

Undiscovered Places

A drama by

D. Richard Tucker

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Undiscovered Places

By D. Richard Tucker

Synopsis: Dan struggles to deal with his wife Greta's grief over losing her only son. Having never had children, Dan begins to question his life, when an ex-girlfriend shows up and tells him that he's the father of her twenty-eight year old daughter. Dan tries to become a part of her life, in an attempt to make up for lost time and create the father-child bond he never knew he wanted.

CAST

DAN Morris, M, 49

GRETA Morris, F, 42, his wife

THE BOY, M, late teens, GRETA's dead child

CANDICE Anderson, F, 48, DAN's ex-girlfriend

JULIE Anderson, F, 28, DAN's daughter, a helicopter pilot

Time: June - September 2010

Setting: Various locations depicted by one or two pieces of furniture.

Act I

Scene 1

The stage is almost bare. Occasional pieces of furniture are used to differentiate locations. Lights up on a kitchen table, where GRETA is seated. Pressed against her chest is a picture frame, turned toward her body so we cannot see the picture. On the table is a small vase of fresh flowers and a cereal bowl full of Froot Loops. GRETA stares into the distance, deep in thought, cutting herself off from the world in an attempt to be close to her dead son, bathing in the memories of his life and the sorrow of his loss. She is not weepy, but sad, almost cold in her grief. After a moment she gazes at the flowers, stares at them for a moment and looks away. GRETA then places the picture frame on the table, face down, and slowly and methodically removes the flowers from the vase, two or three at a time, rips them apart with her hands and tosses the broken stems and petals on the floor. After two or three handfuls, she winces and buries her head in her hands. SOUND: Door opening and closing.

Greta?

DAN (offstage)

DAN enters, returning from work. GRETA is cold and aloof and does not respond.

DAN (cont'd)

Ready to go?

(pause)

Sorry, I'm running a little late. Our reservation is for six.

(pause)

Flowers? Where did we get-

GRETA

My mom sent them.

DAN

(noticing those scattered on the floor)
Umm....what happened?

GRETA

Nothing.

DAN

You got my message, right? About dinner? That new Italian place on Madison?

GRETA

I got it.

DAN

I thought you'd be ready by now. What happened here – this is ..um... What's with the mess?

(pause, getting no response)

Greta, what's.....?

(noticing the picture on the table)

Oh..... It's today isn't it?

GRETA nods.

DAN (cont'd)

Umm...sorry....I forgot...umm, I'm sorry. June twenty-second.....

(pause)

Is that why....umm, is that why your mom sent the flowers?

GRETA nods. DAN now becomes cautious, as if stepping on eggshells. He has seen this side of GRETA before and is wary of her response. He wants to help, but is careful, afraid of saying the wrong thing and pushing her away.

DAN (cont'd)

I'm sorry.

GRETA

Forget it.

DAN

You don't want to go out?

GRETA shakes her head.

DAN (cont'd)

I should have known...I should have... ..June 22nd. I'm sorry.

GRETA
Forget it.

Awkward pause as DAN contemplates what to do next.

DAN
You sure you don't want to go out, maybe grab –

GRETA
I already ate.

DAN
Already? You ate....oh.... Froot Loops?

GRETA
Yeah.

DAN
Oh.
(pause)
I mean, we don't have to go for Italian-

GRETA
I don't want to go out, Dan. I told you - I already ate.

DAN
Yeah, but Froot Loops is hardly a meal...and it might help take your mind off-

GRETA
I don't want to take my mind off it, Dan. And I can't, even if I wanted to.

DAN
Don't you want something, a little more substantial than, you know, Froot Loo-

GRETA
It's not about nourishment, Dan. It was his favorite.

DAN
Right.

DAN starts picking up the flowers.

GRETA
Just leave them there.

DAN stops and stands there awkwardly.

DAN

(pause)

Did you call one of the girls ...from your little group.

GRETA

It sounds really condescending when you say it like that.

DAN

Sorry.

DAN (cont'd)

(pause)

Did you -

GRETA

I talked to Sheila.

DAN

And...?

GRETA

What difference does it make?

DAN

Did she know of some way to take your mind off-

GRETA

You don't just push it aside and think about something else.

DAN

I just thought-

GRETA

It's always there, Dan, even in your sleep, and you just pray that you don't dream about it because it'll probably be a nightmare, and you don't want it to be a sweet dream, because you know that waking up will only be more painful when it's over.

DAN

But if you-

GRETA

That's your answer for everything, Dan – "Take your mind off it." It doesn't work.

DAN

I just thought-

GRETA

Just leave me alone, Dan. It's not something you can fix.

DAN

Why would your mom send you flowers on-

GRETA

She doesn't understand. Why don't you go out to eat, or order a pizza or something? I'm sure you're hungry. I'm going to bed.

GRETA begins her exit.

DAN

Greta, I'm just-.

GRETA stops short, suddenly remembering.

GRETA

Oh.

(turning back to DAN)

Who's Candice?

DAN

She's an old....How did you know about-

GRETA

She left a message on the voicemail. She's meeting you at Bennigan's tomorrow at five-thirty.

DAN

She's an old friend of mine. We went to college together.

GRETA

An old girlfriend?

DAN

Yeah. I mean, I haven't seen her in thirty years. We kind of lost touch. She said she was in town and thought she'd look me up. She called at work and said she'd call back when she knew her schedule.

GRETA

Were you going to tell me?

DAN

Yeah, I was just.... trying to get through the whole thing with the.... with the flowersand Froot Loops.

DAN (cont'd)

(long pause)

Look, I'm sorry. I just...I can't understand what you're feeling. I'm not saying it's wrong –

GRETA

You better not say it's wrong.

DAN

I just don't understand it, and I thought, well, ...I'm sorry, it's just, you know, frustrating – every year, June 22nd, not to mention Christmas, Mother's Day, his birthdayI mean, when are ...when are we going to get past this?

GRETA

You don't get past it! You don't just You don't get past it.

DAN

...It's been a long time -

GRETA

Yeah, eight years is a long time - half of Scottie's life time, but there's just no..... The nurse noticed me fretting over Scottie the day we left the hospital –s he said “Take it easy – you'll be worrying about him for the rest of your life: Every time he cries, or falls down, or goes to school, or learns to drive. You'll worry when he leaves home, or gets married, or gives you grandchildren. You'll never stop worrying about him.” Then, one day, I didn't have to worry any more. It was the worst day of my life.

(pause)

It doesn't go away, Dan, even if they're out of sight, even if they're rude and insensitive, even if they die and leave you all alone in the world.

DAN

(resentfully)

You're not alone.

GRETA

(pause)

I miss him, Dan.

DAN

I know.

GRETA

I don't know what else to do.....so I stare at his photo and I try to make him feel close to me.

DAN

Do you think...maybe.....

GRETA

What?

DAN

I just...um, it seems like ...when you have these moments, you know, it's like you wrap yourself up, like you try to block everything else out.

GRETA

So?

DAN

I just think, maybe that's the problem.

GRETA

Oh, that's the problem!

DAN

No, it's just that maybe you should, you know, try to ...look outward, like Sheila, you know, maybe help somebody else instead of just dwelling on yourself. I read once that-

GRETA

Oh, that's a good idea. You know, tomorrow I'm going down to Boy's and Girls' Club and volunteer – do you think that'll work, Dan? Maybe I can overcome my grief by tutoring Algebra to somebody else's kids.

DAN

Do you ...really think-

GRETA

It's sarcasm, Dan. You can't design a solution for every problem. Life isn't some neat little formula with the appropriate applications. Life is ugly and disorganized, Dan – get used to it.

DAN

I'm sorry. I understand.

GRETA

No, you don't.

DAN

You're right, I don't. I don't know what it's like to lose a child. I don't know what it's like to have a child. I have no frame of reference, Greta, I just know I love you and you're hurting and I wish I could do something about that, but you won't let me.

GRETA

You can't make everything better. You can't fix this, so stop trying.

DAN

I just don't know what else to do. I try to support you, but-

GRETA

This thing with Candice – is there anything you want to tell me?

DAN

I've told you everything I know. I'm not really sure...you know, what she wants. I mean, I haven't even seen her since the eighties.

GRETA

I'm going to bed.

DAN

Okay.

GRETA exits and DAN picks up the remaining flowers and sits. THE BOY, sixteen years old, enters dressed in a t-shirt and jeans, and sits down with DAN, who is preoccupied with his own thoughts.

