

A BENCH IN DRAGONFLY PARK

By Alice Burke and Scott Mullen

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SYNOPSIS: In a quiet park, odd things take place around a typical park bench, from unexpected encounters to wedding proposals to parallel universes and a surprising murder plan.

DURATION: 90 minutes

SETTING: A bench in a park.

TIME: Present

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3-15 females, 2-9 males)

DRAGONFLY

MEGAN (f).....20s-30s. Stuck in a lonely routine. *(38 lines)*
 EARL (m)20s-30s. Looking for new adventures. *(35 lines)*

BACKGROUND

TRACY (f).....20s-30s. Excited. *(23 lines)*
 RITA (f)20s-50s. Experienced. *(36 lines)*
 PETE (m)20s-30s. A friendly bystander. *(14 lines)*

SEEDS

DIANE (f).....late 30s-50s. A friendly woman on a park bench. *(64 lines)*
 GWEN (f).....teens. A teenage girl with an agenda. *(57 lines)*
 JACK (m).....late 30s-50s. Gwen's father. *(6 lines)*

SPONTANEOUS

ALLIE (f).....40s-60s. A bit dramatic. *(23 lines)*
 JEN (f).....40s-60s. Protective. *(29 lines)*
 NANCY (f)40s-60s. Up for anything. *(32 lines)*

WHEELCHAIR

GIL (m).....20s-40s. Handsome, in a suit. *(57 lines)*
 MAGGIE (f).....20s-30s. In a wheelchair. *(64 lines)*

THIRD WINDOW FROM THE RIGHT

KATE (f).....20s-40s. Initially quiet, but willing to
 engage. *(64 lines)*
 HENRY (m).....20s-40s. Socially awkward. *(65 lines)*

A SQUIRREL NAMED HOPE

TOBY (m).....20s-30s. Extremely depressed. *(36 lines)*
 LAURA (f).....50s-70s. Cheerful and hopeful. *(40 lines)*

TWO IDENTICAL UMBRELLAS

KATIE (f).....20s-50s. A nicely-dressed woman. *(61 lines)*
 TOM (m).....20s-50s. A nicely-dressed man.
 Similar age to Katie. *(68 lines)*

PROPOSALS

PAUL (m).....20s-30s. Meek and romantic. *(45 lines)*
 JAKE (m).....20s-30s. A brash influencer. *(53 lines)*
 BETTY (f).....40s-60s. Jake's mother. *(34 lines)*
 MARY (f).....20s-30s. Paul's girlfriend. *(4 lines)*
 AMBER (f).....20s-30s. Jake's girlfriend. *(2 lines)*

CAST NOTE: Actors can easily play roles in more than one play.

PRODUCTION NOTES: You can do all the plays, or as many as you want. Actors can play multiple characters. The action takes place over the course of a single day, though plays can flow one into the other. The one exception is Wheelchair, which needs to end on a blackout, whether it is an act break or not. Any other scenery aside from the bench is up to you.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES: Have fun with the bench, and the action around it.

PROPS**DRAGONFLY:**

- ☐ a takeout coffee cup
- ☐ two pennies
- ☐ a dragonfly prop (optional)

BACKGROUND:

- ☐ a watch

SEEDS:

- ☐ a paper bag

SPONTANEOUS:

- ☐ a sweater
- ☐ a snow cone

WHEELCHAIR:

- ☐ a wheelchair
- ☐ two \$20 bills
- ☐ a flask
- ☐ a watch

THIRD WINDOW FROM THE RIGHT:

- ☐ a thermos
- ☐ a paper bag
- ☐ an envelope of cash

A SQUIRREL NAMED HOPE:

- ☐ two brown bags
- ☐ Tupperware
- ☐ a granola bar

TWO IDENTICAL UMBRELLAS:

- ☐ two identical umbrellas

PROPOSALS:

- ☐ two wedding ring boxes
- ☐ two cell phones

DRAGONFLY

AT START: *MEGAN enters and sits down on the bench, cup of coffee in her hand. She looks around.*

MEGAN: Mom? Are you here? *(She looks behind her.)* Where are you, Mom?

EARL enters. He stops and picks a penny off the ground. He holds it up and smiles. MEGAN checks her watch.

MEGAN: Seriously, Mom, you're going to make me late for work. Where are you?

EARL gives her a curious look. He walks on, then suddenly freezes, looking at his arm.

EARL: Well, hey there!

Note: The dragonfly can either be a prop that EARL puts on his arm out of sight of the audience (and later removes), or something that the audience will have to imagine.

MEGAN: Are you talking to me? Do I know you?

EARL: Oh no, sorry. I was talking to my Uncle Andy.

MEGAN looks confused and looks around. EARL holds up his arm.

EARL: He just landed on my arm.

MEGAN jumps up and rushes over to look.

MEGAN: Oh, no, that's Barb, my mom. I've been waiting for her. She visits me on this bench almost every day since she died. Sometimes she lands on my shoulder, sometimes on the back of the bench, or once she landed on my shoe, but always close by. Hey, Mom!

MEGAN reaches out like she's going to take the dragonfly off EARL'S arm. EARL pulls away.

EARL: I'm sorry, I'm afraid you're mistaken. This is my Uncle Andy.

MEGAN: It's not!

EARL: I had a dream about him last night. And then I found a penny on the ground right now, right before he landed on my arm. It's definitely him. I have a very strong connection with him. Sometimes he visits me as a cardinal in the morning, and sits close while I have my morning coffee on the patio. Often he visits as a butterfly, but I guess today he's a dragonfly.

EARL addresses the dragonfly on his arm.

EARL: Isn't that right, Uncle Andy?

