

Deleted Scenes from *Windup*  
by Brooke Shaffer

Scene 1:

Walter Visits Ernie

Original Chapter: 14. Back to Work

As expected, his cake was gone, and Walter was momentarily distracted from his mental self-flagellation by the disgust that someone would literally steal food that someone else had been eating off of, not knowing if that person had been sick or had some other transmissible disease. Still, he dumped his coffee and washed out the mug before leaving the break room. He started toward the door leading back out front, then paused and thought better of it. Instead, he hung a left and went out the back door, crossing the dreary, slushy lot and ducking into the relative warmth of the tactical warehouse where Ernie's heater faithfully chugged away.

"Walter!" the old veteran cried, awkwardly jumping up from his seat on two prosthetic legs, and shuffling over to embrace him, slap him on the back, and step back before Walter had a chance to react. "Hot damn, son, I never thought I'd be so glad to see you."

"Please, Ernie, I'm almost sixty. Hardly a son."

"You're almost young enough to be my son, Walt, so deal with it."

"And I thought you enjoyed my visits."

Ernie laughed and patted him gently on the shoulder, making his way back to his seat where he kept meticulous records of every piece in the warehouse. "I do, Walter. I do. It's just that most of the time the only reason you come out here is because you're going off on some dangerous mission. No one ever comes to just say hi. Oh, they might greet me in the break room or if I'm on my way to the john, but who takes the time to cross the parking lot and just say hi to old Ernie?"

"Well, I did today."

"And I appreciate that, Walter, very much." Ernie leaned back in his chair and Walter took the chair across from him at his desk. "Rumor is, good Lord must like you. I see now those rumors were true. You healing up all right? If I recall, this is the first time you've been injured on the job ever, be it paper cut or bullet hole."

"Oh, I've had plenty of paper cuts, believe me. As for the first time being hurt, well the same Lord that kept me safe this whole time evidently realized I hadn't had my fair share of humble pie recently."

Ernie nodded gravely. "Lord do as the Lord do, and He teaches us only what we need to learn."

"Well, I've learned that bullets hurt."

The veteran laughed aloud at that and said, "That they do, but probably not as much as bombs and grenades."

"I have no intentions of going that far. That's what Bomb Squad like you is for."

"Throw me under the bus, why don't you?"

"Nah, I'll throw you on top of it. Worked for you once, why ruin a good thing?"

The two old men laughed and then fell silent for a long minute.

"How's your boy doing?" Ernie asked.

Walter sighed. "He lost part of his hearing and needs hearing aids now. Doesn't want to go back to school."

Ernie nodded again. "A boy his age, he ought to be invincible. Nothing worse than showing him he's not, at least in this way."

"Yeah. But he's getting better. I think once life starts rolling again, he'll come back around."

"You're both walking fine lines, Walter. Get help for yourself; I know Greg is going to make you. Get help for your boy, too, if he needs it. And I'll tell you a secret: he needs it."

"No secret to me. But for now, I think I'll give him a little room to breathe and find his own feet."

Maybe he'll come forward on his own without needing to be pushed.”

“Now you don't really believe that, do you?”

Walter frowned and looked away. “No, I guess I don't. But all the same, he needs some breathing room while the world stops spinning out of control and settles down.”

“Well, I won't disagree with you there.” Ernie chuckled. “Fine conversation this has turned out to be. I think I might know why the guys don't come out and visit.”

“I think I have an idea.”

“Tell me what else has been going on, Walt. What mischief are you going to get into while you're off?”

“Mischief, hardly.”

They chatted for a good half hour before Walter proclaimed himself too stiff to be able to sit down anymore. Ernie agreed, saying he had to get back to work himself. There was some ribbing, then Walter headed out, the sudden blast of cold air outside doing nothing for him in the sixty seconds it took to cross the lot back to the building. Again, he was ready to head out, but this time made a detour to Standish's cubicle. As usual, the poor guy just couldn't catch a break as he tossed away pen after pen, each one drying up in his hands.

“I'm heading out,” Walter said.

Standish looked up, apparently startled in his attempt to find just one working pen. “Yeah? You coming back?”

“Eventually, once I get rid of this thing.” He indicated the cane.

Standish stood and took Walter in a much gentler bro-hug. “Hey, man, I'm glad you're okay and your son's okay. You need anything, just let me know. You got that?”

“Yes sir.” Walter gave a mock salute and turned to leave.