in a flight suit and combat boots, carrying a bag over his shoulder. He must have just come straight home from the flight line.

GRACE

Dad's home, Dad's home!

Grace pulls away from her mother to jump into her Dad's open arms.

He drops his bag so he can flip her upside down. They laugh and wrestle.

The TV plays on, unwatched. NEWSREEL:

CHARLIE GIBSON (ON TV)

ABC's Don Daylor is on the scene. Don, just give me a description of what you're seeing right now.

On the screen, the first Twin Tower is up in smoke.

The ticker tape reads September 11th, 2001.

Grace is still over Henry's shoulder.

GRACE

(urgently)

Dad? Dad? Are you still going to be here when it's my birthday in four days?

HENRY

I am still going to be here when
it's your birthday in four days,
Fidget, don't you worry.

Meg relaxes visibly.

MEG

Oh, thank goodness. I feel like
you've been gone all summer.

Sam comes running out of the kitchen.

SAM

Dad's home! Dad's home!

Henry groans theatrically as he picks up his other daughter,
throwing her over his other shoulder.

Meg suddenly remembers she has to get the kids ready for
school.

MEG

C'mon girls, the bus will be here
any minute. Grace, get over here.

HENRY

She's can't come; she's getting
attacked by the DAD MONSTER.

He starts to make growling sounds, then catches sight of
Meg's Death Glare.

Henry quickly puts down the kids.

HENRY (CONT'D)

Grace, get over there. The bus
will be here any minute. Sam, were
you making lunches?

Henry follows Sam back into the kitchen.

Grace runs over to sit on the floor in front of her mother on
the couch. Meg attacks Grace's hair while listening soberly
to the TV.

MEG

Oh my God. Those poor people.

Charlie Gibson's calming voice explains to those just tuning
in that there has been a devastating accident in New York
City.

GRACE
Momma, look!

For just a flash, the second airplane is visible on the television screen. The second twin tower explodes into light and flame.

MEG
What the hell was that?

Grace spins, giggling, delighted.

GRACE
Mom! That was a bad word! You can't say-

MEG
Hush.

Her tone carries no room for disobedience. Grace falls silent.

CHARLIE GIBSON (ON TV)
We don't... we don't have any confirmation, but with two crashes into building so close together, I can only imagine, it must be a problem with the navigation systems.

The news anchor's voice fades out.

EXT. COLLEGE CAMPUS - DAY

2017. Grace is 22; Henry is 50.

The end of a long day on a nearly empty college campus. WORKERS are piling up folding chairs. Trash blows across the grass. A forlorn GRADUATION CAP sits sideways in a path.

A small FAMILY is trying to take a photograph in front of the college's front gate. The FATHER (50s) is a square-faced businessman, the MOTHER (50s) an aging model. Their son is Alexander Finch, the guy from the bar.

FATHER
Just try to look happy!

ALEXANDER
I am happy!

He glances across the street.

There, Henry loads a box into the back of a pickup truck. The truck is big, black, and old. It's crossed the country more than six times and has more dings and scratches per square inch than most commuter cars get ever.

The Oklahoma license plate on the truck is embossed with a Bronze Star and reads VETERAN.

Hitched to the back of the giant truck is a shiny, slightly used, green Hyundai accent - as bright as the truck is tired.

Henry watches the family across the street.

HENRY

They sure are fighting a lot.

Grace closes the gate of the truck. She and Alexander make eye contact.

He raises his hand for a halfhearted wave. She quickly looks away.

GRACE

They're family.

Meg takes stock of the loaded up pickup with Henry and Grace beside the car. She's impressed.

MEG

Well done! I didn't think you'd get everything in the truck.

GRACE

Most of the things in the apartment were Tori's. I started paring down when I knew I was leaving LA.

HENRY

(joking)

You didn't think to pare down the books?

He mockingly rubs his shoulders.

GRACE

I told you I could have carried that box.

He thought he was making a joke. She's trying to prove she doesn't need his help. They descend into an awkward silence.

Meg looks from one to the other, aware of the distance between them but also aware that she can't fix it.

MEG

Just... don't kill each other
before you get to Virginia, okay?

Grace grimaces, acting overly cheerful and sarcastic.

GRACE

It'll be an adventure!

HENRY

Just like in the Air Force, only
someone gets an office and a
paycheck at the end.

Grace deflates, heads to the shotgun seat, and slams the door.

Henry looks from Grace to Meg and throws his hands up. What was that?

MEG

It's a good job. She worked hard
for that.

