

I'LL BE HOME TONIGHT

screenplay by Juliana Byers

Character List

(in order of appearance)

Sarah, Verity's girlfriend

Lieutenant Verity Walther-Odell, a US Airforce pilot

Colonel James, Verity's superior officer

General Grant, a senior Airforce commander

Lead Investigator, an air crash investigator from the NTSB

Australian Investigator, an air crash investigator from the CASA

Australian Ambassador, senior diplomat

Aide, staffer at the Australian Embassy

Australian Consul General, mid-ranking diplomat

Oscar, the consul general's private secretary

Learjet Pilot, the consul general's pilot

Learjet First Officer, his first officer

INT. SARAH'S KITCHEN, MORNING - PRESENT DAY

A coffee pot is bubbling and a piece of toast pops up. A woman's hand pours coffee then picks up the toast and butters it, before she is eventually revealed in full. She is wearing a dressing gown and looks depressed and unrested. She is SARAH. She picks up the coffee cup and brings it up to her lips. Overhead, there is a roar of a plane passing over; Sarah jumps and drops the coffee cup, causing it to smash all over the floor. She looks at the pieces and starts to cry, while the plane continues to pass overhead.

CUT TO:

INT. AN OFFICE IN A MILITARY AIRBASE, DAY - SIX WEEKS AGO

The sound of the plane overhead continues then slowly fades. In a small, portable office, a woman in an air force uniform is standing at ease in front of a desk. Behind the desk is an older man with greying hair, also in uniform. The woman is LIEUTENANT VERITY WALTHER-ODELL; the older man is COLONEL JAMES.

LT. VERITY WALTHER ODELL

So just the cargo to Wilson Airbase then flying back?

COL. JAMES

That's right.

VERITY

Very good, sir. Is there a co-pilot lined up?

COL. JAMES

Unfortunately not. You have solo flight training, don't you?

VERITY

Yes sir, but a Globemaster's a beast to fly solo.

COL. James

Given the short distance it's not viable to give you a co-pilot.

VERITY

I understand, sir.

COL. JAMES

That'll be all, Lieutenant.

Verity salutes and Colonel James dismisses her from his office.

CUT TO:

INT. COCKPIT US AIRFORCE FLIGHT 9320, DAY

Verity is sitting in the cockpit of the plane, completing a pre-flight checklist and setting the controls as she goes. The plane is being loaded by a logistics team off-screen.

VERITY

(to herself)

Radio... set. Gear... locked. Altimeter at 37,000 feet...

A radio in the cockpit crackles and the voice of the LOGISTICS MAN comes over a loud-speaker.

LOGISTICS MAN

(through loudspeaker)

We're all finished here, ma'am; you're good to go.

Verity presses a button to respond.

VERITY

Copy that. Thank you.

Verity presses a button to close the cargo door. As it closes, she takes out her phone and makes a call. It goes to message bank.

VERITY

(leaving a message)

Hey, it's me. I'm so sorry; the bastards need me to fly - I'm literally about to take off - so I'm gonna be late, but I'll be home tonight, I promise. I love you.

Verity puts her phones away before putting on a headset and her seatbelt.

VERITY

Control Tower, this is US Airforce Nine-Three-Two-Zero requesting take-off clearance. Over.

CONTROL TOWER

(off-screen voice; through headset)

Roger, Flight Nine-Three-Two-Zero. You are cleared for take-off, taxi on runway bravo seven.

CUT TO:

EXT. MILITARY AIRBASE, DAY

The C-17 Globemaster taxis down the runway before taking off into a blue sky, studded with cloud banks.

INT. COCKPIT US AIRFORCE FLIGHT 9320, DAY

Verity is in the cockpit. The auto-pilot is flying the plane and she is looking at a weather radar.

VERITY

(over radio)

Wilson Control Tower, this is US Airforce Nine-Three-Two-Zero, requesting weather and ATC check.

WILSON CONTROL TOWER

(off-screen voice; through headset)

Roger, Nine-Three-Two-Zero; weather in Wilson is calm, with winds just above ten knots and clear skies all the way.