MEGAN: I'm sorry, but you're mistaken. My connection with my mom is very, very strong and I just know that dragonfly is her. She must have meant to land on me, and you got in the way. Hey Mom, I'm over here.

MEGAN reaches out again. EARL takes a step back. Their heads both turn as if the dragonfly is flying away.

MEGAN: Mom, no, come back—

EARL: Andy—

MEGAN: Now look at what you've done!

EARL: What I've done? I was just walking here, and he landed on me. You startled him when you kept reaching for him.

MEGAN: She'll be back and she'll land on me this time. I'll sit over here, Mom! I'm going to drink my coffee on our bench! You can come back!

MEGAN sits on the bench and picks up her coffee, then defiantly holds her arm out to give the dragonfly somewhere to land. She scans the area again, glares at EARL, and sips her coffee.

MEGAN: Any minute now.

EARL stands in the same place, looking around. He holds his arm out.

EARL: Come on Andy.

MEGAN: Mom!

EARL: Andy!

MEGAN: Stop scaring her off!

They glare at each other. EARL finally looks away and lowers his arm. He pulls the penny out of his pocket, looks at it, and then sits down next to MEGAN. He shows the penny to her. She looks away.

EARL: Does your mom ever leave you pennies?

MEGAN: (*Annoyed.*) Why would my mom leave me pennies?

EARL: Many people believe that when you find a random penny on the ground, it means your loved one has visited. I've found a lot of pennies in the three years since my Uncle Andy passed. I started putting them all in a jar on my dresser—I'll bet there are about 100 now. I find them in crazy places. Before the one I just picked up here, I found one in a bathroom stall in Home Depot.

MEGAN: Ew.

EARL: I washed it off.

MEGAN: My mother would never leave some random thing for me on a bathroom floor. She leaves pretty heart rocks or lovely feathers on the beach sometimes. I have a bunch of those on my windowsill, but a germy penny? No.

EARL: My Uncle Andy had a great sense of humor. Man, did he used to make me laugh. He was always making bets with me and challenging me to do crazy things. He probably just wanted to see if I would actually pick it up. Of course I did. Do you know what else? It was a 1965 penny, the year he was born. So is this one.

MEGAN looks at the penny.

MEGAN: That's pretty neat.

EARL: I sure miss him.

MEGAN: I miss my mom. She and I would walk to the bus stop together through this park every day to get to work—we had jobs a

few blocks away from each other, so we commuted back and forth together for years. We'd leave a little early and sit on this bench with our coffee and a bagel and enjoy the sounds of the park and people watch. I never got tired of her company. Did you know this park is called Dragonfly Park?

EARL: No.

MEGAN: My mom told me there used to be thousands of dragonflies here. Not so much nowadays, though. But she used to be so happy when she saw one. She's been gone two years, three months and eleven days.

EARL: I'm sorry.

MEGAN: Thanks. I've been pretty lonely since she died.

EARL: Uncle Andy was like a dad to me. He always encouraged me to be a better person and to not be afraid to try something new. He was an incredible role model and he was always, always fun. It hit me very hard when he passed away.

MEGAN sighs.

MEGAN: That dragonfly feels like the only connection to her memory—and you're right, it probably wasn't even her. It was probably your uncle. Or maybe it was just a dragonfly. What am I doing? Every day I follow the same routine and hope for a sign from her. Maybe I'm kidding myself. It's kind of a pitiful, lonely life to be honest.

EARL: Grief is hard.

MEGAN: It is. And I want to believe... But I don't know.

EARL: That was the first time a dragonfly ever landed on me. It feels like that means something.

MEGAN: I'm not so sure anymore. I need to go.

MEGAN gets up and starts to walk away. Then she freezes.

MEGAN: Oh!

She bends down and looks at something.

EARL: Is it a penny?

MEGAN: It is. Sitting all by itself. Do you think—

EARL: That's your mom for sure. Pick it up and check it out. What year is it?

MEGAN picks it up.

MEGAN: 1996 [Or whatever year the actor was born].

EARL: Does that mean anything to you?

MEGAN: The year I was born.

MEGAN sits back down. EARL leans over. Both stare at the penny.

EARL: I'm Earl.

MEGAN: Hi Earl, I'm Megan.

EARL: Don't move.

MEGAN: What?

EARL: The dragonfly is back.

MEGAN: Where?

EARL: It's circling us both.

They watch it fly around them.

MEGAN: Who do you think it is?

EARL: I don't know. I guess it could be either, or maybe a little bit of both.

They watch it fly.

MEGAN: It's not stopping.

EARL: It's just circling us.

MEGAN: What does it mean?

EARL: This might sound crazy, and hopefully I'm not overstepping my bounds, but my Uncle Andy was always trying to set me up with a nice girl.

MEGAN: Ha! Sounds like my mom.

They look at each other in surprise.

EARL: So Uncle Andy would want me to ask—what time do you get off work today?

MEGAN: My mom would want me to say that I get off at 5:15.

EARL: My Uncle would want me to say that I work nearby, and I know a great deli that makes great sandwiches. I could stop after work and grab us a couple, along with some cold beers—or whatever you want. We could come back here to this bench for a little picnic.

MEGAN: Mom would love that. It's a perfect first date.

EARL: (*To the dragonfly.*) Did you hear that? She said yes! We can toast to Andy and Barb. Maybe they'll join us again.

MEGAN: Or maybe it'll just be the two of us.

EARL: That sounds nice.

MEGAN: And there goes the dragonfly. Towards that fountain.

EARL: Do you want to throw our pennies in? Make a wish?

MEGAN: I love that. Come on.

She jumps up, EARL takes her hand, and they exit together in that direction.