HENRY

Of course it's a good job. I was
complimenting her. She's so
sensitive-

Meg sighs, making Henry pause.

HENRY (CONT'D)

I wish you were coming too.

Meg shrugs.

MEG

When you're done, are you going
back to Oklahoma or coming to
Colorado?

Henry doesn't have a response to that. He just looks at Meg.

Meg nods, stuffs her hands in her pockets, and walks away.

Henry takes a step towards her, but she doesn't turn around. He hesitates. Then Henry heads to the front seat of the truck.

The old pickup roars to life, the deafening sound of a diesel work vehicle, so loud it sets off the car alarm on a nearby BMW.

Meg waves at her daughter from the sidewalk.

Henry, Grace, and truck full of Grace's baggage head out of the city, the little green car towed along from the back.

INT. / EXT. TRUCK - LA FREEWAYS - DAY - LATER

Past the skyscrapers and over the underpass, the truck glides down the LA freeways... then grinds to a halt behind bumper to bumper traffic.

Henry cranes his neck to see if he can find an end to this traffic and then flips on his blinker.

GRACE

Where are you going?

HENRY

Side streets will be moving.

GRACE

Not in this beast. They won't be wide enough. It's better to stay on the highway.

HENRY

Grace, it's not even moving.

GRACE

Dad, it's LA - there's going to be traffic.

Henry doesn't listen, taking the roaring beast of a truck down an off ramp.

He goes to make a left turn, to follow the path of the highway.

GRACE (CONT'D)

One way street.

So it is. Henry grinds his teeth. With no where else to, Henry starts driving away from their destination.

Grace pulls up maps on her phone.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Take Flower to get back to the freeway. It's a left up here.

HENRY

Huh - you should be a tactics director, not going to the Treasury Department to be a human calculator.

GRACE

Well, we can't all be war heroes.

Henry bites off a retort he wants to jab and pulls back for some self depreciation.

HENRY

I wasn't a war hero; I was a professional family-mover. We had some fun.

GRACE

(dark but teasing)

Some fun.

The truck rolls back onto the highway.

INT. /EXT. TRUCK - SALT LAKE CITY HIGHWAYS - DAY

2000. Grace is 5; Henry is 33.

Meg's behind the wheel. Henry's half-asleep in the passenger seat. In the back seats, Sam annihilates some aliens on a gameboy while Grace is rooting around in a bag at her feet.

She looks up.

GRACE

Mom, we're out of goldfish. Is there more up there?

MEG

We'll be stopping for lunch soon.

Sam looks up from her game.

SAM

If we stop for more fast food, I'm gonna die.

Henry is startled from his half-slumber by this.

HENRY

Burgers and fries three times a day is the silver lining of road trips, Sam.

SAM

I want Subway.

MEG

(incredulously)

Really?

Sam starts chanting and Grace mimics her sister.

SAM	GRACE
Subway, subway, subway, subway!Subway, subway, subway!

Meg looks at Henry, half-amused, half worried.

MEG
Henry, we broke the girls.

HENRY
This is Utah. Is it even legal to
go to a Subway?

MEG
Careful, they might revolt on us.

HENRY
At least they're working together.

The truck comes up to an off-ramp.

MEG
Alright, alright, let's go to
Subway.

The girls cheer.

INT. TRUCK - DAY - LATER

Sam and Grace happily munch on their sandwiches. Henry's taken his shift behind the wheel. Meg folds down the paper on his sandwich from the passenger seat so he can eat and drive at the same time.

Henry adopts a "documentary narrator" voice.

HENRY
Torn from their native burgers, the
military family makes do with cold
sandwiches.

GRACE
I love my sandwich, thank you!

SAM
At least it's not greasy.

Grace spots something out the window.

GRACE
Hey look!

It's a compact car with a U-Haul hitched to the back, coming up from behind.

GRACE (CONT'D)
They've got Texas plates too.

MEG
I bet they're military.

The car passes the truck. On the back is a SEMPER FI bumper sticker.

The family busts up laughing.

Henry continues in his narrator voice.

HENRY
Like the Travels of the Caribou, no one knows why the military families migrate each summer. They just do.

The family keeps laughing together.

INT. / EXT. TRUCK - CALIFORNIA - DAY

2017 - Grace is 22; Henry is 50.

Henry and Grace sit in awkward silence as the truck rolls on. Grace fiddles with the radio but there's nothing but static.

HENRY
So... how are things with Alan?

GRACE
Alan?

HENRY
That guy. That... Uh... Philosophy major.

Grace looks confused. Then the lightbulb clicks on.

GRACE
Oh. Alex.

