

This is a portion of the play. To obtain a complete reading copy or to arrange performance rights, please see [the Flowers In The Desert information page.](#)

FLOWERS IN THE DESERT
BY DONNA HOKE

CAST OF CHARACTER

BRITT: 39 years old

JOE: 41 years old

SETTINGS (VARIOUS LOCATIONS IN NEW JERSEY)

SCENE ONE: Mo's Bar and Grill

SCENE TWO: Mo's Bar and Grill

SCENE THREE: Fancy restaurant

SCENE FOUR: Art museum

SCENE FIVE: Sports bar

SCENE SIX: Theater/parking lot

SCENE SEVEN: Park bench

SCENE EIGHT: Mo's Bar and Grill

SET NOTE: Scenes can be as realistic or as stylistic as desire and budget allows, i.e. art museum scene does not need art, theater does not need anything more than two chairs. The final scene--whether a pool table is used or not--should use sound effects for the action.

DIALOGUE NOTE:

// indicates overlapping dialogue

...indicates a beat before the line

Dialogue in [] is a reaction, and is unspoken

NOTE TO DIRECTORS: This show works best without blackouts between scenes. I have indicated transitions, but encourage any creativity in staging to move seamlessly from one scene to the next, which not only maintains audience engagement, but allows the actors to show emotional transitions as well.

SCENE 1

CASUAL BAR/GRILL EATERY, MO'S. JOE IS SEATED ALONE AT THE TABLE, AND FOOD HAS JUST ARRIVED. WATER GLASSES ON THE TABLE, BUT NO ALCOHOLIC DRINKS. HAMBURGER AND FRIES FOR JOE, A SALAD FOR BRITT.

Joe digs in. Britt emerges from the bathroom.

BRITT

Works every time. You want your food to arrive, go to the bathroom.

JOE

(caught mid-bite)

Sorry I didn't wait.

BRITT

I told the boys that. Big mistake. Now they test it every time.

(beat, taking her seat)

How many restrooms do you think you've used in your lifetime?

JOE

(WTF)

I don't know.

BRITT

(starts to eat)

No, really. If you think about all the places you've been, and all the restrooms you've used.

JOE

If you're counting actual restrooms, it's more for you than me.

BRITT

What do--

JOE

Trees, back alleys, snowbanks--

BRITT puts up a hand.

JOE

Who cares?

BRITT

[shrug] It just popped into my head. Is it more than a thousand, do you think?

JOE

Too many to count.

BRITT

I wasn't looking for an exact number.

JOE

(shrugs, holds out burger)

You want a bite?

BRITT

Why would I want a bite of that?

JOE

It's good. Mo's has good burgers.

BRITT

No meat. Remember?

JOE

You're not over that yet?

BRITT

I-- never mind. No thank you.

JOE

(taking a bite)

You don't know what you're missing.

BRITT

You're right. I haven't been here in two years and I can see that so much has changed.

JOE

I like it here.

BRITT

No really. Didn't they used to use pink chalk for the specials? Look, now it's blue.

JOE

It's comfortable.

BRITT

They got rid of the pool table.

JOE

Maybe they got sick of you hustling their customers away.

BRITT

I haven't been here. And even when I was, I never hustled anybody.

JOE

They bring in live music now. They needed room for that.

BRITT

Is it any good? The music?

JOE

It's no Springsteen.

BRITT

What is?

JOE

[True.]

(beat)

The last tour was weird without you.

BRITT

Tickets and sitters. It adds up.

JOE

He played "Independence Day" last show.

BRITT

Aargh. That hurts. Why would you tell me that?

JOE

Because I thought of you. Wished you were there to hear it.

BRITT

Next time.

JOE

I hope there is a next time. You never know--that's what I think at every show.

BRITT

And how many shows was that?

JOE

I don't know.

BRITT

Really. You've suddenly lost count? How many?

JOE

Just twenty or so.

BRITT

Must be nice to have all that freedom.

