

TELEGRAM

by

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INT. DEN - MORNING

STAN HARPER, a paunchy, middle-aged man with glasses and thinning, brown hair, scans the telegram he's holding and smiles.

STAN  
(quietly, to himself)  
Remember, put the jacket in the  
cylinder before you turn out the  
lights.

He repeats the phrase two more times then adds the telegram to a stack of others that are wrapped with a rubber band. He tucks the stack into the back of the desk and checks to make certain it cannot easily be seen.

STAN (CONT'D)  
Don't like keeping secrets from  
Linda but she doesn't have to know  
about this.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

LINDA HARPER is an attractive woman with short brown hair and a perpetually youthful face. She looks harried and overwhelmed as she scoops up the empty dishes from the table and dumps them in the sink.

ERIC is tall, lanky and looks to be in his mid teens. He adjusts his earbuds and scans his music player for a new song.

LINDA  
Eric, come on, the bus will be here  
any minute; where is your backpack?

ERIC  
Mom, it's on the stairs.

Eric gestures toward the northeast corner of the room near the exit.

LINDA  
Well, do you have your books, your  
homework?

ERIC  
Oh, my homework!

Eric leaps up from the table and moves quickly in the direction he'd just pointed to.

KATHLEEN sits on the opposite side of the table from where Eric had been. She absentmindedly tosses her long brown hair over her shoulder as her large brown eyes scan the papers in front of her.

KATHLEEN

Mom, you sure this paper doesn't sound too ... I don't know?

Linda pours a cup of coffee that she sits in front of Stan who watches the activity from the counter near the sink. She then moves to Kathleen who seems on the verge of tears.

LINDA

Okay, honey, let me see. Show me the part you're concerned about.

Kathleen flips through several pages, stops and points at a particular paragraph. Linda moves a chair over next to her and studies the paper.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Oh honey, this is fine. I understand what you're trying to say and you quoted the proper sources. The only thing I would suggest is that you break the page up into shorter sentences.

KATHLEEN

Really, you really think it's okay?

LINDA

Yep, just make shorter sentences and you should be fine.

Linda gives Kathleen a smile and kisses her forehead. She gets up from the table and moves over to Stan.

LINDA (CONT'D)

How you doing Stan, you okay?

She straightens his hair and smiles.

STAN

Doing good.

He returns the smile and pats Linda's cheek. Linda glances down at her watch then rushes over to the staircase just outside the kitchen.

LINDA

(shouting)

Eric, what are you doing up there?

(MORE)

LINDA (CONT'D)

Grab your home work and get down here; you're going to miss your bus.

INT. BASEMENT - MORNING

Stan stands with his arm folded, tapping the figure of a model soldier on his bottom lip. He studies a large, highly-detailed model of a battlefield.

On the walls are plaques and awards from art competitions which bear Stan's name. Scattered throughout the basement on shelves and stands are bronze, wood and pewter sculptures of various sizes. A large sculpture against the wall depicts General MacArthur witnessing the surrender of the Japanese aboard the USS Missouri. At the end of the room is a statue of a soldier sitting dejectedly in a foxhole.

STAN

Someone must be taking some of these pieces.

Stan walks around the battlefield model and shakes his head as he sets the soldier down, then picks it up again. He reaches for one of the model ships then pauses and stares blankly at the setup.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER THAT MORNING

The stations on the television flip by in a montage of sound and video bites. Periodically, Stan pauses the disjointed sequence of clips and settles on a station showing two men wrestling a huge white snake into a glass cage.

STAN

What the hell is going on here?

Stan watches for a moment, a perplexed look on his face then starts scanning channels again.

FADE TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

Stan is dozing on the sofa as the television plays in the background. The sound of the KITCHEN DOOR OPENING wakes him. He leaps off the sofa with child-like excitement and heads to the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN - MOMENTS LATER

Stan enters the kitchen in time to see Linda struggling through the door trailing her large blue cello case.

STAN

Hey honey, you're home early.

He takes the case from her and sets it against the wall.

LINDA

Am I?

Linda glances down at her watch.

LINDA (CONT'D)

No Stan, this is the time I usually get here.

Linda plops down into one of the kitchen chairs, leans her head against the wall with her eyes closed and blows out an exhausted sigh.