VERITY

(over radio)

Copy, Wilson. Requesting - Holy shit! Where'd you come from?!

Verity releases the communication button on her headset and pulls hard on her yoke with both hands as another plane, a medium-sized Learjet, appears in front of her aircraft from around a large cloud bank. She pulls hard to the right.

VERITY

Come on! Come on!

As she banks, lights and alarms go off on her control panel, including the bank angle alarm.

COCKPIT WARNING SYSTEM

(automated voice)

Bank left! Bank left! Bank left!

CUT TO:

EXT. THE SKY, DAY

The two planes collide. The left wing of the C-17 Globemaster hits the Learjet and it is torn off, while the Learjet's tail section is ripped clear. Both planes careen towards the ground in opposite directions. The C-17 begins to roll steeply to the right.

CUT TO:

INT. COCKPIT US AIRFORCE FLIGHT 9320, DAY

Inside the cockpit of the C-17 Globemaster, Verity is fighting for control and multiple alarms are going off as the plane rolls further and further right.

VERITY

Mayday! Mayday! Mayday! US Airforce Nine-Three-Two-Zero in uncontrolled descent -

The plane rolls completely to the right and begins to spiral dive towards the ground at an almost vertical angle. Verity wrestles for control.

COCKPIT WARNING SYSTEM

Terrain! Terrain! Pull up! Terrain! Terrain! Pull up!

VERITY

NO!

CUT TO:

EXT. US AIRFORCE FLIGHT 9320, DAY

The C-17 Globemaster hits the ground nose first and bursts into flames.

CUT TO:

INT. COLONEL JAMES' OFFICE, EVENING

COLONEL JAMES, GENERAL GRANT and their staff are gathered around a small television, watching live footage of the crash site. All jump when the phone rings. Grant picks it up.

GENERAL GRANT

General Grant... Yes, sir... Yes, it was ours... Pilot was Lieutenant Verity Walther-Odell... No, sir... Yes, I understand that sir, but... What?... Fuck!... Yes, sorry sir... Right away.

Thank you sir.

Grant hangs up the phone.

GENERAL GRANT

We got a shit show on the way; that plane she hit, the Australian Consul-General was on board.

CUT TO:

INT. National Transportation Safety Board Meeting Room, DAY

A team of investigators are gathered around a table with small models of the planes; they are listening to the cockpit voice recording from the C-17. The LEAD INVESTIGATOR is from the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), AUSTRALIAN INVESTIGATOR is from the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) and Major General Grant is the Military Investigator.

WILSON CONTROL TOWER

(on the CVR)

...weather in Wilson is calm, with winds just above ten knots and clear skies all the way.

VERITY

(on the CVR)

Copy, Wilson. Requesting - Holy shit! Where'd you come from?! Come on! Come on!

Investigators continue to listen until the recording stops at the sound of impact and Lead Investigator turns off the tape.

LEAD INVESTIGATOR

She didn't even see him until she was on top of him. How's that possible?

AUSTRALIAN INVESTIGATOR

You heard the tape! She didn't wait for traffic clearance - she interrupted the controller after she got the forecast.

GENERAL GRANT

She didn't interrupt, she acknowledged the message. She was requesting traffic clearance when they collided -

AUSTRALIAN INVESTIGATOR

We don't know what she was requesting!

GENERAL GRANT

What else could it have been?!

AUSTRALIAN INVESTIGATOR

Could have been anything. If she'd let ATC finish, they would have told her to steer clear of our plane.

GENERAL GRANT

What about your pilot? Walther-Odell's direct superior is a good friend of mine: he says, if anything, your guy would have hit her.

LEAD INVESTIGATOR

At this stage, General, it looks as if the Globemaster hit the Learjet, but we're all keeping an open mind.

AUSTRALIAN INVESTIGATOR

Our Consul-General was on board that plane: the pilot's not going to be taking stupid risks. And, General, let's be honest, how could anybody miss a whacking-great Globemaster?!

GENERAL GRANT

I just want to be sure everyone is keeping an open mind.