END OF PLAY

BACKGROUND

AT START: *PETE enters and sits on the bench. He looks out into the park. TRACY and RITA enter. PETE doesn't notice them.*

TRACY: I can't believe I'm finally going to be a background actor in a movie. You've been doing this for years and trying to get me to submit, and I finally got up the nerve. And now that the day is here, I think I'm going to be sick. I'm so nervous. (*Paces.*) I'm not an actress—what if they want me to actually act?

RITA: Tracy, I've told you this a million times. When you're background, you're background—that's it.

TRACY: But I'm going to have to do things!

RITA: They'll probably give you direction, and you may get to act a little bit, if they want you to look surprised or sad or happy. All stuff you do every day. You may need to walk somewhere or look at something and behave in a certain way. But really, it's super easy—anyone can do it. Just listen to directions, do what they say, and don't look at the camera.

TRACY: I don't know. Seriously. I might freeze up. Or maybe I won't be able to stop looking at the camera—I'll just start staring at it like this.

TRACY stares, over-the-top.

RITA: Okay, don't do that.

TRACY: I feel like they'll think I'm a fraud and kick me off the set. I'll be mortified and I'll never get the opportunity to do that again.

RITA: Take a deep breath.

TRACY breathes.

RITA: I have an idea. We'll practice. I have no idea what the scene is going to be, but we'll make one up and I'll be the director. You'll see how simple it is.

RITA spots PETE. She lowers her voice slightly.

RITA: Okay, this is perfect. See that guy? He's the main character. The camera is going to be on him and you are going to be background for this movie about—I don't know. Maybe he's a superhero in disguise and he's about to go meet his superhero friends for lunch.

TRACY: Lunching with superhero friends? Seriously? That's the best you can do?

RITA: It doesn't matter. The camera is on him. He's staring out at the world, thinking about all the amazing things he's done for the city so far. All the lives he's saved. He's probably saved the planet at one point! But right now he's just a mild-mannered dude sitting in a park.

TRACY: Okay, got it.

RITA: Now I'm the director, and I'm going to tell you to walk behind him nonchalantly. Not too fast, not too slow. Stop once you've gotten a couple of feet past him. Look at your watch, tie your shoe. Then walk over and stand a few feet away from him, on that spot. Don't look at the camera, which is down there to the right of him.

TRACY: Walk behind him, stop, look at my watch, tie my shoe, and then walk and stand. Okay, I think I can do that.

RITA: Don't look at him and don't look at the camera. This is not about you. This is about... Silver—um—Silver Dragon, the superhero, disguised as a regular guy.

TRACY: Silver Dragon?

RITA: But you don't know that! To you he's just a guy. Don't make any sudden moves. Just move slow and easy and make it look natural.

TRACY: I can do this.

RITA: I'm going to say "Rolling" then "Background," and at that point, you start going. When I say "Cut," you come back to "one," which is your starting point. We can do a practice run first.

They look at PETE, who seems oblivious, gazing out into the park.

RITA: Okay. Rehearsal. And action.

TRACY starts walking behind the bench. But she's nervous, and stumbles, catching herself. PETE looks at her curiously. An embarrassed TRACY flees back to RITA.

TRACY: That's exactly what I was afraid I would do.

RITA: You're overthinking it. Forget about the camera. You've been in this park a million times. Pretend this is real, you're not in a movie. Just remember what you need to do and listen to my directions.

TRACY takes a deep breath.

TRACY: Okay, I can do it this time.

RITA: *(Quietly.)* Action.

TRACY smoothly walks behind PETE, stops a bit past him, and bends down to tie her shoe, then freezes.

TRACY: Darn it.

TRACY walks back to RITA. PETE eyes them, slightly more curious. They give him a small wave and turn back to each other. PETE shakes his head and goes back to looking at the park.

TRACY: *(Low, to RITA.)* I forgot to check my watch.

RITA: That's okay. Also, don't distract the talent. He has to concentrate on his character and if you're making too much noise, he won't be able to focus. Calm, cool and slow. You've got this.

TRACY: I got this.

RITA: Action.

TRACY more-confidently walks behind PETE, stops, and checks her watch dramatically. RITA nods her head encouragingly. TRACY bends down to tie her shoe and then walks a few feet past PETE. She looks away from him, trying to be discreet. But PETE looks over and stares at her, then turns and sees RITA watching it all. He looks confused.

RITA: Cut!

TRACY walks back to RITA. A puzzled PETE stares at them, then turns back to his original position with a shake of his head.

RITA: That was good but slow it down a bit. No drama when you're looking at your watch. Calm, discreet movements. The talent got distracted—he has lines to remember, and you don't want to make him forget.

TRACY: Okay.

RITA: We're done with rehearsal—pretend this is the real deal. Slow down, do what I told you to. When I say "Cut" come back to me.

TRACY nods, looking serious. RITA mimes using a clipboard.

TRACY: Take one. Rolling. And background!

TRACY walks smoothly behind PETE, stops, looks at her watch. PETE turns around and watches her, though a concentrating TRACY doesn't notice. She stoops down and ties her shoe, then stands and walks to her spot. PETE rises and moves toward TRACY, about to speak.

RITA: Cut! Cut! Back to one!

PETE: What is going on?

TRACY: I'm sorry Mr. Dragon, I didn't mean to distract you! I'll try again but much more slowly and you won't even notice me there. Really. Go back to your bench and pretend I'm not there.

PETE: Did you call me "Mr. Dragon"?

TRACY: Oh shoot, you're supposed to be in disguise. I don't know your secret identity. Or your actual actor name.

RITA comes over and grabs TRACY'S arm.

RITA: Tracy, what did I say? Stop talking to the talent! (To PETE.) I'm very sorry sir, it won't happen again.