THE BOY

(dabbling with the flower stems)

That time of year again?

DAN

Yeah.

THE BOY

It must be tough, huh? Dealing with all that baggage – even though none of it is yours.

DAN

Maybe that's the problem.

THE BOY

How's that?

DAN

If it were my baggage, I might know how to deal with it.

THE BOY

You didn't expect this when you two got married, did you?

DAN

I figured it would change – eventually.

THE BOY

But it didn't. You try to be supportive, say the right things, do the right things....and for all you know, it's never going to get better.

DAN

That's what love is, right?

THE BOY

Dude. You sound like a Hallmark card.....or one of those Mormon commercials.
(pause)

Ooooo, I bet you're having those nagging thoughts now aren't you?

DAN

No.

THE BOY

You're wondering if you screwed up by not having kids, right?

DAN

I don't want kids.

THE BOY

Really?

DAN

Maybe a long time ago.

THE BOY

Still mad at Candice?

DAN

No. I mean...if Candice and I had been together, I never would have met Greta.

THE BOY

So it worked out after all.

DAN

Yeah.

THE BOY

So you're not pissed at Candice for dumping you?
(pause)

For ruining all your plans for a family and living happily ever after?

DAN

I could have had a family if I wanted.

THE BOY

Then what are those second thoughts about?

DAN

I don't have-

THE BOY

Yes, you do.

DAN

It's just....I don't know.

THE BOY

You mean, what - you're almost fifty? Starting to wonder if you've missed out on something?

DAN

Maybe.

THE BOY

There are other important things – lots of people don't have kids.

DAN

It means a lot to some people...like your mom.

THE BOY

Different story, dude. Losing a kid is wicked stuff - some people never get over it.

DAN

I can't relate to what she feels, so I figure there must be something wrong with me.

THE BOY

You mean, like, being a dad is a part of being a man, an adult? And since you aren't a dad, you're really not much more than an overgrown teenager?

DAN

That's an ugly way to put it.

(pause)

She really misses you.

THE BOY

She hasn't been the same. Totally wrecked her marriage.

DAN

(pause)
How did your dad deal with it?

THE BOY

What?

DAN

How did your dad deal with losing a kid – losing you?

THE BOY

How would I know?

DAN

He's your dad.

THE BOY

(pause while staring at DAN)
You know I don't exist, right?

DAN

...yeah.

THE BOY

You know I'm not real. Please, Dan, tell me you know that I'm totally imaginary.

DAN

Yeah, I know.

THE BOY

I mean, it's crazy enough that you sit here talking to yourself, but if you think that you're actually conversing with your wife's dead son, then, dude – you need some help.

DAN

I know.....I know.

THE BOY

What now?

DAN

(collecting the flowers)
I guess I'll throw these in the trash.

THE BOY

Not the trash, dude – the compost.

DAN gives THE BOY a look and then exits
as the lights fade out.

Scene 2

Lights up on CANDICE, sitting at a bistro table, representing Bennigan's bar. CANDICE is checking her text messages on her phone. DAN enters, carrying two beers, places them on the table, and sits.

Coors okay?

DAN

As long as it's light.

CANDICE

So do you get out here much?

DAN

My first time – we just signed two new clients and the boss wanted me to get some face time with them.

CANDICE

What was it you-

DAN

Medical equipment.

CANDICE

Right. That's a great industry.

DAN

I like it.

CANDICE

(pause)

DAN

You're.... looking well.

CANDICE

You are too, Dan.

DAN

You're still just as pretty as I remember you.

CANDICE

Thanks.

DAN

I was really surprised to get your call.

CANDICE

Yeah, I'm sure you didn't expect to see me.

DAN

No. What, umm.....just what made you decide...to call?

CANDICE

I don't know... happenstance. It just turned out this way.

DAN

(pause)

Look, I feel like...um...this is kind of awkward, but I was thinking about it and I still haven't figured out what happened.

CANDICE

You mean after sophomore year?

DAN

Yeah.

CANDICE

We .. uh...had some family issues. My parents couldn't afford the tuition any more so I dropped out.

DAN

But I never heard from you again.

CANDICE

I know, I just...well, I was kind of embarrassed by the whole thing. I was young and immature and didn't know how to deal with it.

DAN

You didn't respond to any of my letters.

CANDICE

I feel bad about that, but - I'm sorry, Dan, I was just young and selfish.

DAN

I didn't expect to see you again.

CANDICE

I know. It's been a long time.

DAN

So. How have you been?

CANDICE

I'm doing well. I had no idea it would be this tough getting older. So many things that we took for granted as kids. At least I haven't started replacing joints yet.

DAN

Hopefully you won't have to.

CANDICE

How about you? How's Father Time been treating you?

DAN

I guess I'm doing okay.

CANDICE

Not even high blood pressure? I have to watch my sodium intake at every turn.

DAN

No, I guess I've been lucky.

CANDICE

And your parents? Are they okay?

DAN

Yeah, they're doing alright. Dad had surgery.... For a polyp on his colon, but he came through just fine. I'm sorry, that's probably not appropriate to share, I just-

CANDICE

Don't worry, I'm in the business, I hear it all the time. I see so many issues with people aging.....I'm glad you're in good health.

DAN

Yeah, Greta is a stickler for balanced meals.

CANDICE

How long have you two been together?

DAN

Oh....just over three years now.

CANDICE

Is she your first?

DAN

First wife? Yeah, I guess I waited a while. What about you? Married?

CANDICE

No. I never did.

DAN
Really?

CANDICE
Any kids?

DAN
No. Greta has a son, I mean, had a son. He died before I met her.

CANDICE
I'm sorry.

DAN
Boating accident...when he was sixteen. Some guy's jet ski went out of control and collided with the boat Scottie was in. By the time they got him out of the water, he was gone.

CANDICE
I'm sorry. That must be tough.

DAN
It...yesterday was the anniversary of his death. She doesn't do too well with that.

CANDICE
That must be hard.

DAN
Holidays are kind of tough. Especially Mother's Day and the ever infamous June 22nd.

CANDICE
When he died?

DAN
Right.

CANDICE
How do you deal with that?

DAN
You just, you know – do what you can, try to be supportive. She kind of ,, , she'll eat his favorite foods – Froot Loops was a big thing with him.

CANDICE
I didn't know anybody actually ate those.

DAN
Apparently Scottie liked them.

CANDICE

I'm sorry - that was insensitive of me.

DAN

It's okay. Greta has her ups and downs. One day I came home and found she'd torn all the flowers out of the flower beds. She was angry to see them alive and blooming while her son was.....She was mad at the daffodils. Yesterday she ripped up a bouquet of flowers that her mom sent.

CANDICE

Really?

DAN

It's weird – sometimes she just has an issue with anything that's pretty, or happy. Just doesn't ...you know, I guess when you're hurting like that, it's tough to see things that remind you of...you know.

CANDICE

I lost my father two years ago. He had a stroke and passed away soon after that. It was a strange feeling to lose him, but I can't imagine losing a child.

DAN

It's been hard. I've heard so many stories about Scottie, see his photos all over the house – it's like I know him.

Awkward pause then CANDICE notices DAN staring at her, and gives him a quizzical look, but DAN keeps staring.

CANDICE

Why are you staring?

DAN

Oh...just trying to remember you...the way you used to be.

CANDICE

You mean you don't like me the way I am now?

DAN

I don't know you now. I knew you then. I thought the world of you.

CANDICE

I know.

DAN

You were the first woman I actually loved.

CANDICE
I know.

DAN
(pause)
I was just thinking...

CANDICE
Yes.

DAN
You know, we're almost fifty, and well – I was wondering, does it bug you? I mean, I can't relate to Greta, you know, about her loss....and I was just wondering if others feel the same way.

CANDICE
I suppose they do.

DAN
I'm beginning to think that maybe having kids is what makes a guy a grownup..... in which case, I guess I'm always going to be a juvenile. What about you? How do you deal with it?

CANDICE
Deal with what?

DAN
Not having kids?

CANDICE
Actually, Dan, I have a daughter.

DAN
Oh, I - um.... I didn't...you know.....

CANDICE
I didn't marry her father. I raised her myself.

DAN
Oh. That's ...um, well..... So you can probably understand Greta's feelings, you know losing a...

CANDICE
It would be the worst thing that could ever happen to me. Without Julie, I'd be lost.