Stan eagerly takes the seat across from her; his knees bouncing with excitement.

STAN

So, what kind of day did you have?

Linda responds without opening her eyes.

LINDA

Rough and exhausting.

STAN

So what did you do?

Linda barely opens her eyes as she reaches out and pats Stan's hand.

LINDA

Honey, can we talk later; I'm really tired and I'd like to get a little rest before starting dinner.

STAN

Sure, sure.

Stan slumps back in his chair dejectedly and stares at the table. They sit in silence as Stan twiddles his thumbs and stares around the room.

STAN (CONT'D)

What's that?

LINDA  
(groggily)  
What's what?

Stan points excitedly toward the wall and the blue case.

STAN  
That, up against the wall; what the  
hell is it?

Linda opens her eyes, looks but does not see anything out of  
the ordinary.

LINDA  
Stan, what is it; what are you  
looking at?

Stan walks over and points at the cello case.

STAN  
This thing; what is it, a guitar or  
something?

Linda sighs and lets her head settle against the wall.

LINDA  
Stan, that's my cello; remember?

Stan moves the case around and studies it as though aliens  
brought it.

STAN  
God, it's big. I didn't know you  
played the cello.

LINDA  
Stan I ...

Linda stands and walks into the living room as Stan continues  
to examine the cello.

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Linda collapses on the sofa. Moments later Stan enters the  
living room and sits in the rocking chair near the sofa. He  
stares back and forth between Linda and the television.

STAN  
Linda, Linda look at this! Why the  
hell is that woman doing that; it  
doesn't make sense!

Linda wakes with a start and looks around dazed.

LINDA

What, what is it Stan?

STAN

This woman on television, what the hell is she doing? At first I thought it was one of those foreign stations or something but she's talking in English, I just can't figure out what she's doing.

Linda rolls over, looks at the television and sees Julia Child cooking something in a pan on the stove. As she moves the pan back and forth over the burner, flames leap from the bottom of it as she talks about sauteing something.

LINDA

(slightly irritated)

Stan, that's just Julia Child cooking something. You've seen her do that hundreds of times!

STAN

Not this I haven't! I've never seen her do this! I know I'd remember if I'd seen her do this!

Stan points vigorously at the screen as he makes his point.

LINDA

Stan honey, this is a repeat; we saw this same program just last week.

STAN

Look Linda, I'm not crazy; what she's doing doesn't make any sense. I'd remember if I saw her do something like this!

Linda falls back into the sofa almost on the verge of tears.

LINDA

Stan please; I just need to get a little rest. With all the extra hours I'm working I just need to get a little rest. You understand that don't you?

Linda drapes her arm over her eyes and turns into the sofa.

STAN  
(under his breath)  
I'm not crazy and I'd remember  
something like this!

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. KITCHEN - LATER

Linda is fixing dinner and chatting with Stan.

STAN  
Somebody must be taking pieces from  
my models because I tried to set up  
the Battle of Midway today and  
couldn't make it work.

A sad expression crosses Linda's face as she begins to  
respond but changes her mind.

LINDA  
So what else did you do today?

STAN  
Tried watching a little television  
but nothing made sense. Funny, I  
use to love television but I hate  
it now.

Kathleen enters the room and takes a seat at the table.

KATHLEEN  
Hey guys.

Kathleen gives Stan a brief, nervous smile and quickly turns  
her attention to Linda.

KATHLEEN (CONT'D)  
Mom, the teacher gave me good  
comments on my child development  
paper; thanks for all your help.

Linda looks over her shoulder at Kathleen and smiles.

LINDA  
Aw, you're welcome honey. I'm glad  
your teacher liked your paper.

Stan sits and listens and begins to fidget. Moments later  
Eric bounds down the stairs and enters the kitchen while  
listening to his iPod.

ERIC

Hey guys.

Eric leans against the wall and fiddles with the player.

STAN

What you got there Eric?

Stan reaches for the iPod.

ERIC

What Dad?

Eric holds out his hands and glances around his body.

STAN

That, that there; where'd you get  
it?

Stan gestures toward the player.

ERIC

You're kidding me, right Dad.

Eric looks at his mother and shakes his head.