JOE
So the music's not bad sometimes. Cover bands. They had Meatloaf once.

BRITT
He's still around?

JOE
Very round.

BRITT
You should've told me. That would've been fun.

JOE
No meat, remember?

BRITT
[hat ha]

(beat)
With the pool table, I never had to pay for drinks. It was the best thing about this place.

JOE
I thought meeting me was the best thing about this place.

BRITT
I might have even made you a bet for old time's sake.

JOE
What would we bet?

BRITT
Doesn't matter. I wouldn't let you win this time.

JOE
Let me win.

BRITT
You know I did.

JOE
Sure.

BRITT
And you let me be a woman of my word instead of a woman of loose morals.

JOE
I'm a good guy.

BRITT
Neat trick: Being a good guy and still scoring.

JOE

It wasn't a bad bet, was it? I mean if me and you--

BRITT

You and I.

JOE

If you and me hadn't met and gotten together, we wouldn't have the kids. They're great kids.

BRITT

They are.

JOE

The best.

BRITT

I'm not arguing.

JOE

I know.

BRITT

Thank you?

JOE

I'm not fishing.

BRITT

But you want something.

JOE

I miss 'em, B. Wednesday nights and every other weekend, that's nothing. It's less than nothing. And Professor Jermaine/

BRITT

/Gerald./

JOE

/gets to see them all the time, and they're not even his kids.

BRITT

He's hardly a bad influence.

JOE

I'm sure he's not, but really, does the guy even know how to throw a football?

BRITT

That isn't nice.

JOE

Boys like sports.

BRITT

You like sports.

JOE

Yes, and a father should enjoy sports with his sons. More often.

BRITT

(deep breath)

You're right. You should see them more.

JOE

That was too easy.

BRITT

Yeah. But I've been thinking, you know, that maybe you should spend more time at the house, in their own environment. I think seeing you in that apartment makes them sad.

JOE

They like the bunkbeds.

BRITT

But you've got nothing in the refrigerator. If you want them to spend more time with you, you're going to have to learn to feed them something more substantial than boiled hot dogs and cheese doodles.

JOE

□ They like that stuff.

BRITT

They need good nutrition, Joe. Milk. Fruit. Vegetables.

JOE

I--

BRITT

Ketchup and potato chips don't count.

JOE

I don't really cook.

BRITT

You don't really want to cook.

JOE

Will they even eat those things?

BRITT

Not if you never put those things in front of them. Not if every visit to dad's is a junk food holiday.

JOE

I don't want to argue about vegetables. If I spent more time with them--

BRITT

Next week, I have to go away for a few days, and you could stay at the house--

JOE

Oh! You and lover boy want some time away, and then it's okay for me to spend more time with the kids. The rest of the time, it's "you know it's not your day." But when you need a babysitter--

BRITT

It's not babysitting when it's--

JOE

I know, I know.

BRITT

Well, it's not.

JOE

Okay then, when you have something you want to do, then it's okay to let me have more time.

BRITT

You didn't let me finish.

JOE

[Go ahead.]

BRITT

If you spent your time with them at the house, you could get used to their routine. That would make it easier for you to be together, because it wouldn't be so disruptive.

JOE

I'm sorry, but last time I checked, you asked me to move out.

BRITT

I don't want to go there, Joe. They're in second and third grade now; they have lives. You could take an interest. A close-up interest.

JOE

What's in it for you?

BRITT

Nothing.

JOE

Are you and Jerko eloping?

BRITT

It's... business. Gerald isn't coming.

JOE

Trouble in the garden?

BRITT

We... broke up.

JOE

Whoa!

BRITT

You don't have to sound so excited.

JOE

I'm just surprised. I thought he was "the one."

BRITT

I thought so, too.

JOE

Because he was so perfect for you, and you shared so many interests, and he understood you.

BRITT

Stop it.

JOE

And he's so good with the kids, and he teaches them so many things, and he reads, and he's everything I'm not.

BRITT

I was wrong.