DAN
That's umm...that's what I would expect.

CANDICE

Somebody said – I don't know who – they said "There are undiscovered places in your heart, that you didn't know existed until you love your child." Everything about me changed when Julie was born. I never knew I could love that much.

DAN

(pause)

What's she like?

CANDICE

She lives in Denver, too, has a great job there.

DAN

Doing what?

CANDICE

She's a helicopter pilot.

DAN

Really?

CANDICE

She works for a local radio station - that whole traffic chopper thing.

DAN

That's pretty cool, I guess. ...well.... maybe I've missed a lot of opportunities.

CANDICE

Have you?

DAN

In college, I thought you and I would be together forever - a family - the whole thing. I was pretty naïve.

CANDICE

You're a good man, Dan.

DAN

After you...um...you know - I mean.....I've always wondered, you know, if you hadn't dropped out... well....would things be different now? Better, worse, I don't know.

CANDICE

Or just different.

DAN

Yeah, maybe just different.

(pause)
So why are you here, Candice?

DAN (cont'd)

What?

CANDICE

Why did you call me?

DAN

Like I said, I was in town.

CANDICE

And you figured, "Hey, why not look up people I haven't seen in thirty years?"

DAN

Is there something wrong that?

CANDICE

That's not how your mind works - there's something you're not telling me.

DAN

There's nothing.

CANDICE

You didn't ask me out to buy you a beer for old time's sake.

DAN

I'll pay for the beer.

CANDICE

No, it's on me – but tell me why you're here.

DAN

I told you, I have bus-

CANDICE

Why did you call?

DAN

Dan....

CANDICE

Why?

DAN

(getting up to go)
It's not important.

CANDICE

DAN

It must be.

CANDICE

You don't want to know, Dan.

DAN

Yeah, I do.

CANDICE

Dan, please.

DAN

You dropped out of my life thirty years ago. I want to know why you're back.

CANDICE

Dan...

DAN

Sit down, Candice. You're not just here for a little chit chat. Why did you call?
(pause, getting no response)
Candice?

CANDICE

I told myself I wasn't going to do this.

DAN

Do what?

CANDICE

It's about Julie, my daughter.

CANDICE stares at DAN quietly as the lights fade out.

Scene 3

Lights up on a kitchen table, where DAN and GRETA are seated. A cell phone is lying on the table.

GRETA
She's how old?

DAN
Twenty-eight.

GRETA
Wow.

DAN
I know.

GRETA
And Candice never mentioned this before?

DAN
I haven't seen her since college.

GRETA
Why did she bring this up now?

DAN
Julie's been ill. Candice wanted to check on my family medical history, you know, see if there's anything like cancer, MS, whatever.

GRETA
She's got a lot of nerve.

DAN
It makes sense.

GRETA
Dan! That doesn't make sense, that's just sick. She gave birth to your daughter and waited twenty-eight years to tell you about it.
(pause)
So what now?

DAN
I don't know.

GRETA
Do you want to meet her?

DAN
I'm...not sure.

GRETA
Are you scared?

DAN nods.

DAN
(pause)
What should I do?

GRETA
It's up to you, Dan. I just think that ...if I were in your place, I'd want to meet my daughter.

DAN
I thought you might say that.

GRETA
I used to listen to mothers talk about their kids - it was so annoying, you know, can't they talk about anything else? And then when Scottie came along, I was just like them. I had to tell everybody about what he said, what he did - I couldn't help it. He just filled me up, so much that it just leaked out....I don't know if you can have that with Julie, but I think ...if you don't find out, you'll wind up kicking yourself .

DAN
I'm worried, you know, how it might turn out.

GRETA
You can't control that - you've just got to give it your best shot and see how Julie takes it.

DAN
That's not what I mean.
(pause)
I'm worried about ...how it's going to affect us.

GRETA
You thinkJulie might get in the way?

DAN
Maybe.

GRETA

Why? Because I had a son and now I don't, and then suddenly - boom - you've got a daughter?

DAN

Yeah.

GRETA

You think I'm going to be jealous? Dan....It doesn't work that way. You've got a chance to have something special, and.... if you don't follow this through, I'll be disappointed. And don't forget about Julie - doesn't she deserve a chance to meet her father?

(pause)

Becoming a parent is scary -

DAN

Especially if it happens instantly.

GRETA

(chuckling)

Yeah.

(kissing his cheek)

But it's the most rewarding experience I've ever had.

(turning to go)

Yeah, Dan, I'm jealous. But I'm really happy for you.

GRETA exits. THE BOY enters with an open laptop computer and sets it in front of DAN at the table.

THE BOY

Well?

DAN

Greta thinks I should.

THE BOY

Forget Greta, Dan - what are you thinking?

DAN

I'm curious.

THE BOY

No joke - your own flesh and blood is running around out there - how can you not be?

(turning on the laptop)

You're gonna look her up, right?

DAN nods.

THE BOY (cont'd)

You were going to all along, weren't you?

DAN

I guess.

THE BOY

So why don't you call Candice and get her number?

DAN

No.

THE BOY

Why not?

DAN

Not Candice.

THE BOY

What's the big deal?

DAN

I said "no."

THE BOY

Okay, so how do you find her?

DAN

She lives in Denver.

THE BOY

Good - small town like that, everybody ought to know her.

THE BOY begins typing on the laptop.

THE BOY (cont'd)

What's her last name?

DAN

I don't know.

THE BOY

What's Candice's last name?

DAN

Anderson.

THE BOY

Julie Anderson in Denver, Colorado.

(types and views results)

Wow. And that's assuming she doesn't live in the suburbs. Okay, Dan, so here's a concept – why don't you just call Candice and ask her for Julie's number?

DAN

(ignoring him)

Check out the web sites for radio stations in Denver. Look for the staff listings.

THE BOY

(typing)

What are you going to do when you meet her?

DAN

I have no idea.

THE BOY

Good plan.

(pause)

You really going to go through with this, right?

DAN

I said I was.

THE BOY

You say that now, but it's talk versus action – how can you be sure you won't sabotage it all in the end. I mean you let that thing with Candice screw you up all those years ago.

DAN

I didn't let it-

THE BOY

You didn't have to wait twenty-five years to get married. You didn't have bounce all across the country, never putting down roots-

DAN

Shut up.

THE BOY

(looking at the results on the screen)

Wow. Take a guess - how many radio stations are there in Denver?

DAN

A lot?

THE BOY

Fifty-six. Hey, I just had an idea! Why don't you call Candice and ask her for Julie's number?

DAN ignores THE BOY.

THE BOY (cont'd)

You got any other ideas?

THE BOY picks up phone and hands it to DAN.

DAN

(takes phone, pause)

You think she'd tell me?

THE BOY

She cheated you out of twenty-eight years of parenthood, and now it's come back to haunt her. She's got a whole truck load of guilt piled up and all you want from her is your daughter's phone number. How can she turn you down?

DAN looks at the phone.

THE BOY (cont'd)

You're chicken.

DAN

Cut it out.

THE BOY makes chicken sounds.

DAN (cont'd)

You're not helping.

THE BOY

I'm not supposed to help - that's not my job. I just sit on your shoulder and tell you the things you don't want to hear.

DAN

I don't know if I'mif I'm ready for that kind of responsibility.

THE BOY

Oh, for the love of God, Dan - she's twenty-eight. It's not like you have to change her diapers.

THE BOY picks up the computer and exits.
DAN looks at the phone for a moment, and then dials.

Candice?.....Dan Morris.

DAN

The lights fade out.

Scene 4

Lights up on GRETA at the table. There is a suitcase on the table and GRETA is going through it, removing some items and replacing them with more appropriate clothing.

GRETA

Hurry up. The taxi's waiting.

DAN (offstage)

Just a minute.

GRETA removes a dingy t-shirt and replaces it with a clean pressed t-shirt.

GRETA

Come on, before he gets impatient.

DAN (offstage)

I'm coming.

GRETA zips up the suit case and puts it on the floor. DAN enters, wearing slacks and a jacket and holding a necktie in each hand.

DAN

Which one?

GRETA

Whichever – it doesn't matter.

GRETA takes the plane ticket from the table and puts it in DAN's right jacket pocket.

DAN

This one's my favorite.

GRETA

Then wear it.

GRETA takes a piece of paper off the table and places it in DAN's left coat pocket.