PETE looks around, utterly confused.

PETE: Am I on a movie set?

RITA: Come on Tracy, back to one. Mr. Dragon, please go back to your spot on the bench and ignore the background. Her disruption will not happen again.

PETE: Um, okay?

RITA and TRACY return to the starting point. PETE walks back to the bench while looking around, trying to figure out if there are indeed cameras. He finally sits again.

RITA: Action.

TRACY does her walk and her watch checking and her shoe tying and does it perfectly. She ends up at the same spot, looking away from PETE.

RITA: And—cut! Perfect.

RITA walks over to TRACY, with PETE watching and listening in.

RITA: See Tracy, that was perfect. You blended into the scene perfectly. All I saw was Silver Dragon, as he sat on the bench reminiscing about all his amazing work for the citizens of the city. You didn't distract him as he imagined what the future might bring, and what new bad guys he might need to battle. And about reuniting with his superhero friends and, uh, forming a new superhero group. Or something like that.

PETE: Wait.

RITA and TRACY look at him.

PETE: I was supposed to be thinking all of those things? I didn't realize that. I was honestly thinking about the fact that I have to go see my mother and tell her that I just broke up with Linda. And then I have to listen to my mother tell me what a mistake I made and that I will never get married, because Linda might be the only person that will date me. And how disappointed my mother is in me. Then she'll make me clean out her closet, which she's been after me to do for months. It's a huge mess, just like my life. But I really like what you said better, and I would like to try that scene again. I feel like I can really get into the mind of Silver Dragon.

RITA and TRACY look at each other. RITA shrugs.

RITA: Okay, great. Tracy, back to one. Silver, I mean, um—what is your secret identity name?

PETE: Well the guy who just broke up with Linda and has to clean his mother's closet is Stan. But I don't want to be Stan anymore. I want to be—Pete. Yes! My secret identity is Pete.

RITA: Okay, great Pete. Back to one.

PETE moves back to the bench. He's sitting a little taller and his chin is up. A different person. A superhero in disguise. TRACY and RITA go back to where they started. RITA claps the invisible clapboard again.

RITA: Take two. Rolling. And—background.

TRACY does her routine flawlessly. When she reaches the spot past PETE he looks straight ahead a few seconds longer, but then looks at TRACY and walks over to her.

PETE: Hi, I'm Pete. I'm going to meet my friends in the city for lunch to discuss the future. Would you like to join us?

RITA: Cut! Hey! No, she's background! Don't answer him! She does not get paid to talk. Cut! Back to one, back to one!

TRACY: (*Ignoring RITA.*) That sounds really fun. But I have this job to go to. (*To RITA.*) Though maybe he can come along?

PETE: I'd like to.

RITA: He hasn't been approved!

PETE: If they don't let me in, that's okay.

RITA: We don't know if he can do background.

TRACY: I bet he'd be good.

PETE: Let me try!

RITA rolls her eyes.

RITA: Fine. Tracy, you sit on the bench. Pretend you're the hero.
You're—

TRACY: Golden Dragon?

PETE: I like it.

RITA: And you're thinking about—

TRACY: How fighting crime leaves me no time for love.

PETE: Awww—

RITA: That'll work. Pete, over here. Places. And... action!

RITA does the clapboard. TRACY stares out at the park. PETE walks behind the bench, checks his watch, ties his shoe, and moves to the spot, perfectly.

RITA: And... cut.

Instead, PETE points.

PETE: Look! It's Professor Evil!

TRACY: We can stop him!

They rush off the stage together. RITA crosses to look after them.

RITA: Not bad. Not bad at all.

She exits after them.

END OF PLAY

SEEDS

AT START: *DIANE enters and sits down on the bench, a paper bag in her hand. She doesn't notice when GWEN, 15, comes in and watches her. DIANE pulls out a handful of (pretend) bird seed, and tosses it as far away from herself as she can. She watches it land. Smiles. Notices GWEN.*

DIANE: The pigeons are hungry today.

GWEN: You're feeding pigeons?

DIANE: There's a woman who comes by and feeds the squirrels, but no one ever thinks about feeding the pigeons. I decided to be that person.

DIANE looks at GWEN. GWEN stares back. It's an odd moment.

DIANE: Do you want to sit down?

GWEN hesitates, then sits on the bench. DIANE offers her the bag.

DIANE: Take a handful, and try to toss it as far away from the bench as you can. Don't get it too close. I made that mistake once—I just tossed it on the ground down there, and the birds were all over me. I like birds, but I don't like them that much. Here.

GWEN reaches in a hand. Pulls out a fist. She opens her hand and looks at the food.

GWEN: What are you feeding them?

DIANE: Dried peas, some wheat, some seeds. A lot of people feed birds old bread, but that's not very good for them. Plus they like this better.

GWEN closes her hand again. Throws the invisible contents in the same direction DIANE did.

DIANE: Nice throw. Look at them eat. My name's Diane. What's yours?

GWEN: It's silly.

DIANE: There are no silly names.

GWEN: My name is Guinevere.

DIANE: I love that name!

GWEN: No one can spell it.

DIANE: I bet they call you Gwen.

GWEN: They do.

DIANE: That's a nice name too.

DIANE catches GWEN staring at her again.

DIANE: Do we know each other?

GWEN: No. Not really.

DIANE: Not really?

GWEN: Can I throw some more?

DIANE offers her the bag. GWEN pulls out another fistful. Holds it.

GWEN: You love animals, huh?

DIANE: I do.

GWEN: I bet you have pets.

DIANE: Three cats.

GWEN: Three. Wow.

DIANE: You?

GWEN: Not right now. Your kids must like the cats, huh?