JOE

(softening)

What did he do?

BRITT

Nothing.

JOE

Did he hurt you?

BRITT

No.

JOE

Because if he hurt you--

BRITT

He didn't hurt me. I hurt him.

JOE

Why would you do that?

BRITT

Because... He wanted-- Because of you.

JOE

Come on. I have not given you any grief about him for a long time. That football comment I made before--

BRITT

Not like that. We were at the place. Where you need to either go forward or-- When I said-- When I said maybe you should spend more time at the house, I meant... I was thinking... maybe we should go back to counseling.

JOE

I could not have heard that right.

BRITT

The more time goes by, the older the boys get... I started to wonder if I hadn't given it enough of a chance, if I threw in the towel too quickly. If there's a chance to be a family again... I broke up with him, so that I could ask you... to □ try.

JOE

Whoa.

BRITT

There you go again.

JOE

You caught me off guard.

BRITT

And...

JOE

And I don't really like you thinking that it didn't work out, so you can just ask me to "try" again.

BRITT

I broke up with him.

JOE

After what, like a year and a half? Just like that. Why?

BRITT
This is why.

JOE
Whoa.

BRITT
That's not the reaction I was looking for.

JOE
B, I've spent the past two years living without you, getting used to the idea of living without you, convincing myself that I had to live without you. But it's been a while since I've reached across the bed in my sleep.

BRITT
...I waited too long.

JOE
No. I just-- It's like a dream or something.

BRITT
A good dream.

JOE searches Britt's face for signs that this is a joke.

JOE
You're serious.

BRITT
You need time to think about it. But if you consider--

JOE
No. I still-- Yeah. Hell yeah. I'll go back to counseling.

JOE reaches across the table for BRITT's hand. Transition: BRITT and JOE stand, BRITT pulls a scarf from her purse and puts it on. They take their plates and exchange them for drinks from the stage manager, and return to the table, sitting on opposite sides.

SCENE 2

SAME RESTAURANT, TWO WEEKS LATER. JOE AND BRITT ARE SEATED WITH DRINKS. HE HAS A BEER, SHE RED WINE.

JOE

I thought you didn't like this place.

BRITT

It's not dislike. It's just always the same. Same menu. Same tablecloths. Same bartenders. Same people. Look, Mark and Miranda just walked in.

(she waves)

Look at her face. She can't figure out why we're here together.

JOE

I can't either.

BRITT

Because it's date night.

JOE

I mean here. In this place. You got first pick, why did you pick here, if it's always the same?

BRITT

It just seemed like if we were starting over, this would be a good place to start, the place we met.

JOE

But we were just here two weeks ago.

BRITT

That wasn't a date. It was a meeting.

JOE

What's the difference?

BRITT

We have drinks.

JOE

[come on]

BRITT

You like it here. I thought you'd be happy.

JOE

You're trying to put coins in my love bank.

BRITT

I am not trying to put coins in your love bank.

JOE

Yes, you are. You're trying to do something nice so that I'll ch-ching... ring it up in the love bank.

BRITT

Next time I won't bother.

JOE

I appreciate it. I just don't like this whole date night idea.

BRITT

A lot of my friends have date nights. And the counselor said it works well, especially for couples who have trouble finding time to spend together.

JOE

They should just call it what it is: Sex night.

BRITT

This is so not sex night.

JOE

I thought we were getting back together.

BRITT

And that means sex?

JOE

Usually.

BRITT

Okay, it's a process.

JOE

That sex is a part of. Maybe the best part.

BRITT

And it will be.

JOE

When?

BRITT

When it's--

JOE

You don't trust me.

BRITT

I don't see it that way.

JOE

You're not going to let me in your bed because you don't trust me.

BRITT

I just don't want to rush.

JOE

So we have dates and they're just... dates?

BRITT

Yes, this is a date. We're starting over, Joe, not picking up where we left off. If we pick up where we left off, we're going to end up in the same place.

JOE

We are in the same place.