DAN

But this is more classy.

GRETA

Then wear it.

DAN

In can't make up my mind.

GRETA

Let me do that for you.

GRETA takes both ties away from DAN and tosses them on the table.

GRETA

Neckties are too formal anyway. Have you got everything?

DAN

Yeah. I shined my shoes, too.

GRETA

Great – airline ticket in the right, rental car reservation in the left.

DAN

Got it.

GRETA

Did you pack your phone charger?

DAN

Umm, yeah. I think...I think I packed it. Yeah, I packed it. I think.

GRETA

You're a mess.

DAN

I'm just nervous, okay? There's nothing wrong with that, is there? I'm just going to meet my daughter. The daughter I didn't know existed. I think I should be a little nervous.

GRETA

Remember, she'll be nervous, too.

DAN

What do I say to her? I don't to be all creepy and stuff, but I don't want to seem impersonal either, I'm just kind of at a loss, you know, because this has never happened, I mean it's probably happened, but not to me, and I don't want to do anything, you know rude or insensitive, because that would be-

GRETA

Okay – time out. Here, sit down a minute. We need to talk.

DAN

(sitting)

What about the cab?

GRETA

Don't worry – they all speed anyhow. Now, listen – I'm not going to be there, so you have to do this on your own – don't do anything stupid.

DAN

No.

GRETA

I know you're nervous, that's natural, but remember, this is going to be tough on her, too.

DAN

Right.

GRETA

So don't let your feelings freak you out. Just take it easy, you can't just add water and – poof – Instant Dad.

DAN

I know.

GRETA

Pay attention to her – try to understand what she's feeling. Forget about what you're thinking – listen to her.

DAN

What should we talk about?

GRETA

It doesn't matter. Just relax and try to make her comfortable.

DAN

Should I ask her questions?

GRETA

Sure, that's fine. Ask her about her job, her friends, what she does in her spare time, whatever. Ask her about how she's feeling – she's been sick, right?

DAN

Yeah, I should ask her about that.

GRETA

But don't turn it into an interrogation. You don't want her to feel like she's being interviewed.

DAN

Okay.

GRETA

And don't get pushy. Watch her closely – if she starts to squirm, back off – she might feel pressured by all this, so be sensitive to that.

DAN

(rising)

Right – I'll be careful.

GRETA

Are you ready?

DAN

Airline ticket in the right, rental car reservation in the left.

(heads for the door, then turns back)

This is gonna work, right?

GRETA

Yes.

DAN

I've got a daughterandnow I get to meet her.

GRETA

Yes.

DAN

It's just a little uncomfortable.

GRETA

That's all – just a little discomfort.

DAN

Was it uncomfortable when you met Scottie for the first time?

GRETA

Yes, Dan, it was extremely uncomfortable.

DAN

Oh, that's right. I forgot about....you know, the-

GRETA

You've got to go now.

DAN

Right.
(patting his coat pockets)
I love you.

GRETA

I love you, too.

They kiss.

DAN

I wish you were going with me.

GRETA

No, this is just for you.

DAN kisses her again and exits. GRETA
pauses for a moment as the lights fade out.

Scene 5

Lights up on JULIE, sitting at a table in a bar, somewhat uncomfortable. After a moment, DAN enters, carrying two beers, and places one in front of JULIE.

DAN
Coors, all right?

JULIE
Sure. As long as it's light.

DAN
I thought you might like Coors, you know, being from Denver and all.

JULIE
Thanks.

They sip in silence for a moment.

DAN
It's good - Coors.

JULIE
Yeah. Lots of my friends like it.

DAN
But you don't?

JULIE
Oh, no, I do. It's fine. I'm notumm....a big beer drinker.

DAN
Would you rather have something else?

JULIE
No, this is fine. It's good.

They sip in silence for a moment.

DAN
Your mom said you were sick...

JULIE
Uh, yes, but I'm much better now.

DAN
Are you okay?

JULIE

Oh, yeah, the doctors weren't sure what it was at first, but they think they've narrowed it down.

DAN

Good.

(pause)

Umm,,,,what is it?

JULIE

Oh-

DAN

I mean, if you don't mind me asking.

JULIE

Oh, no.

DAN

I don't want to get too personal or anything.

JULIE

No, that's fine. It's rheumatoid arthritis. At least they think it is.

DAN

Aren't you kind of young to have ...

JULIE

It's not exactly a text book case. It's taken them months to finally narrow it down.

DAN

Are you okay?

JULIE

I'm fine. I'm taking medication for it. Some times my hands get puffy and some times my feet swell up, but I'm doing all right.

DAN

Your mom seemed worried.

JULIE

We both were. I had a lot of pain and swelling in my arms and legs. It kept me awake at night. I would get these tingly feelings, you know – all through my arms. One day my feet were so swollen I couldn't even get my shoes on

DAN

That sounds a little scary.

JULIE

Every morning I would wake up in pain - every joint hurt, until I could get down a dose of Prednisone. Then I'd start to feel normal again.

DAN

Is it still like that?

JULIE

No, it's stable now. They've been able to treat it. It's much better.

DAN

Your mom thought I might have something like that in my family history.

JULIE

Yes.

DAN

But I don't.

JULIE

No...we're not sure how ...well, how I came about it.

Awkward pause.

DAN

So it sounds great - flying a helicopter.

JULIE

Oh, I love flying, and the pay is really good, though sometimes I miss the Army. Flying over traffic is pretty calm compared to a combat mission.

DAN

You were in the Army?

JULIE

Yeah, I with the 3rd ACR in Iraq. Logged more than a thousand combat hours.

DAN

ACR?

JULIE

Armored Cavalry Regiment. I flew a Kiowa - a scout helicopter.

DAN

Wow.

JULIE

I guess Mom didn't mention that.

DAN

No.

JULIE

She was the reason I got out. She worried a lot. So... well, I resigned my commission last year and came back to be near her. And now, I still get to fly, it's just a lot less dangerous.

DAN

I guess so.

JULIE

So what do you do? I mean, your job?

DAN

I work for the phone company.

JULIE

Oh.

DAN

I'm a ...sales engineer. I design phone systemsfor businesses.

JULIE

That sounds interesting.

DAN

It's not. Not really. I mean, I like the technology.... And the problem solving....but, it's really not that interesting.

JULIE

It sounds like a good career.

DAN

It's been, you know, good to me.

Awkward pause.

DAN (cont'd)

Did your mother ...did she ever...you know, tell you anything about me?

JULIE

Umm, not really. I mean she said youthat you.....when I was little she said you..... that you died in a plane crash.

DAN

Oh.....I didn't.

JULIE
No.

DAN
No, I didn't even know about you until last month.

JULIE
(pause)
Are you mad at her?

DAN
Mad?

JULIE
Because...of this whole...mix up.

DAN
Um...no, I just....I'm glad I found out. I'm glad that , umm, ...that I got a chance to get to know you.

DAN reaches into his pocket and produces a pocket knife.

DAN (cont'd)
I ... uh...want you to have this. It belonged to my grandfather - he gave it to me before he died. I was uh...I was sixteen and went to see him at the hospital – he had cancer – and he put this in my hand and said “every man needs a good knife.” Two days later, he was gone. I've carried it with me everywhere I've gone since then. I thought you should have a little piece of history - your history, you know, something that belonged to your great-grandfather.

DAN places the knife in JULIE's hand.

JULIE
Really, Mr. Morris, this is-

DAN
Oh - don't call me Mr. Morris. It sounds so formal.

JULIE
Well, thank you.

DAN
You could always call meDa-

JULIE
(interrupting)
Dan. Thanks, Dan. I appreciate it.

DAN

Soumm....what do you do in your free time?

JULIE

Oh, lots of things. I bike a lot. And I enjoy baseball. A friend of mine has season tickets for the Rockies, so I go to a lot of baseball games. Do you like baseball?

DAN

Umm, uh...not really. I've always been a big football fan. I played football in high school. Receiver. I was pretty good.

JULIE

I've never really understood football.

DAN

(pause)

So what kind of food do you like?

JULIE

Oh, lots of things. I'm not big on sushi - that whole raw fish thing kind of escapes me.

DAN

Yeah, me, too.

JULIE

I like Italian ... Mexican...the standard American fare.

DAN

Do you like Thai food?

JULIE

Um...it's okay.

DAN

Lots of women really like Thai food.

JULIE

It's okay - not my favorite.