DIANE: No kids.

GWEN: Your husband.

DIANE: No husband.

GWEN: Never?

DIANE: Don't let anyone tell you that you need to be married. Or have kids.

GWEN: No, I know.

DIANE: It's not good or bad. It's just how life worked out.

GWEN: But you wish you had kids?

DIANE: Sometimes.

GWEN: My mother died when I was four.

DIANE: I'm sorry.

GWEN: I barely remember her. Isn't that awful? I've seen photos, but most of my memories of her are from those photos. Not of us together.

DIANE: You were young.

GWEN: I suppose. It was a car accident. Not her fault. Drunk driver.

DIANE: That's terrible.

GWEN: Yeah.

GWEN throws the fistful of food. Runs her hands on her legs over and over again, stressed.

DIANE: Are you okay?

GWEN: I can't do this.

DIANE: Do what?

GWEN: I mean, it's not fair to you. It's going to change things forever, no matter what happens. And maybe that's a good thing, and maybe that isn't. It's a lot of responsibility.

DIANE: What's the matter, Gwen?

GWEN looks at her.

GWEN: Are you happy? Really happy?

DIANE hesitates.

DIANE: That's a tough question.

GWEN: I know.

DIANE: I guess I am. Sometimes. I'm content. I've made my life.

GWEN: Do you ever dream?

DIANE: Of course.

GWEN: What did you dream last night?

DIANE smiles.

GWEN: What?

DIANE: Last night I dreamed of bears.

GWEN: Bears!

DIANE: In fact, I guess I was a bear. Big and furry. I was traveling with a bunch of bears. We were all going to our caves for the winter, to hibernate. And we all had different caves. Which was sort of lonely... But I could look out the opening to my cave, and see the other bears, looking out their caves, and it felt like we were watching over each other. Strange, I know. Maybe that's why I feed the pigeons.

DIANE throws some more food.

DIANE: What do you dream of?

GWEN: Sometimes I dream of different universes. Different lives. Where things worked out differently. Do you ever do that?

DIANE: ...Maybe.

GWEN: I want to tell you a story. Let's say it's... a story I'm writing for school. And I need an ending. Maybe you can help me with that.

DIANE: I'm listening.

GWEN: It's about a man whose wife dies. And he's really sad, and his children are really sad. And he becomes obsessed with somehow bringing her back. He's a scientist, and he has a lot of stuff in his garage. And he believes that there are other universes, parallel universes. And in some his wife didn't die, and she is happy with her family in that world, and he doesn't want to mess with that. And in some, she did die, and that's sad, too. But maybe, just maybe, there's a parallel universe where she never met him. Where she's living alone, and she thinks she's happy, but maybe she isn't. Because she never met her soulmate. Never met her kids. Never really had that choice.

DIANE: Wow.

GWEN: How do you think that story should end?

DIANE: I guess, maybe he finds the woman, and talks to her, and if they are soulmates, really soulmates, she can sense that and... I don't know. Is he going to stay there with her? Can she go back to his universe?

GWEN: I think he'd want her to go back to his universe.

DIANE: So she'd be leaving everything in her world. Everyone.

GWEN: Yes. Though some of the people would exist in the other world.

DIANE: Where's she's suddenly alive.

GWEN: It's a tricky story.

DIANE: I like the story. How does it end?

GWEN: I don't know yet. But do you think it can be real? Do you believe it?

DIANE: I don't know. It's pretty far out. But the world is a strange place.

GWEN: There's another wrinkle. Maybe the man is shy. And scared. He finds the woman, and she's single, but he doesn't want to screw it up. He doesn't know if he can talk to her without breaking down—and that might just freak her out. He doesn't want to freak her out. So he sends his daughter, the sensible one, the serious one, to try and talk to the woman instead. To feel her out, to see if there's a chance.

DIANE: Wow. You have some imagination.

GWEN: No, I don't. I really don't. I wish I could make this stuff up.

DIANE: I don't understand.

GWEN: Don't freak out. Please. Don't. But I'm your daughter.

DIANE: What?

GWEN: Yeah.

DIANE: I think I'd know if I had a daughter.

GWEN: From the parallel world.

DIANE: That's not real.

GWEN: You're freaking out.

DIANE: Why are you telling me this?

GWEN: I have a picture.

GWEN pulls a small photo from her pocket. Hands it to DIANE.

GWEN: That's you. Holding me. When I was a baby.

DIANE stares at it.

DIANE: You could have faked this.

GWEN: I didn't.

DIANE: Do you want money? Is this a con?

GWEN: No! No. I just... I don't know. It's hard to know what to do. How to present this in a way that's not going to upset you, like you are now. Maybe this was a bad idea. Maybe I should have just made my father do this. Because it's all his idea! But I wanted it too. Really badly.

DIANE: Wanted what?

GWEN: You to come back with us. I know. It's silly. But it's not. Because you're her. You're really her. And just now, I had a memory, of you, bending over me, in a park like this. I'm in a sandbox, and you're worried that I'm cold, you brought me a coat, it's pink... I remember that coat. What you must think of me right now.

DIANE: I don't know what to think.

GWEN: I'm sorry. But look at me. My face. My eyes. Do you see yourself in me? At all?

DIANE looks.

DIANE: I don't know.

GWEN: Do you want to?

DIANE: I don't know! If I believe this—and I'm not saying I believe this—then why didn't I meet your father in this world?

GWEN: I don't know.

DIANE: If he's my soulmate... if he's my destiny... shouldn't we have met?

GWEN: I guess it doesn't always work like that.

DIANE: Gwen—

GWEN: Wait—do you believe that, if he is your soulmate, that you'll feel it immediately? That that will be enough?