HENRY
Yeah, yeah! He's....

Henry takes stock of Grace's morose expression.

HENRY (CONT'D)
No?

GRACE

No.

HENRY

Do you want to talk about it?

GRACE

I don't know - do you want to talk about you and Mom?

It's Henry's turn to fall silent.

GRACE (CONT'D)

Have you found a job yet? Are you moving back to Colorado or is she moving to you?

HENRY

(Shut up.)

I don't know, Grace.

They both fall silent. Grace stares out the window.

They're passing through the inland empire. Huge warehouses for shipping companies squat across the desert. The traffic is lightening up. The sun shines high in the sky.

GRACE

He's just so...
(beat)
LA.

Henry nods as if that's a reasonable explanation.

HENRY

It's why your mom left that state after college. Can't stand the place.

GRACE

I get that - now. He thinks this is the whole world. Like, he thinks he's edgy.

HENRY

And he's not?

GRACE

No, he doesn't even understand how anything works. He's not a rebel; he's an 80s wannabe.

Henry laughs.

HENRY

Ouch, Fidget, don't hate the 80s.
The 80s were great.

GRACE

I missed out. My consciousness
starts at 9/11.

Henry heaves a heavy sigh. Grace looks at him curiously.

GRACE (CONT'D)

What do you remember, about that?

HENRY

Shitty day.

Grace waits for him to go on. He doesn't.

GRACE

But like, at work. I just remember
my birthday, after.

HENRY

I remember your birthday, too. At
work was... well, it was paper
plates.

Grace listens, curiously.

INT. TRAVIS AFB OFFICE - DAY

2001 - Henry is 35.

Far from a secret lair with beeping machines and maps, much
of Travis Air Force Base is just boring offices with cubicles
and a conference room.

Inside the conference room, Henry and MAJOR LEWIS unfurl an
enormous map of the United States. It stretches across the
conference table.

HENRY

What is it - two minutes an inch?

MAJOR LEWIS

Two point three minutes an inch.
And we need to be able to get there
in twenty minutes.

(beat)

Sir.

Henry adjusts his ruler. He's measuring a distance in
Northern California.

HENRY

Travis can cover both San Fransisco
and Sacramento.

Someone passes by and pauses - LT. COLONEL BEDFORD (40s).

LT. COLONEL BEDFORD

You boys planning a road trip?

MAJOR LEWIS

We are strategizing military
squadrans ability to get to major
metropolitan cities in the United
States.

HENRY

Or as the Army would say - planes
go fast, stop terrorists.

Bedford has a chuckle at the Air Force/Army rivalry.

LT. COLONEL BEDFORD

Gonna take a long-ass time to do
all the cities with that ruler.

That's a good point. Henry measures the ruler against the
span of his hand and has an idea.

HENRY

Give me a minute.

He darts out of the cubical.

Lt. Colonel Bedford steps in and peers at the map.

LT. COLONEL BEDFORD

And what's the plan if there's
nothing close enough?

MAJOR LEWIS

If there isn't a flight base within
twenty minutes by jet, we'll be
contacting the local airports and
setting aside spaces for the
planes.

LT. COLONEL BEDFORD

You doing Alaska and Hawaii too or
just CONUS?

MAJOR LEWIS

Just CONUS. NORAD might cover
Alaska. Hawaii's SOL.

LT. COLONEL BEDFORD
Press if gonna have a field day if
we get Pearl Harbor 2.0.

MAJOR LEWIS
From Afghanistan? You think
Afghanistan has the fuel tanks to
fly to Hawaii?

Lt. Colonel Bedford shrugs.

Henry steps back into the cubical. He's gotten a totally
generic paper plate from an office snack bar.

He takes the rules and measures it, then pokes a hole in the
middle.

Henry takes the plate and slides it over the map until the
hole is directly over a city. He uses a pen to draw a circle
around the city.

Lt. Colonel Bedford whistles appreciatively.

LT. COLONEL BEDFORD
Gold star for Davis. Does it have a
base in the ring?

HENRY
No, Sir. And no airport either.

LT. COLONEL BEDFORD
Let's measure the rest of them and
see what's nearby.

Henry hands the plate to Major Lewis.

HENRY
Here. I'll grab another one.

SERIES OF QUICK SHOTS - The two men use paper plates to draw
circles around American cities.

MAJOR LEWIS
So Dallas is good, Chicago is good,
Kansas City is good. What about
Des Moines?

LT. COLONEL BEDFORD
We should set something with the
local airport. There are a couple
of big highways that go through Des
Moines. If something gets nasty we
don't want to lose mobility
advantage.