DAN

What about Froot Loops?

JULIE

The cereal? Umm, I'm more of a granola person myself.

DAN

Yeah. I like Italian, too.

(pause)

So, what about your home? Where do you live?

JULIE

I have a condo in Littleton. Two bedrooms, two bathrooms. Nice neighborhood.

DAN

That's good that you own your own home - no reason to pay rent, it's like paying somebody else's mortgage.

JULIE

Right.

DAN

Do you have a roommate?

JULIE

No, I live alone.

DAN

Yeah, you're too old to have a roommate. No reason for that. What about your car?

JULIE

....A Ford Ranger.

DAN

Really? A pick up?

JULIE

I like it 'cause it sits higher than a car. I like to be above the other cars in traffic.

DAN

You keep it serviced, right? Regular maintenance?

JULIE

Yes.

(pause)

This is kind of awkward isn't it?

DAN nods.

JULIE (cont'd)

I get the feeling you really don't know how to deal with this.

DAN

That'sthat's about right.

JULIE

So what do we do now, Dan?

DAN

I'm not...I'm...not really sure. I just feel like, you know, I should be a part of your life. Maybe there's something I can offer you – there should be some value in having a father, something I can do, something that would...you know, benefit you in some way.

JULIE

So you're feeling obligated to be there for me.

DAN

Um, yeah...I guess so.

JULIE

Like what? Are you trying to make up for the past?

DAN

Well, no, I mean, that wasn't my fault that, you know, I wasn't there. I would have been, but...well, I just don't want to let you down – if there's something I can do, I want to be there to do that...for you.

JULIE

Well, I don't really know what you can do, Dan. I admit, it would have been nice to have you there years ago, to do...whatever it is that dads do. It would have been nice to learn those things that a dad is supposed to teach a kid – how to get along with other people, how to deal with authority figures, what to expect from guys when going on a date - maybe how to save money, buy a car, stuff like that. As it is, I figured those things out.

DAN

I know, andwell, you're right – that's what I should have been there to do...but I wasn't.

JULIE

And now?

DAN

Well...lots of fathers still have influence in the lives of their kids, and I don't want to be remiss in not being available for you, for anything that you need.

JULIE

You don't like me, do you?

DAN

Yes, yes, I do. You're an amazing person – I'm really impressed.

JULIE

Really?

DAN

Yes. Why....why would you think I don't like you?

JULIE

Because you can't seem to figure out why you're here.

DAN

I told you – I want to be there for you.

JULIE

Enough about me – what about you, Dan?

DAN

Huh?

JULIE

Everything about this visit has been because you “want to be there” for me. You want to be involved in my life. You want to help me any way you can.

DAN

Yes.

JULIE

But what about me? Do you want me to be a part of your life?

DAN

I just said-

JULIE

No you didn't. You said you wanted to be there for me, involved in my life, but what about your life, Dan? Are you going to let me in? Do you really want to know me, or do you just not want to let me down.

DAN

That's um...that's....

JULIE

I don't need parenting anymore. I'm old enough to take care of myself. Yes, some kids are able to maintain a friendship with their parents. Is that what you want, Dan?

DAN

Yes, I want to be-

JULIE

Yeah, I know - you want to be there for me. I don't need that, but thanks for the offer. I don't need to be your little obligation. I don't need to be a burden.

DAN

You're not a burden-

JULIE

(getting up to go)

I'm sorry this didn't work out – I appreciate you coming. That was very thoughtful of you.

DAN

But, Julie I really do want-

JULIE

You should take this back. I don't think I should be entrusted with Grandpa Morris's things.

DAN

Julie, please!

JULIE

It's okay, Dan – I hereby release from any parental responsibility. You don't have to go with me to Father-Daughter banquets or drag me a long for Take-Your-Daughter-To-Work Day.

DAN

But, Julie, I want to be your father.

JULIE

Maybe you do, but I don't think you want me to be your daughter. Because that's another thing entirely. Good bye, Dan. Thanks for coming.

JULIE exits quickly. DAN watches her leave, and then stares at the pocketknife in disbelief as the lights fade out.

Scene 6

The kitchen table. DAN enters, carrying a bowl of cereal and spoon. SOUND: Phone ringing offstage. DAN quickly puts down his cereal bowl and runs offstage. THE BOY enters, sits, and begins poking at the cereal with the spoon. After a moment, DAN enters holding a cordless phone, sits and places the phone on the table.

THE BOY

What's this stuff?

DAN takes the spoon from THE BOY and begins eating.

DAN

Special K.

THE BOY

Looks disgusting.

DAN

Not everybody likes Froot Loops.

THE BOY

Yeah, well, if this ...Special K was the only other choice, I'm thinking the Froot Loops arena would be standing room only. Who called?

DAN

Publisher's Clearing House.

THE BOY

Not Julie, huh?

DAN

Not unless she's taken a job in a call center and changed her name to Frank.

THE BOY

When's the last time you called her?

DAN

Tuesday.

THE BOY

Really?

DAN

I decided she might get creeped out if I kept leaving her messages.

THE BOY

Ya think?

(pause)

You holding up okay?

DAN

Yeah.

THE BOY

I mean, hey, it really worked out, right?

DAN

Huh?

THE BOY

Well, you said you didn't really want kids anyhow.

DAN

That's what I thought.

THE BOY

You changed your mind?

DAN

No. I've just been leaving humiliating voice mails for a girl in Denver and in hopes that I may drive her farther away than I already have.

THE BOY

Dude, lighten up. I'm on your side.

DAN

I just.... I don't know. When I saw her there...it was different. She seemed new and... familiar all at the same time. Her nose is just like my mom's. The way she talked, was kind of like Candice – when she was younger. And she just had something...I don't know – she just drew me to herself. So there I was, trying not to say anything stupid, and trying to sound smart and fatherly, and somewhere in the midst of that, she sucked me in and I fell in love with her.

THE BOY

Not like-

DAN

No, not like that. Like... I started worrying about her, thinking about every aspect of her life, and looking for ways to ensure that nothing ever happened to her, you know nothing bad, or anything that would cause her disappointment. I wanted to audit her home owner's insurance policy, and measure the thickness of her brake pads. I wanted to be there to check out the guys who might drop by. I wanted to give her advice on her 401K. All of this just welled up inside me, over a person I had just met, and I didn't know how to deal with my feelings, so I bit my tongue, and watched as she walked out of my life.

THE BOY

You went through the entire life cycle of parenting in twenty minutes?

DAN

I just know that....I don't know what I know.

(pause)

When I was in high school, we had a dog – a Yellow Lab named Sandy. She loved to chase cats, totally delighted her. I'd yell "Where's the cat?" and she'd run to the door and bark. Then one summer she got pregnant – never found the dog that did it. She had a huge litter, eleven puppies and she was a great mother, no big deal. Later that fall, the neighbor's cat had kittens, and I figured it would be a problem, you know, with her whole chasing cats thing. Turns out, she would go over to the neighbor's and watch the kittens when the mother cat was away doing whatever mother cats do. Sandy would just sit there, watching over them like she was on guard duty. Apparently she and the mother cat worked out some kind of schedule, rotating shifts or something.

(pause)

I just figured that having her own puppies made her feel differently about cats, and since her pups were gone, she adopted the kittens.

THE BOY

And Julie is your kitten.

DAN

No, she's my puppy. I mean... I didn't know I was a parent, and because of that, I didn't want kids. Once I found out that I was a father, I was confused, until I met her – my own flesh and blood, and then it clicked – I really want to be a dad to Julie.

THE BOY

What would have happened if you had met Julie before you found out she was your daughter?

DAN

It doesn't matter. What does matter is that I feel like a dad.

THE BOY

(rising)

Well, hopefully it will work out.

SOUND: Phone ringing.
THE BOY (cont'd)

As if on cue.

THE BOY starts to exit. DAN stares at the phone as it continues to ring. THE BOY returns to the table, picks up the phone, and checks its LCD.

THE BOY (cont'd)

Area code three oh three.

THE BOY places the ringing phone on the table and exits. DAN slowly picks up the phone and answers.

DAN

Hello?

Lights fade out. End of Act I.

ACT II

Scene 1

Lights up on DAN and THE BOY, seated at the dining room table. There are forks and napkins set for three, but no plates. On the table is a simple yet pretty flower arrangement.

THE BOY

How do you think it's going?