DIANE: I do.

GWEN: Because he's here.

DIANE: What?

GWEN: Over there. Watching from behind the tree. I'm waving him over.

GWEN waves.

DIANE: Oh my goodness—

GWEN: No pressure. Forget I told you everything. Just meet my dad—his name is Jack—and see if you feel the spark. Even if it's just the seed of something, maybe you will recognize it.

DIANE: The seed.

GWEN: Maybe you'll just know.

JACK comes in. Very shy and nervous.

GWEN: Hey. She really isn't sure what to believe. But she wanted to meet you.

DIANE looks at JACK. JACK looks at DIANE. Just staring.

DIANE: Hi.

JACK: Hi.

DIANE reaches out. Touches his face.

JACK: This can't be real.

DIANE: That's supposed to be my line.

JACK: I never thought I'd see you again.

DIANE: I'm not her.

JACK: I know.

DIANE: But I guess I am, aren't I?

JACK: In all the best ways.

DIANE touches his face again.

DIANE: Can I bring my cats?

JACK: You can.

DIANE looks at him.

DIANE: Let's go.

DIANE takes his hand, and GWEN'S as well. And they all exit together.

END OF PLAY

DO NOT COPY

SPONTANEOUS

AT START: *ALLIE, JEN and NANCY enter, walking together. They stop at the bench.*

ALLIE: Wait you guys. I need to sit down, I'm having another hot flash. I need to take off this sweater.

ALLIE pulls off her sweater and drapes it over the back of the bench.

JEN: Okay, but just for a few minutes. I don't want to miss the tennis game, those guys play every day at this time and they are nice to look at.

ALLIE fans herself.

ALLIE: Okay, just hang on. How come this doesn't happen to you guys? I'm dying here. I'm sure this is going to be the big one, the SHC. Whooooo!

NANCY: SHC?

JEN: Spontaneous human combustion. Allie is convinced that one of these days she's going to burst into flames and become a pile of dust.

NANCY: I didn't think that was real.

JEN: It's not.

ALLIE: Yes it is. Back in 1885 some lady named Matilda in Illinois burst into flames. Only her feet were left. They found them in her kitchen.

NANCY: Gross. But kind of interesting at the same time.

JEN: It's not a thing. Nobody saw that happen. People have hot flashes all the time. Go to your doctor and get on meds, it will help, trust me.

ALLIE: I don't like to take medications. I've tried some natural remedies, but I don't think they're working. What I need is one of those giant snow cones that the ice cream man has here at the park. Where is he? He usually comes around at this time. I need to buy two—one to eat and one to rub on my face.

NANCY: There you go. Keep a bunch of snow cones around that you can rub on your body to keep yourself from going up in flames. It could work. Mike could help you with that—that might be fun.

JEN: Nancy, I really think we should be helping Allie think of ways to control her symptoms.

NANCY: Fine. I've heard acupuncture helps.

ALLIE: No needles! Maybe I'll move to Alaska so I can just sit in a pile of snow all the time.

NANCY: Ooooo! With the penguins!

JEN: There are no penguins in Alaska! Alaska doesn't even have snow all the time.

ALLIE: Fine. Then I'll go to the North Pole. I'll live in an igloo.

NANCY: With penguins!

JEN: There are no penguins at the North Pole! There's not even an actual North Pole!

ALLIE: But it's cold up there.

JEN: Yes!

ALLIE: That's all I need. *(Fanning herself.)* It's definitely going to happen soon. I smell smoke. *(She smells her armpit.)* Do you smell smoke?

NANCY: I smell hotdogs from the stand over there. It's making me hungry. I think on the way back from the tennis game, I'm going to have to stop for one.

ALLIE continues sniffing herself.

JEN: Allie, you are not starting to smoke! You are a little flushed, and a bit sweaty, but I don't see any smoke.

ALLIE: There was another case of a lady in Florida, in the 1950s. Her name was Mary something. She was just sitting in her chair, minding her own business, when BAM—she burst into flames. I believe only one of her feet was left.

NANCY: Okay, there goes my appetite. Forget the hotdog. Try not to leave any body parts behind if this happens to you. You really need to commit—everything needs to burn up with you.

JEN: Nancy!

NANCY: Do you want to walk into her house and find two feet on the floor?

JEN: Allie, you need to stop obsessing about this. Stop looking up stories online about SHC. You're going through menopause, that's it. You can't live your life being afraid you're suddenly going to turn to ash. It's not healthy.

ALLIE: Turning to ash is definitely not healthy!

JEN: That's not what I meant.

ALLIE: I'm trying to convince Mike to become a volunteer firefighter. Then I might have a chance if he's with me when the flames start.

NANCY: What he'd say?

ALLIE: He thinks it's ridiculous. He won't even let me keep a fire extinguisher in every room.

NANCY: I'd follow you around with a fire extinguisher if you want.

ALLIE: See—Nancy understands.

JEN: There's nothing to understand!

NANCY: Have you heard of stop, drop and roll? I learned that way back in elementary school. Maybe you could do that.

ALLIE: I'm not sure that would be quick enough. One second I'd be there, and the next—feet.

NANCY: I told you not to leave any feet!

JEN: You're not helping, Nancy!

ALLIE: I actually hope it's that fast, so I won't know what hit me. Maybe I'll be sleeping. Mike will be sorry that he didn't take any precautions. I even offered to sleep in a separate room to protect him!

NANCY: That's sweet.

ALLIE: He does turn up the air conditioner though, because when I get one of these flashes even he can't bear to be too close to me. It's hard to be a woman sometimes.

NANCY: Amen, sister.