BRITT

But it's a do-over. This time, we don't end up in bed at the end of the night.

JOE

I don't see how that's a good thing.

BRITT

Can we talk about the rules?

JOE

You're sucking the fun out of this.

BRITT

There have to be ground rules.

JOE

Can't we just wing it?

BRITT

First rule: No cellphones. Unless it's the sitter.

JOE

Just give her the number of where we're gonna be, like our parents used to.

BRITT

The cell is easier.

JOE

You're the one with the rules.

BRITT

Next rule.

JOE
How many are there?

BRITT
No flirting.

JOE
We're dating and I can't flirt with you?

BRITT
□No flirting with anybody else. No waitresses.

JOE
The marriage counselor didn't say anything about that.

BRITT
No wandering eye. No wandering anything. That's my rule.

JOE
Then I get to make a rule.

BRITT
Go ahead.

JOE
No crying. No matter what we end up talking about, no crying.

BRITT
I can't help it if I cry.

JOE
But if you start crying, that's it, so keep it and check.

BRITT
Okay, then no farting. No burping.

JOE
I can't help--

BRITT
Fair is fair.

JOE
Okay. No talking about other guys. No Jerry boy.

BRITT
Or any of the 700 hundred women/

JOE
You exaggerate.

BRITT

/you've dated in the past two years. And...and the counselor did say this, no talking about the infidelity.

JOE

We talked about it in counseling.

BRITT

But not on dates. We need to stay neutral. Or even better... positive. Save the negative stuff for the sessions. Thank you for being on time, by the way.

JOE

That's a pretty backhanded way to get a nickel.

BRITT

And you smell good.

JOE

That's the best you got.

BRITT

Well, you do.

JOE

So is it going to be okay for me to sleep over?

BRITT

What?

JOE

Will the boys freak, do you think?

BRITT

That's a premature discussion.

JOE

But I thought--

BRITT

We settled that.

JOE

You settled it.

BRITT

It'll happen. When it feels right.

JOE

B, we've known each other for like fifteen years. It feels right.

BRITT

Not yet.

JOE

You're gonna make me jump through hoops.

BRITT

It's not the most important thing. I mean, we know that works.

JOE

I'm not going to feel like we're back together until we're back together.

BRITT

I just think we should wait.

JOE

Until when? Second date? Tenth date? What's the rule?

BRITT

We'll know when it's right.

JOE

It'll make us closer.

BRITT

Or make it easier to pretend.

JOE

Come on...

BRITT

If I hadn't jumped into bed with you on our first date, maybe you never would have called me again. Maybe we wouldn't have ever gotten married.

JOE

I don't see what the big deal is.

BRITT

We should save it for the counseling session. Try saying something positive, like the counselor suggested.

JOE

You look really hot.

BRITT

Joe.

JOE

All right, all right. I really had a great time with the kids while you were away.

BRITT

Yeah. They said.

JOE

And you're right; it is so different now! Trying to get them up for school is not easy. I gave Zane a gold star on his reward chart for being ready two minutes early. I hope that's okay.

BRITT

It's fine.

JOE

And I can't believe they have homework in grammar school! And Matt can really read! Zane's good, too, but Matt...Wow.

BRITT

Yeah.

JOE

Okay, what. I'm being positive.

BRITT

And I'm trying not to lose my nickels.

JOE looks confused.

BRITT

I'm trying not to be negative.

JOE

About what?

BRITT

I came home from an exhausting three days away to a disaster. There were clothes everywhere, dishes piled up, notes in the backpack asking for notes explaining why the boys were late to school--

JOE

Yeah, we kind of overslept.

BRITT

Maybe they wouldn't oversleep if you'd get them to bed on time.

JOE

We were having fun. The game went into extra innings.

BRITT

But they have a bedtime! They're seven and eight years old! They don't get to stay up just because you decide they should watch a game!

JOE

When I'm in charge, I get to make those decisions. I'm their father.

BRITT

So act like one.