DAN

Umm.... I think.... good, I think.

THE BOY

Kind of proud of yourself, aren't you.

DAN

I'm just glad she took my call.

THE BOY

Yeah, you're just tickled pink. Sweet talked the little lady into giving you another shot.

DAN

Cut it out.

THE BOY

Talked her into a visit, wow, you must be something else. Something special. Talked to her like a Dad to his daughter - you've got this whole fatherhood thing figured out. It's only been three weeks and she's eating out of your hand.

DAN

Shut up. You know that's not true.

THE BOY

I know it. Do you? Or are you ready to nominate yourself for Daddy of the Year?

DAN

I think she's warming up.

THE BOY

Yeah? Took you long enough to get her here.

DAN

You can't rush things - this has been pretty difficult for her.

THE BOY

It hasn't been tough for you?

DAN

It's different.

THE BOY

That's what it is, isn't it? You thought "Oops, I'm a parent now – I should be different." But it didn't turn out that way.

DAN

Shut up.

THE BOY

Thought you'd accelerate from guy to dad in three point two seconds. Didn't turn out that way, did it?

DAN

I'm just glad she took my call.

THE BOY

Well, you two spent enough time on the phone. How many times did you talk?

DAN

It's not important.

THE BOY

The way I figure it, you should be caught up to date in the whole father-daughter thing.

DAN

You're a smart ass, you know it?

THE BOY

Just trying to keep you from getting overly optimistic - you tend to do that, you know.

DAN

I know this isn't a cakewalk.

THE BOY

I like the flowers - that's a nice touch.

DAN

She didn't have to bring them, you know. She's polite. And thoughtful.

THE BOY

I didn't say anything to the contrary. She's a nice girl, Dan.

DAN
We've got a long way to go.

THE BOY
And that road is sure to be bumpy.

THE BOY stands and departs the table just as GRETA and JULIE enter carrying three dessert plates and three coffee cups. THE BOY exits. GRETA and JULIE do not notice him.

GRETA
Ready for dessert?

DAN
Oh, yeah.

GRETA
Cherry pie is Dan's favorite.

GRETA and JULIE place the plates and cups on the table and sit.

DAN
Is it okay with you? Cherry pie?

JULIE
Oh, yeah, I've always loved it. It was my favorite when I was a kid.

DAN
Really?

JULIE
Mom used to serve it - with about a half can of whipped cream on top.

DAN
Do we have any whip cream?

GRETA
Oh, no, I'm sorry.

JULIE
It's alright - it's not necessary.

DAN
(to GRETA)
Are you sure?

GRETA

Yes, Dan, we don't have any.

JULIE

It's really okay - that's too many calories, anyhow.

DAN

(rising)

I'll go get some.

JULIE

You don't have to.

DAN

It's no problem.

JULIE

Dan, really-

DAN

No, if that's what you liked as a kid, then you ought to have it. I can be back in a few minutes.

GRETA

Swing by the Quickie Mart. They'll have it in the big cooler next to the beer.

DAN

But it's more expensive. It'll be cheaper at Kaufmann's.

GRETA

Sure, but it'll take ten minutes longer. Just spend the extra sixty-nine cents and go to the Quickie Mart.

JULIE

Please don't go to any trouble.

DAN

It's no trouble.

GRETA

Let him go - it'll make him happy.

DAN

I'll be back. Go ahead - commence with the girl talk.

DAN exits. SOUND: Door opens and closes.

JULIE
I feel bad about-

GRETA
Don't. He wants to do it.

JULIE
I don't want to impose.

GRETA
But he wants you to. He'd do anything if he thought it'd make you happy.

JULIE
I'm not used to that. I'm used to taking care of myself.

GRETA and JULIE sip coffee as they talk.

GRETA
He's not used to it either. He's not sure how to take all this - he just doesn't want to do the wrong thing. He said you'd had some kind of illness...

JULIE
Yeah, it's better now. It had us worried for a while, but it seems that a number of Iraq vets have had similar issues. Mom nearly went crazy, calling the doctors everyday, going with me to all the tests. She worries a lot.

GRETA
Mothers are like that.

JULIE
Dan told me ... about your son.

GRETA
Scottie.

JULIE
I'm sorry. For your loss.

GRETA
Thank you.

JULIE
I can't imagine how tough that would be.

GRETA
I still have a hard time wrapping my brain around it.

JULIE

I knew some guys that didn't make it back from Iraq - it never occurred to me what their parents would be going through. And since your son - Scottie - was so young... I can imagine it must, you know, tear your heart in two. Of course, you know that already. I'm sorry, I shouldn't -

GRETA

It's okay. It's a big part of me now. When Scottie was little, he was the biggest part of my life, and now that he's gone, his absence seems even bigger.

JULIE

I can imagine you never get over it.

GRETA

In some ways the pain gets duller, but then it can sharpen at a moment's notice. A smell, a place, certain sounds - they all bring back memories, good and bad, that launch you into a black hole of grief. Sometimes I thought I could hear his voice. I justI just wanted to scream...and I did. Usually in the shower - I felt like the water would drown out my crying. Sometimes I'd scream in the car. I'd roll up the windows and let it rip. I wouldn't read a book if it had a happy ending. I wouldn't celebrate holidays. I wouldn't even eat dessert. I got angry at the silliest things. Once my ex-husband brought me a bouquet of flowers. Just looking at them made me furious - I had to throw them out. I couldn't stand anything that was happy, or pretty, or -

JULIE

(thinking of the vase of flowers)

Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't-

GRETA

No, it's alright - they're lovely. The anguish polluted my relationships. My husband would come home from work and find me sitting in the dark in the middle of the day. I hurt so much that I forgot that he was hurting, too. We got divorced within the year. I'm still surprised I got remarried. Dan has been so good through all that I put him through. He's a good man.

JULIE

How did you two meet?

GRETA

Through mutual friends. They wanted me to get out and get on with my life and I begrudgingly complied. Dan is so gentle, thoughtful...just a great guy - the kind that wants everybody to be happy. He's still like that. I warned him that things would be tough, but he took it in stride. He had no idea what he was getting into.

JULIE

Has he been a big support for you?

GRETA

It's hard for him, because he just doesn't have, I don't know – the perspective, I guess. I meet with a support group at the community center - we've all had the same experience, we all try to help out when things are tough. They're like ...my home team – the only people I can feel safe with.

JULIE

I think....you've done an amazing job dealing with this.... of learning what you can overcome, and what you have to accept.

GRETA

Maybe. I guess that's why I find it refreshing to watch Dan...as he discovers things about you. I guess I'm just.....I know this is hard for you.

JULIE

Sometimes, he'll say something and I'll note the inflection in his voice, or a gesture, or a mannerism, and I think "That's me. This guy is mimicking me," and then I realize - I got that from him. It's kind of weird.

GRETA

Have you ever wondered what your Dad would be like?

JULIE

Not really. Well, I guess I had an inkling that there might be more to it...than what I knew. His name isn't on my birth certificate, so, well, it made me question my mom's story. She didn't talk about it. She just said it was in the past and we needed to move forward. I guess a big part of me just moved on. I thought about looking for more info on him, but I didn't have much to go on.

GRETA

How are things with you and your mom? Now that, well....

JULIE

There's a little tension. I'm still trying to get past the whole, "Why did you hide my daddy?" thing. I don't know how I would have dealt with that...if I had been in her shoes. Of course, it's easy to say what should have happened, but if there's anything that the Army taught me, it's that you never can be sure how you'll respond until you come face to face with the problem.

GRETA

I've heard some people who go through a lot to find their parents.

JULIE

I knew a girl in high school who was adopted, and when she was sixteen, she went through this huge effort to find out about her birth parents. It seemed crazy to me for her to spend time and money trying to find people who chose not to be in her life. My room mate in college was really close to her family, even though they were constantly making her mad. Her mom did all kinds of passive aggressive stuff and her dad didn't pay her

JULIE (cont'd)

much attention, and she would constantly complain about how awful they were and yet, she would call them almost every day and spend every weekend with them and her sisters - who were even worse. I figure I would rather spend time with people I like – and just because I'm related to somebody doesn't mean I like them.

(pause)

I don't want to hurt Dan, but I have no idea how to - I don't know, I don't even know what we're supposed to do.

GRETA

He doesn't know, either.

SOUND: Door opens and closes.

GRETA (cont'd)

Just remember - he only wants the best for you.