JEN: We're your best friends and we're always here for you, you know that. But this obsession is getting out of control. I'm going to give you my doctor's name and number and I want you to call her. I'll even go with you! She's an amazing doctor and she'll help find you something to get through this. I'll also give you my therapist's info—Dr. Meadows is wonderful.

ALLIE: Okay, I'll give it a try. Thanks, Jen.

JEN: What are friends for?

NANCY: Now that we've got that figured out, we need to go or we're going to miss those two hunky guys on the court. I'll bet they have their shirts off already. I may burst into flames watching them, but what a way to go!

JEN: Nice, Nance.

ALLIE wipes her forehead.

ALLIE: I may still need a second.

NANCY: Look at her. She's bright red and sweating like a pig. She might go up at any minute. I'm going to call 9-1-1.

ALLIE: Don't! Either I'll be fine, or I'll burn up. Either way they won't do any good. I think I'll be okay.

JEN: Take your time.

ALLIE: Thanks.

NANCY: Wow, don't look now, but there's a really, really nice-looking guy jogging our way.

NANCY and JEN turn to watch the unseen man; they turn to gaze at him as he moves across the park. Meanwhile, there's the sound of the ice cream bell. ALLIE looks up, and heads offstage in that direction. JEN and NANCY watch until the man disappears, sigh at the same time, then turn back to find the bench empty, except for her sweater still draped on the back.

NANCY: Allie?

JEN: Where did she go?

NANCY: Allie!

They both look around.

NANCY: Oh no.

JEN: You don't think—

NANCY: She was right here!

NANCY bends down and looks under the bench.

NANCY: Was this dust here before?

JEN: I don't know. Maybe? Maybe not. Her sweater is still there.

NANCY: She wasn't wearing it.

JEN: Is it scorched at all?

NANCY looks at it.

NANCY: I can't see anything. At least she didn't leave any feet.

JEN: Nancy!

NANCY: She promised she wouldn't!

JEN: We would have noticed her bursting into flames behind us!
Wouldn't we?

NANCY: I don't know how fast it happens. Maybe it's instantaneous.
Though it felt like we stared at that guy's butt for a long time.

JEN: I was in my own little world there for a bit.

NANCY: *(To the bench.)* Oh Allie. I'm so sorry Jen didn't believe you.

JEN: Me! This isn't my fault. What are we going to tell Mike?

NANCY: It's not like she didn't warn him.

JEN: I guess we better go, this is going to be hard.

They put their arms around each other and sadly walk off. A few beats later, ALLIE returns with a snow cone.

ALLIE: Jen? Nancy? Geez, you could have waited for me.
Where did you go?

She sits on the bench and looks down. Runs her fingers through the imaginary dirt.

ALLIE: Oh no. No. No. *(Beat.)* At least they didn't leave their feet.

ALLIE starts heading off back the way she came, when JEN and NANCY come running back in.

JEN: See! I thought I heard her. Allie, you scared us! I'm going to have nightmares for a week!

They all hug.

NANCY: The heck with the tennis game, we need to get a drink.

ALLIE: With extra ice.

NANCY: I know a good barbecue place.

JEN: Nancy!

They exit laughing, arm-in-arm.

END OF PLAY

DO NOT COPY

WHEELCHAIR

AT START: *GIL enters and sits down on the park bench, looking out at the world. Rolling herself in is MAGGIE, in a wheelchair. She stops next to the bench.*

MAGGIE: Is anyone sitting here?

GIL: No. Feel free.

MAGGIE awkwardly tries to transfer herself from the wheelchair to the ground. She is able to use her legs a bit, though they seem weak.

GIL: Would you like some help?

MAGGIE: No, no, I got it.

MAGGIE manages to move onto the bench. She looks out at the world, then over at GIL, appraisingly. She finally slides over toward him a few inches.

MAGGIE: That wheelchair is comfortable, but sometimes too much comfort is uncomfortable, you know? Figure that out. Sometimes you need to get your butt onto a hard park bench. Feels so good. Don't worry, it's a muscular thing. It's not catching. You won't get it.

GIL isn't really paying attention to her.

MAGGIE: I used to come here with my sister, when we were kids. There was this mean old woman who would yell at us if we tried to draw a hopscotch on the sidewalk. No kids today. In school I guess. You grow up around here?

GIL: Huh? No. Chicago.

MAGGIE: Chicago! They got some big parks there, huh?

GIL: I suppose.

His eyes are still straight ahead. MAGGIE looks where he is looking.

MAGGIE: You don't mind me talking so much, do you? I mean, if you were reading, I wouldn't do it, but you're just sort of sitting here. Sometimes I find it easier to talk to a stranger. Especially one I'm not attracted to.

GIL: (*Amused.*) Oh, really?

MAGGIE: I come out here to watch the people. Like that couple over there.

GIL: Yeah. I've been watching them.

MAGGIE: Look at the tension. They've been arguing. She might be crying.

GIL: Some people aren't meant to be together.

MAGGIE: But watch. Within two minutes, I bet they'll be kissing.

GIL: Not going to happen.

MAGGIE: Bet? Twenty bucks.

GIL: Come on.

MAGGIE: Seriously.

MAGGIE'S purse dangles from the wheelchair. She pulls out a bill and slaps it on the bench between them.

MAGGIE: Twenty dollars. Kiss on the lips. Two minutes. Starting... well, not starting until you agree to the bet.

GIL eyes the couple again. He pulls out his wallet, pulls out a bill, and puts it on top of hers.

GIL: Bet. You gonna time it?

MAGGIE looks at her watch.

MAGGIE: Starting now.

They watch.

MAGGIE: Come on. Plant a big one on him.

GIL: It's not going to happen.

