WILL: Don't you think it's good?
FRAN: Yes, of course I do. But I wanted to know what you thought about it.
WILL: I kind of already put what I thought in my paper. Did you like the paper?
FRAN: Yes, it was good.
WILL: What makes it good?
(FRAN suddenly realizes that WILL is making fun of her. SHE shoots him a quick glance but we can see her stifle any further reaction. SHE turns her attention to the stack of papers on her desk, shuffles through them, and extracts WILL's essay.)
FRAN: The title is "Trauma and Disassociation..."
WILL: "...on the Western Front." Yeah.
FRAN: Interesting title.
WILL: (Shrugs.) I thought it fit.
FRAN: You thought it fit because...?
WILL: Because it's about trauma and disassociation?
FRAN: I haven't ever heard you use those words in class. Or anybody.
WILL: Well, nobody would use those words in class.
FRAN: In fact, you've missed rather a lot of classes.
(WILL shrugs. Pause.)
WILL: You said you wanted to talk to me about the paper.
(FRAN studies the paper for a moment, glances quickly at WILL, sighs, and adopts a peppy tone.)
FRAN: Let's go through some of this together, shall we? Could you read...?
(WILL hands the paper to WILL and points to the opening sentence. WILL reads.)
WILL: "Shells fall around you, they scream through every fragment of your soul. The only reason you can even move is because you're fighting for your life in the dirt."
(WILL stops and looks up quizzically.)
FRAN: That's good. Keep going.
WILL: You circled you in red. And your...
FRAN: Oh. Because in the guidelines for the essay, I said not to use the second person. The second person is when you—

WILL: Yes, I know, it's when you use you. But how else could I say it without using you?

FRAN: Well. You could say Paul: "The only reason Paul can even move is because he is fighting..."

WILL: But I don't just mean Paul. I mean anybody. I want it to be like you're there,

FRAN: Oh. Well, you could say...uh, no. Well...I suppose maybe that's the exception, I guess, that proves the rule. (Pause.) Let's go on....Here, this paragraph...

(FRAN points to a line on the paper and WILL reads.)

WILL: "War consumes Paul to the point where he is disassociated from his past, present, and future. He lives in utter isolation, with only the Front as a constant."

FRAN: "War consumes Paul to the point where he is disassociated from his past, present, and future?"

WILL: Yeah.

FRAN: Could you explain how you arrived at that analysis?

WILL: How I arrived at it?

FRAN: The ideas. Where did they come from?

WILL: From reading the book?

FRAN: And anywhere else?

WILL: From thinking about it?

FRAN: (Pause.) How about these particular words: consumes...disassociated...

WILL: I was going to say, "War eats Paul up," but I thought consumes sounded better.

FRAN: (Pause.) Well, yes, it does. That's true. And disassociated?

WILL: My dad uses that word a lot. He works with Vietnam vets.

FRAN: Oh, I see! Did he help you with this paper?

WILL: A little. He read it and circled my mistakes. Like he usually does. But then he makes me correct them on my own.

(Pause. FRAN looks at WILL, then down at the paper.)

FRAN: To be honest—

WILL: You don't think I wrote the paper.

FRAN: I didn't say that. Maybe you had some inappropriate help or...

WILL: I wrote the paper by myself. Yeah, my dad proofread it. But it's my ideas. My words.

FRAN: I'm not accusing... I'm just trying to understand. There's an inconsistency between the way you talk in class and the way you write....

WILL: Yeah, I know that. I don't talk the way I write. Does anybody?

FRAN: It's not only that. I looked up your STAR reports from last year, and your writing score—

WILL: I hate those tests! Before you even get to the test part, they ask you for your race and your parents' income and how many years they've gone to school and your student ID number and what language you speak at home and, I dunno, what kind of breakfast cereal you ate this morning, and by the time I get to the real questions, my brain is boiling, and I just stare at the words and read them again and again.

(Silence. FRAN looks at WILL directly and openly for the first time in their conversation.)

FRAN: Will, I'm sorry, I—

(WILL stands up.)

WILL: I enjoyed reading All Quiet on the Western Front, and I even enjoyed writing the paper. And I don't care what grade I got on it. I don't cheat. And I could speak the way I write, if I chose to do so. But I prefer to talk the way everybody else does. So, thank you, Ms. Peterson, for the informative conversation. And have a nice day.

(WILL goes to her and walks away. FRAN stands up hurriedly to follow him.)

FRAN: Will, wait, please. I apologize....Can we talk...?

(WILL leaves the room, closing the door firmly behind him, but not slamming it. FRAN walks.)

FRAN: Shit.