DAN (offstage)

I'm back.

JULIE

Thanks for sharing...about Scottie.

GRETA nods. DAN enters shaking a can of whipped cream.

DAN

Who wants whip cream on their pie?

JULIE

That would be me.

GRETA

Fire away, cowboy.

DAN tries to get the cap off, but it won't budge.

GRETA (cont'd)

We're waiting.

DAN

Tell your sweet tooth to hold on a second.

DAN pulls his pocketknife from his pocket, opens the blade and uses it to cut the lid from the can.

DAN (cont'd)

There.

DAN closes the knife and places it on the table. DAN gives each piece of pie a large dollop of whipped cream.

GRETA

(taking a bite)
That's more like it.

DAN

Good?

JULIE

Uh-huh.

DAN

Good.

They eat in silence for a moment.

GRETA

So, Julie, what made you decide to become a pilot?

JULIE

Oh, I always wanted to fly. Something about being above everything, up in the air, separated from the ground. They always joke about helicopters, saying that airplanes fly, but choppers just beat the air into submission. When it comes to flying, everybody wants to fly a jet - you know, fighter planes are sexy, but there was something about rotary flight that appealed to me - kind of like the difference between a hawk and a hummingbird.

DAN

What does it feel likewhen you're flying a helicopter?

JULIE

It's totally epic – absolutely the coolest feeling you can have. The best way to describe it...you know how it feels when you get to the top of a rollercoaster, when you come to the top and just before you raise your hands in the air? You get that feeling in your stomach like it's kind of floating, just before you make the descent? That's what it feels like, only for more than just that split second. It's an amazing feeling.

DAN

It must be different, flying in combat versus what you're doing now.

JULIE

Yeah, the biggest difference is that with a traffic chopper, I'm not allowed to shoot anybody. Then again, no one's shooting at me either. It's easier to concentrate when there aren't any bullets flying.

GRETA

I guess so.

JULIE

I told my boss that it would be more effective to mount a fifty cal. machine gun on the nose and maybe a couple hellfires - I could get rid of most of our traffic problems that way.

DAN

And what was the response?

JULIE

Something about the insurance policy - you know how it is with corporate bureaucracy.

GRETA

Was it hard to fit in? I mean.... as a female pilot?

JULIE

Pilots are the worst when it comes that macho crap. Sometimes when I'd call in on the radio, if they could hear any little inflection of emotion, they'd reply "Say again? You're coming in soft."

DAN

That's mean.

JULIE

In the end, once a woman proves herself, the gender issue isn't such a big deal. Of course, the Army policies didn't help. Women and men weren't allowed to go into each other's quarters, so when one of the guys threw a poker party in his room, the females weren't invited. That's how I met Regina, the girl I'm staying with across town - she worked at the supply depot and would hold a "Chicks Only" poker party for the women.

GRETA

Girls have to stick together.

JULIE

Well, I'd better get going.
(standing to go)

Regina should be home soon and I wanted to spend some time with her since I have to fly back tomorrow.

GRETA

It's nice that you knew her from your time in the service.

JULIE

Yeah, I haven't seen her since I left the Army. That's one thing I liked about the military - after a while, you have friends all over the country.

DAN

Do you need a ride to the airport tomorrow?

JULIE

No, I have to return the rental car anyway, but thanks.

GRETA

Well, it was nice meeting you, Julie.

GRETA hugs JULIE.

JULIE

Thanks, it was nice meeting you, too.

GRETA

And thanks for the flowers - they're gorgeous.

JULIE

I'm glad you like them. The florist said they keep for a while, maybe as long as two weeks.

GRETA

Good, I hate it when they turn brown so quickly.

DAN

Thanks for coming.

DAN attempts to hug JULIE, but JULIE offers her hand instead.

JULIE

(shaking hands)

I'm glad I did. Oh - I was wondering, um....

JULIE picks up pocketknife from the table.

JULIE (cont'd)

Would it...um....

DAN

Sure.

JULIE takes the knife.

We'll see you to the car.

GRETA

JULIE exits and as GRETA and DAN follow her out, GRETA takes DAN's hand and squeezes it. The lights fade out.

Scene 2

A bistro table. DAN and CANDICE are seated with drinks.

DAN

She is. She's really amazing.

CANDICE

She's a very special woman.

DAN

I think you did a great job...raising her.

CANDICE

Well, that's more to her credit than mine.

(pause)

So what did you want to talk about?

DAN

I... I can't seem to break through...to get to know Julie. There's like...I don't know - like there's something in the way, something that keeps us from getting close.

CANDICE

And what can I do?

DAN

I just thought you might have an idea, something I could do...to make it easier.

CANDICE

I'm not sure what to tell you. She's always had a mind of her own, kind of like she had a plan and no one was going to get in her way. She was a good student, graduated from college before she turned twenty-one. I'm not bragging - it's not like I had a lot to do with it.

DAN

(pause)

What was she like ...as a kid?

CANDICE

Once I saw her out in the backyard - she was probably five - she was wearing a tutu and carrying a large plastic pirate sword. And she was dancing about, singing a song - "It's a Sunny Day, It's a Fighting Day." I still remember the tune - I'd sing it for you, but I can't sing worth a damn.

DAN

That's funny.

CANDICE

She's always been very imaginative - once told me a story about a far off country where the sky was green and the grass was blue and all over the country side there were these giant cows - pink cows - which didn't give milk. Instead they gave soda pop, all different flavors of soda pop. And nearby was a little town, with big walls surrounding it that were all made of fruitcake. And the people in the town had never had soda pop because they were afraid to go out of the town because of a giant who lived on the hillside. Apparently the giant watched the cows or something. Anyhow, in the town was a little girl who really wanted some Dr. Pepper, and so she dug through the wall of fruitcake, by eating her way out, and snuck up to the herd of giant pink cows and drank her fill of Dr. Pepper until she was burping, and she burped so loud that she woke up the giant and he came to check on the herd and found her.

DAN

And then what happened?

CANDICE

(laughing)

She really reeled you in, didn't she?

DAN

Why didn't you tell me about her?

CANDICE

I did.

DAN

Earlier. Like thirty years ago.

CANDICE

I.....I couldn't.

DAN

Didn't you trust me?

CANDICE

Of course I trusted you, Dan, I just.....I-

DAN

Didn't you think I'd make a good father?

CANDICE

Of course. You would have been a great father.

DAN

Well,I just feel...if we could have been together, if we could have been parents together, had a family - then...that would have been better for Julie.

CANDICE

I suppose, maybe.

DAN

(agitated)

Why couldn't you tell me? Why couldn't you let me meet my own baby girl, why did you have to - Didn't you care about us, Candice? Didn't you want Julie have to have a dad? Didn't you care about how it would feel for me?

CANDICE

Yes, Dan, I did.

DAN

Then why didn't you tell me?

CANDICE

(exploding)

Because I didn't love you!

(pause)

You were a good man. You were very sweet to me. I enjoyed being with you and I trusted you, but...

DAN

What about the baby?

CANDICE

My mom got pregnant with me when my parents were dating. They quickly got married, mom dropped out of high school for a year and had me. They were good parents, they tried hard, but all through my childhood I knew something was wrong - they just didn't click, you know, like a husband and wife were supposed to. They were about to file for divorce when I came home that summer, two months pregnant. They didn't, at least not then. They stuck together and helped me raise Julie until I could finish my degree and get established. Anyhow, when I found out I was pregnant, I knew I didn't want to live like that. I almostyou know....terminated the.....but, well my folks promised they'd help out.

DAN

That's not really fair to me.

CANDICE

No, it's not, I agree. I was young and scared and ...I wasn't really thinking about you.

DAN

What about Julie?

CANDICE

I did the best I could for Julie!

DAN

You didn't give her a father!

CANDICE

(pause)

It's easy to look back after all this time and figure out what should have happened. It's very easy, especially when you've got no skin in the game.

DAN

I'm in the game now, Candice, and I've got a serious handicap, coming in three decades late. I've done a lot of reading, about kids who grow up without dads, and I just think that maybe if you'd -

CANDICE

I know, Dan. I've read the books. I know - difficulty in socializing, inability to relate to men, excessive promiscuity - I know all the symptoms, Dan, and I think that little girl came through with flying colors. What are you saying - isn't Julie good enough for you? Are you unhappy with the way she turned out?