LEAD INVESTIGATOR

This isn't personal, General; we all have a major stake in this. I suggest we all take a breath and start with the facts.

The investigators agree and return to the CVR, their charts and the models of the planes.

CUT TO:

INT. A MILITARY AIRBASE, EVENING

Colonel James is sitting in his office, pouring over charts and looking at a printout of the CVR from the C-17 Globemaster. There is a knock at his door and General Grant enters.

GENERAL GRANT

I knew you'd still be at it.

He sits down opposite the Colonel's desk without invitation.

GENERAL GRANT

Don't you think it's time to let it go?

COLONEL JAMES

Lieutenant Walther-Odell did not hit that plane.

GENERAL GRANT

I'm sorry, Arthur, but she did. I've spent six weeks trying to find another explanation, but there isn't one. It's all on the CVR: she didn't give ATC a chance to give her a traffic report -

COLONEL JAMES

If she hit them, I'm Osama bin Laden!

GENERAL GRANT
(trying to joke)

Well, I better let the S.E.A.Ls know where to look.

COLONEL JAMES
Fuck you.

GENERAL GRANT
(seriously)

You need to stop, Arthur. Unless you have some evidence, you need to let. It. Go.

General Grant leaves. Colonel James gives the finger to his back and then returns to the papers he has been examining. After several minutes, he makes a phone call.

COLONEL JAMES

Good evening, I'm sorry to call so late. I'm part of the team investigating the mid-air collision that happened about six weeks ago... Yes, that's right. Do you have a printout of Learjet's flight paths and black box recording? Unfortunately it was misplaced... I agree, but if you could check... Yes, I can hold... Wonderful...! Yes, thank you; you too. Have a good evening.

Colonel James hangs up the phone, minutes later a fax machine whirs and a copy of the Learjet's black box recording and flight path comes through. Colonel James picks it up before returning to his desk and putting all the papers side-by-side on the table.

COLONEL JAMES

Alright Walther-Odell, talk to me. What really happened up there?

Colonel James continues examining the charts and comparing them with printouts of the CVR recordings before he suddenly sits back in his chair.

COLONEL JAMES
Shit.

CUT TO:

EXT. AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY, DAY

AUSTRALIAN AMBASSADOR, Australian Investigator and Lead Investigator are holding a press-conference. The Australian Ambassador is mid-way through his speech.

AUSTRALIAN AMBASSADOR

... to lose a friend and colleague, especially one as experienced and valued as Consul Keegan was, is a simply incomprehensible tragedy...

While he is still speaking, AIDE hurries out. He taps Australian Ambassador on the shoulder. Australian Ambassador turns to Aide, who hands him a piece of paper. Australian Ambassador looks at the paper, gives an exclamation and leaves the podium without comment. Lead Investigator and Australian Investigator watch him go, as does the press pack. Aide steps quickly up to the microphone.

AIDE

I'm so sorry to cut this short, ladies and gentlemen, but we have recently been made aware of new developments in this case and the Australian Government will not be commenting further. Thank you for your time this morning.

Aide steps away from the podium and the reporters begin to shout. He ignores them.

AIDE

(to Lead Investigator and Australian Investigator)
You two had better come with me, the Pentagon just called.

CUT TO:

INT. AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY MEETING ROOM - DAY

Australian Ambassador, Australian Investigator, Lead Investigator, General Grant and Colonel James are gathered around a table in a meeting room. On the table are the charts Colonel James was comparing the night before, along with two copies of the CVR recording from the Learjet.

AUSTRALIAN AMBASSADOR

Does someone want to tell me what I'm looking at?!

COLONEL JAMES

Certainly, Mr. Ambassador. This is the transcript from the Learjet's CVR that your investigator provided six weeks ago -

Colonel James points at one of the pieces of paper.

COLONEL JAMES

- and this is the actual transcript of the recording, before it was doctored.

He points at the second transcript.

Lead Investigator
What the hell?!

COLONEL JAMES
Next to that, we have charts showing the flight paths the Learjet
and the Globemaster were directed to follow -

Colonel James points to highlights on the aviation charts.