ERIC (CONT'D)

Mom bought it for my birthday three  
months ago.

Kathleen turns in her chair and watches them.

KATHLEEN

Yeah Dad, and you bought him those  
in-ear speakers; don't you  
remember?

Kathleen and Eric look at their mother with sad, frightened expressions. Linda turns back to the stove and begins moving the food back and forth in the pan distractedly.

FADE OUT.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Linda is cooking breakfast and dressed casually in a grey sweat shirt and pants. On the windows and doors are various Thanksgiving decorations slightly obscured by condensation. The doorbell rings and Linda answers it. When she opens the door, she finds a telegram messenger.

## TELEGRAM MESSENGER

Hello ma'am, I have a telegram for a Mister Stanley Harper; can you sign for it?

LINDA

Sure, thanks.

Linda signs for the message and opens the envelope.

LINDA (CONT'D)

(quietly to herself)

Remember, put the jacket in the cylinder before you turn out the lights. What on earth does that mean?

Linda can hear Stan's heavy footsteps as he descends the stairs.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Stan! Stan can you come here for a moment, I want to talk to you!

As Stan enters the kitchen, she turns to him perplexed and holds the telegram out in front of her.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Stan, what does this mean and who sent it to you?

Stan takes the message and reads it as he struggles to hide the look of guilt on his face.

STAN

Oh, it must be some kind of joke.

Stan manages a crooked smile as he tucks it into the pocket of his robe.

STAN (CONT'D)

You read it Linda, did it make sense to you?

LINDA

No it didn't Stan but who would send it to you, even as a joke?

STAN

I don't know honey; it's probably just a prank. I'll throw it away and we'll forget about it.

INT. DEN - EVENING

Stan and Eric sit on the sofa watching a movie on a large plasma television. Linda sits in a quaint rocking chair with Kathleen at her feet. Eric turns from the movie and looks at his father.

ERIC

Dad, what does the phrase, full metal jacket mean?

Stan glances over toward Linda and Kathleen who are absorbed in their conversation. He leans in closer to Eric and whispers.

STAN

Jacket describes the metal casing around a bullet. Originally, they put jackets around lead bullet because the new gunpowder shot the bullets so fast that the lead would melt in the barrels. Military bullets are full metal jacketed, which means the whole bullet is encased in metal.

Stan glances over to Linda and Kathleen again, then turns back to Eric.

STAN (CONT'D)

The movies don't really show it but, when you're hit by one of those 225 M-16 jacketed bullets, turn out the lights, it's over for you.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Linda is still dressed in her robe and slippers as she finishes preparing her breakfast and sips a cup of coffee. She moves to the refrigerator, opens it and reaches for a container of orange juice. As she does, she spots three rectangular white shapes on the bottom rack beneath a gallon of milk. She picks them up and sees that they are a utility bill and two credit card statements.

LINDA

(groans)

Damn it; these are two weeks old!  
Stan!

Linda slams the refrigerator door.

INT. DEN - MOMENTS LATER

Linda sits down at the roll top desk, opens it and scans the inside.

LINDA  
Okay, so where did you put the  
checkbook?

Linda feels around in the back of the desk and finds a stack of envelopes tied with a rubber band. She pulls them out, removes the top one and reads through it.

LINDA (CONT'D)  
Remember, put the jacket ... wait,  
this is the same telegram Stan  
received two months ago.

Linda thumbs through the others and finds they are all the same.

LINDA (CONT'D)  
(yelling)  
Stan!

Linda stares at the letters as tears well up in her eyes. She is about to yell Stan's name again when he appears in the doorway of the den.

STAN  
Linda, what is it; are you okay?

Linda holds the messages in Stan's face as her hand trembles.

LINDA  
Stan, please tell me what is going  
on here!

Stan stares blankly at the envelopes.

STAN  
What do you mean?

Linda shakes the messages in front of him.

LINDA  
(nearly hysterical)  
These! You said the telegram was  
just a prank; that you were going  
to throw it away and now I find all  
of these. Stanley, how do you  
explain these?

Stan takes one of the telegrams and reads it through carefully. After reading it a second time he looks at Linda with genuine confusion.

STAN

Linda, I have no idea what this is about or what it means. It makes absolutely no sense to me.

THE END