HENRY

What about Minneapolis? They're wide open.

There's a long pause.

LT. COLONEL BEDFORD

Not a priority.

Henry nods.

MAJOR LEWIS

My mother-in-law lives in Minneapolis.

Lt. Colonel Bedford looks at him, no ounce of pity.

LT. COLONEL BEDFORD

My brother was in the Pentagon. Everyone's family lives somewhere.

Major Lewis nods.

Henry spins a paper plate on a finger.

EXT. CALIFORNIA HOUSE - DAY

2001 - Grace is 7; Henry is 35.

Rows of paper plates line a folding table.

We're at an average street in a base housing division - identical half brick, half painted houses. Barely bigger than double-wide mobile homes but the lawns and paint are impeccably kept up. Every house displays an American Flag and has a small plaque displaying the last name and the rank of the officer that lives there.

The Davis's front yard is decorated for a rainbow-themed birthday party. Multi-colored streamers run from the roof of the house. The snacks table has a rainbow table cloth and the plastic cups go in order of R.O.Y.G.B.I.V.

There's one big tree in the front yard, next to the driveway. The TRUCK sits there, some kids playing in the bed of the truck.

Off a single string, a RAINBOW PINATA hangs from the tree. KIDS, including Sam, run pell-mell through the yard, chasing after a soccer ball.

SPOUSES, mostly women, stand by the snack table, including Meg.

SPOUSE 1

I'm just glad to get out of the house. It's so annoying to leave the base - what if they shut it down again?

SPOUSE 2

Better question - when are they going to open up commercial flights? Jack's still in Texas.

The other Spouses "mmhmm" sympathetically.

MEG

My cousin's supposed to be back at school on the east coast. She's been sleeping at LAX for three days. Can't even get a hotel room.

SPOUSE 3

I got a call from my brother today. His neighbor worked for Cantor Fitzgerald. They were on the top floor of the towers.

MEG

Jesus, the whole company?

Spouse 3 nods.

SPOUSE 3

Over 600 employees dead, they think.

SPOUSE 1

(warning)
Kid incoming.

Grace, hyped up on sugar and cake and wearing a birthday hat, throws her arms around her mom's legs.

GRACE

Mom! The piñata won't break! It's just spinning.

MEG

(calling out)
Henry?

Henry's standing with a group of OFFICERS, mostly men, all in flight suits. They're standing in a loose circle, arms crossed tightly, clean-cut fly boys boiling with rage and testosterone.

A young MAJOR comes over with a six pack of beer, and hands one to the grey-haired COMMANDER before passing it around to the other Officers.

MAJOR

Sir. No point in staying sober -
they just pulled us off alert.

HENRY

Are you kidding me?

MAJOR

It's been four days. No one's
alive anymore. They only need one
crew to fly in the cadaver dogs.
(hands a beer to Henry)
Cheers.

Henry shakes his head, murmurs a curse, and knocks back a swig of his beer.

MEG

Henry!

Meg walks up with a baseball bat, decorated with streamers around the grip. She gestures to the Piñata.

MEG (CONT'D)

Can you help the kids?

Henry trades his drink for the bat. He eyes the spinning piñata.

MEG (CONT'D)

Henry, be careful.

Henry gives Meg a cheeky wink. Grace trails behind him.

Henry sees the piñata, spinning, spinning, spinning. He takes a swing.

It just spins.

He gets angry - all his anger and fear from the last four days spilling over and out on this rainbow.

He starts swinging wildly, beating the shit out of this goddamn rainbow.

MEG (CONT'D)

(warning)

Henry.

He doesn't stop. Henry pours all his rage out into this useless, spiraling rainbow.

It CRACKS open - candy sprays out all over the grass in circle. The Kids run forward SCREAMING and Henry has to pull himself back to avoid hitting one of them. He's panting, a little stunned at himself, baseball bat still gripped tightly in his hands.

Grace stands staring at him - her soldier Dad, under the still spraying flood of candy, the broken rainbow spinning in the sky.

She's never seen him scary before now.

INT./EXT. TRUCK - THE MOJAVE DESERT - SUNSET

2017. Grace is 22; Henry is 50.

It's so beautiful in the desert. The golden light from the sky filters over the sand. There are no other cars on the road.

Grace watches through the side window at the Joshua Trees. A bird glides lazily high overhead, too far away to name.

As the sky darkens, Henry flips on the lights on the truck and they rumble onwards in an illuminated pool of light.

GRACE

It's such a beautiful country.

Henry sighs.

HENRY

Yeah. It is.

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