DAN

No, it's just...I want to be a part of her life. I look at you and think - it's not fair. You got to see her grow up. You were there every step of the way. I didn't get to watch her crawl around the house. I didn't get to hear her first words, see her lose a tooth, get up with her early on Christmas morning. I mean, you told her I was dead!

CANDICE

I'm sorry..... I can't change that now.

DAN

Why did you do that?

CANDICE

I had to! I didn't want you to look like a loser, for her to think you ran off, or that she drove you away.

DAN

And the two of us?

CANDICE

I didn't want Julie growing up thinking that she was the reason her parents were unhappy. I've been there and I don't.... I just...

DAN

(pause)

So what do I do? I want what you have - she's my daughter, too.

CANDICE

Yeah, she is, but she's not a piece of property, Dan - she's a real live person.

DAN

What's that supposed to mean?

CANDICE

(getting up to go)

It's not about you, Dan, it's about Julie.

DAN

So what's best for Julie?

CANDICE

Ask her. I'm sorry this has been such a mess. If I could fix it, I would.

DAN

So what happened?

CANDICE

Huh?

DAN

In the story – the giant and the little girl?

CANDICE

The giant saw she was just a little girl and gave her permission to drink as much as she wanted, because, truth be told, he was just lonely and wanted a friend. End of story. Happily ever after. Badda boom, badda bing . Take care, Dan.

DAN

You, too.

CANDICE exits. THE BOY enters, and sits.

THE BOY

It's hard to believe she did that to you. What a bit-

DAN

Hey. Give her a break - she was young and stupid.

THE BOY

And you were in love with her.

DAN

I was young and stupid, too.

THE BOY

So what now?

DAN

I...I need to meet Julie atI don't know, meet her at her level, you know, where she is.

THE BOY

And if you were to translate that into English, what might that sound like?

DAN

I need to act like a parent. I need to forget about I just need to concentrate on my daughter, you know – action, not talk.

DAN rises and exits as the lights fade out.

Scene 3

Lights up on a bench, representing bleacher seats at a baseball park. DAN and THE BOY are seated. Crowd noise and organ music can be heard intermittently throughout the scene.

THE BOY

When's she coming back?

DAN

I don't know. Maybe a long line at the ladies' room.

THE BOY

How do you think it's going?

DAN

Okay. I think she's warming up.

THE BOY

You're lucky, at least she likes sports. Imagine what it would be like if she wanted to go shopping or something like that.

DAN

Then I guess I'd be shopping.

THE BOY

I know, but this is a lot easier to endure. Even if it is baseball.

DAN

Not everybody likes football.

THE BOY

At least the weather is better.

JULIE enters, carrying a beer in one hand and a soda pop in the other. THE BOY exits.

JULIE

Coors okay?

DAN

As long as it's light.

JULIE hands DAN the beer.

DAN
What did you get?

JULIE
Dr. Pepper.

DAN chuckles.

JULIE (cont'd)
Sorry it took so long - the concessions are way around the back.

DAN
That's okay, you didn't have to-

JULIE
No, it's fine. I was parched.

DAN
You know we could have gotten better seats, closer to all the-

JULIE
No, I like it up here. It's a great view. I like to look down on the action - gives you a better idea of the strategy.

DAN
There's strategy in this game?

JULIE
Yes, Dan, there's strategy. See the runner on first base? They're trying to keep him close, but you can tell he's not really gonna go.

DAN
How do you know?

JULIE
Look at his feet. See where the grass comes to a corner about ten feet from the base?

DAN
Yeah.

JULIE
Well, when he's serious about going, he'll take a lead out to that point, or close to it. But he won't do that until he's ready to run.

DAN
I guess you can see a lot, even way out here in left field.

JULIE
Right field.

DAN
Huh?

JULIE
This right field. Left field is over there.

DAN
But we're on the left.

JULIE
You have to look at it from home plate. Left is over there. Right is here.

DAN
Okay. Hey, look where the guy's feet are.

JULIE
What guy?

DAN
The guy on base

JULIE
Oh. Yeah. Good eye, Dan. Now watch.

DAN and JULIE watch closely.

DAN
There he goes!

DAN and JULIE jump to their feet.
SOUND: Crowd cheers.

JULIE
Stolen base!

DAN
High five.

DAN and JULIE high five and sit down.

DAN (cont'd)
Way to go number seventeen.

JULIE

His name is Wilson.

DAN

Yeah, I can't read his jersey from out here.

JULIE

Poor eyesight, Dan?

DAN

Hey, I'm not a pilot - I don't have to have superhuman vision.

(pause)

You know, this is like the perfect day - good weather, good beer, good company - I'm surprised there aren't more people here.

JULIE

Yeah, well, it's a Wednesday afternoon in September and this team is eight games below five hundred. They're lucky anybody came at all.

DAN

Then why do you like it, if the team's not that good?

JULIE

It's still baseball. And this way, we've got the stands to ourselves. If they had a shot at the playoffs, this place would be packed.

(pause)

Ah, struck him out. Wilson stole that base for nothing. Seventh inning coming up - we're only three outs away from my favorite part.

DAN

What's that?

JULIE

We sing.

DAN

You're kidding.

JULIE

No, the seventh inning stretch - we all get up and sing "Take Me Out to the Ballgame."

DAN

I don't know the words.

JULIE

It's okay, they'll show the words on the Jumbo-tron.

DAN
I'm not a very good singer.

JULIE
Nobody here is.

DAN
Your mom said you like to sing.

JULIE
Yeah, a little.

DAN
(pause)
So....how do you think we're doing? You know, you and me?

JULIE
Okay, I guess. I'm...not really sure how this works.

DAN
Me neither. I was thinking -

JULIE
Oh my god - That's Ted Barrett.

DAN
Who's Ted Barrett?

JULIE
The umpire, at third. I didn't realize it was him.

DAN
You know the umpires, too?

JULIE
Not all of them. My girlfriend Kendra has a big crush on him.

DAN
On an umpire?

JULIE
She thinks he has a cute butt.

DAN
Oh. It's hard to tell way out here.
(pause)
I really don't want to make you uncomfortable with this whole thing.

JULIE
I appreciate that, Dan.

DAN
(pause)
I feel fortunate to finally get to know you. I'm really proud of you - you're a great young lady.

JULIE
Thanks.

DAN
I wish I'd been there to spend more time with-

JULIE jumps to her feet.

JULIE
Look at that! Great play!

DAN
(standing)
What?

JULIE
(sitting)
And bare-handed, too. That kid's got great hands.

DAN
(sitting)
Yeah.

JULIE
Everybody was upset when they brought him up from the minors, but he just gets better every day.

DAN
(pause)
So this is what a father-daughter outing is like.

JULIE
I guess so.

DAN
I hope we get a lot more of these.
(pause, getting no response)
Do you?

JULIE

I'm sure that'll all come together. Why don't we just enjoy the game, okay?
Nice! That's eight strikeouts already.

DAN

(pause)

You know, I was thinking, maybe I'm a little like your giant.

JULIE

My what?

DAN

Your giant. From your story.

JULIE

What are you-

DAN

The giant.... that lived on the hill with the giant cows that gave soda pop. And you're like the little girl who made friends with the giant.

JULIE

Who told you this?

DAN

Your mom. I think maybe this was your way of looking for your dad....when you were a kid.

JULIE

My mom told you She...Dan, this is...this is just....

DAN

It's like we can be friends, because you're brave enough to -

JULIE

No! That's not what it's like! You have no right to ...to...to invade my life like this!

DAN

But your mom said-

JULIE

I don't care what she said! You may be my biological father, but I don't need any parenting.

DAN

I'm just trying-

JULIE

I don't need some guy working his way into my private life, trying to psychoanalyze my childhood – it's like you're trying to rope me in with an imaginary umbilical cord.

DAN

But Julie-

JULIE

No, Dan, no! You're a nice guy, but I don't need you butting into my life.

DAN

But I'm your Dad!

JULIE

NO, YOU'RE NOT!

(sobbing)

I'm sorry it worked out like this. I'm sorry for the way it all happened, but that's the way it is and it's not my fault. I didn't ask for this and I'm not about to-

JULIE picks up her things and starts to exit.

DAN

Julie! Please!

JULIE

No! Leave me alone. Please Dan, leave me alone.

JULIE exits. DAN watches JULIE leave, totally lost. SOUND: Singing of "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" in the distance. The lights fade out.