MAGGIE: Look at her. She wants to be there, or she would have fled. She's vulnerable. She wants him to kiss her. To tell her he's sorry.

GIL: Agreed. But look at him. He's in over his head. There's no charm there, no finesse. Worse, you can tell he's stubborn. Whatever they were arguing about, I guarantee he thinks he's right. He's not going to apologize.

MAGGIE: Well, she's not going to apologize.

GIL: Exactly. So no kiss.

MAGGIE: We'll see.

GIL: Time?

MAGGIE: One minute ten seconds to go.

GIL: They're arguing again.

MAGGIE: But look at the passion. Trust me. I always had the biggest arguments with the guys I had the best sex with.

GIL: Not me.

MAGGIE: No?

GIL: It's a respect thing. If you want to argue with my opinion, we shouldn't be together.

MAGGIE: Huh. Really?

She leans over and looks.

MAGGIE: No ring.

GIL: I haven't found the perfect girl yet.

MAGGIE looks at him. He's still looking at the couple.

GIL: He's not going to kiss her. They're done.

MAGGIE: Thirty seconds.

GIL: Not going to happen. Look at the tension in his neck.

MAGGIE: They've stopped arguing—

GIL: Just taking a breather.

MAGGIE: She's still there. He's still there.

GIL: True. But are they kissing?

MAGGIE: No.

GIL: Time?

MAGGIE: Five, four, three, two, one. Rats.

GIL scoops up both bills.

GIL: I suppose if I was a gentleman, I wouldn't take your money.

MAGGIE: No. Fair's fair.

GIL pockets the bills. MAGGIE eyes the couple.

MAGGIE: Double or nothing. Two more minutes.

GIL: It's not going to happen.

MAGGIE: You're that sure? Then three minutes. Double or nothing there's a kiss in the next three minutes.

GIL: Forty dollars?

MAGGIE: Chicken?

GIL: You're on.

GIL pulls the bills out, puts them back on the bench. MAGGIE rifles through her purse.

MAGGIE: Awww, come on.

GIL: Stop stalling.

MAGGIE: I don't have any more cash on me.

GIL: Oh well—

GIL reaches for the bills. MAGGIE eyes the couple.

MAGGIE: Wait.

MAGGIE digs back into her purse. Comes out with a flask. Puts it on the bench.

MAGGIE: Do you drink?

GIL: It depends.

MAGGIE: Macallan 18 year Highland Style Malt Scotch Whisky.

GIL: I drink.

MAGGIE: All eight ounces, against your forty dollars. Three minutes.

GIL: Deal.

MAGGIE: Starting now.

They watch.

GIL: It's not going to happen.

MAGGIE: You keep saying that. And yet...

GIL: I know. She's still there. What do we do if she gets up and leaves before the three minutes are up?

MAGGIE: Does he get up and follow her?

GIL: Will we follow them if they do?

MAGGIE: Might be a little obvious. Tell you what. If she leaves a ten-foot radius of the bench, you win.

GIL: Even if he chases her down, and makes love to her in the bushes?

MAGGIE: You think that might happen?

GIL: No. He's not the type.

GIL picks up the flask. Unscrews the lid. Takes a sniff, his eyes closed. Screws the top back on.

GIL: There must be a story.

MAGGIE: Some days are just sit-in-the-park-and-drink-really-expensive-scotch days. More so now.

GIL: Since your—

MAGGIE: Since my thing. Yes. Sad thing is, scotch was his drink. He turned me onto it.

GIL: He?

MAGGIE: Fiancé. Ex-fiancé. Called it off when I got... sick. He couldn't deal with it. Suddenly I wasn't the wife he pictured.

GIL looks out at the couple.

MAGGIE: This is where you call him an ass.

GIL: A man wants what he wants.

MAGGIE: Seriously?

GIL: You're lucky. You found out now, before you were married. Some men cave at the first sign of problems. They're weak. Other men... don't.

MAGGIE: Would you be with a woman like me?

GIL studies her.

GIL: Well, you're moderately attractive. You seem smart. Feisty, which is a plus. And you have that vulnerable thing underneath it all, which I like. But... how much worse is it going to get? Your wheelchair thing?

MAGGIE: It's going to get worse.

GIL: Yeah... I'm going to have to say no.

MAGGIE: You're an ass.

GIL: A man wants what he wants. How much time left?

MAGGIE: Under a minute.

GIL looks out at the couple.

GIL: Now she interests me. Pretty, but vulnerable. But loyal. She hasn't stormed off yet, which is good. But she will. And then... she just requires the right man.

MAGGIE: What are you going to do, follow her?

He smiles.

MAGGIE: Oh my God, you are.

GIL: It's a public service. She'll need a man to remind her how beautiful she is. To buy her a drink and listen to her problems.

MAGGIE: And then what... take her home?

GIL: Her place. Easier to leave.

MAGGIE: You're a... rogue.

GIL: I'll leave her with a smile on her face. Look, it's over. See all that space between them on the bench? How much time?

MAGGIE: Fifteen seconds.

GIL: She's going to wind up in the nearest bar, drowning her sorrows, and there I'll be. Catching her when she falls. Count it down.

GIL unscrews the lid off the flask.

MAGGIE: Five, four, three, two, one.

GIL drinks deeply from the flask. Finally smacks his lips.

GIL: That is good scotch.

MAGGIE: You going to share?

GIL: No. Because you called me an ass.

He drinks some more. Looks at her. Offers her the flask.

GIL: Oh, what the heck.

MAGGIE: Forget it.

GIL: Fine by me.

He drinks again.

GIL: Whoa. That's got a kick.

MAGGIE: It does.

GIL: She's standing up. She's going to leave him. That's my cue.
It's been real.

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