COLONEL JAMES
- and their actual flight paths on the day of the collision.

Colonel James indicates another highlighted area, showing that the
Learjet was off course when it hit the Globemaster.

AUSTRALIAN AMBASSADOR
(to Australian Investigator)
Did you know about this?

AUSTRALIAN INVESTIGATOR
I... I...

LEAD INVESTIGATOR
(interrupts)
I've never seen these charts before. Why weren't they provided to
our investigation?

AUSTRALIAN INVESTIGATOR
Diplomatic flights sometimes have to change route for security
reasons -

LEAD INVESTIGATOR
(looking at the flight chart)
Look at this! He turned left! Why the hell did he turn left?

Lead Investigator looks at the two copies of the CVR transcript
and then back up at Australian Investigator.

LEAD INVESTIGATOR
You bastard!

Australian Investigator swallows.

CUT TO:

INT. AUSTRALIAN LEARJET, DAY - SIX WEEKS AGO

The AUSTRALIAN CONSUL-GENERAL, his private secretary OSCAR and other staff are in the interior of the Learjet. The Australian Consul-General speaks to Oscar, who nods and walks to the front of the plane. He enters the cockpit to speak to LEARJET PILOT and LEARJET FIRST OFFICER.

OSCAR

We're already fifteen minutes behind schedule.

Learjet Pilot rolls his eyes and exchanges a look with Learjet First Officer.

LEARJET PILOT

I'll have you on the ground as soon as I can, sir. Now I'm going to have to ask you to leave the cockpit.

Oscar snorts but exits the cockpit.

LEARJET FIRST OFFICER

(looking at an aviation chart)

We could cut off some time if we took a left, caught some of that tailwind Pan Am 246 was harping on about earlier.

LEARJET PILOT

That's not a bad idea.

Learjet Pilot begins to turn to the left.

LEARJET PILOT

Wilson Control Tower, this is Learjet Two-Four -

LEARJET FIRST OFFICER

Oh hell!

Learjet Pilot looks as they come through a cloud bank and sees the C-17 bearing down on them. He tries to go under the larger plane, but does not dive fast enough. Alarms begin to sound in the cockpit and the occupants of the plane begin to scream.

CUT TO:

INT. AUSTRALIAN EMBASSY - PRESENT DAY

Everyone in the room is looking at Australian Investigator. There is a long silence.

AUSTRALIAN AMBASSADOR

What have you done?

AUSTRALIAN INVESTIGATOR

I was just trying to protect our people.

COLONEL JAMES

Your people? What about my pilot?!

AUSTRALIAN INVESTIGATOR

I... I really... I don't...

Colonel James gets up and leaves, followed by General Grant.

CUT TO:

INT. COLONEL JAMES'S OFFICE - LATE AFTERNOON

Colonel James and General Grant are sitting together in the office; both have a glass of whiskey.

GENERAL GRANT

You were right, Arthur. I'm sorry I missed it for so long.

COLONEL JAMES

To be fair, Lucas, I don't think anyone expected the Australians to go as far as they did.

GENERAL GRANT

Doctoring the CVR, withholding flight charts... Unbelievable conduct.

COLONEL JAMES

At least it's over now.

Colonel James raises his glass.

COLONEL JAMES

To the memory of Lieutenant Verity Walther-Odell, an excellent pilot. May she rest in peace.

Both men drink.

CUT TO:

INT. SARAH'S KITCHEN, MORNING - PRESENT DAY

The sound of the plane is slowly fading away. Sarah is standing in her kitchen, leaning against her bench and breathing hard and still crying. The smashed coffee cup is still on the floor and the plate of toast is sitting untouched nearby. Sarah fumbles in the pocket of her dressing gown and pulls out her phone. She opens her message bank and clicks on a saved message, before putting the phone up to her ear.

VERITY

(through the phone)

Hey, it's me. I'm so sorry; the bastards need me to fly - I'm literally about to take off - so I'm gonna be late, but I'll be home tonight, I promise. I love you.

SARAH

(crying)

I love you too.

END