JOE

Quit making a thing out of it. It was just a couple of days, they're all safe, and the world didn't end.

BRITT

They still have chores, and homework, and rules to follow whether it's a couple of days or couple of years or the rest of their lives. God, you just don't get it.

JOE

I get that you're overreacting. You asked me to watch them while you were away, and I stepped up.

BRITT

Stepped up? That doesn't sound like the guy who was telling me he wanted to see them more. You know what? You are acting like a babysitter, except wait, my babysitters do a better job.

JOE

I was happy to be there. And they were happy to be with me.

BRITT

Fine. But if this is going to work, you've got to work with me.

JOE

Which means follow your rules.

BRITT

Just acknowledge that there have to be rules.

JOE

I don't want rules. You've got rules for everything. Can't you ever just be?

BRITT starts to cry.

JOE

Don't. Don't do that.

BRITT

I can't help it.

JOE

I make one fucking rule. One. Why are we even doing this? How am I supposed to trust you? How do I know Jerry Joker/

BRITT

/Gerald!/

JOE

/didn't dump you and now you're just terrified to be alone?
Do you need money?

BRITT

No! You're not listening!

JOE starts to put on his coat.

BRITT

Where are you going?

JOE

You broke a rule. I'm out of here.

JOE walks out.

BRITT

Joe...

BRITT see Miranda staring.

BRITT

(under her breath)

Fuck you, Miranda.

BRITT throws some money on the table for the drinks and walks out.
Transition: BRITT re-enters with JOE, now both wearing jackets.

SCENE 3

ONE WEEK LATER. FANCY RESTAURANT LOBBY.

BRITT and Joe enter.

JOE

I really am sorry I was late.

BRITT

I just don't get it. I mean, I got stuck on the phone with this stupid chef, who educated me about the subtleties of variations in pepper color for two hours! By the time I got off the phone, I had fifteen minutes before you were supposed to come, and I was still ready on time.

JOE

I said I was sorry.

BRITT

I thought you weren't going to show. That even though/

JOE

/I said at the counselor's/

BRITT

/you said at the counselor's you were going to show that you were still mad.

JOE

I meant what I said there. I'm sorry for what happened last time.

BRITT

No, you were right. You did help me out and I could have been more grateful.

JOE

But they're my kids. I should help out. And instead of being defensive, I maybe should have realized that this is what you do every day. And that it's kind of tough.

BRITT

You'd get used to it. If you tried.

JOE

Maybe. So what do you think of this place?

BRITT

It looks nice, but you didn't need to bring me here.

JOE

I felt like I owed it to you.

BRITT

Who's trying to put coins in the love bank now?

JOE

I just want to forget about last week and start over.

BRITT

Joe, really... can you afford this?

JOE

As long as they take Visa.

BRITT

Please don't tell me you've got that thing run up again.

JOE

Okay.

BRITT

You'll still be paying for this dinner when the boys are in college.

JOE

Can't you just enjoy it and let me worry about paying for it?

BRITT

Instead of me eating dinner, guilt will be eating me.

JOE

You can't even let me make it up to you without turning it into a thing.

BRITT

I'm not turning it into a thing. I'm trying to help you.

JOE

I don't need your help.

BRITT

Okay. Let's just get our table and sit down. Let's hope they held our reservation.

JOE

Reservation?

BRITT

You didn't make a reservation.

JOE

...No.

BRITT

You can't expect to walk into a place like this on a Saturday night without a reservation.

JOE

I didn't know. I don't usually go to places like this.

BRITT

Joe, I don't need a place like this.

JOE

I screwed up.

BRITT

You want to go to Mo's?

JOE

Yeah.

Transition: BRITT and JOE take off their coats, and walk downstage; they are in an art museum.

SCENE 4

ONE WEEK LATER. ART MUSEUM.

BRITT and JOE are strolling along.
Britt is sick with a very bad cold. SHE
coughs violently.

JOE
You really do sound awful.

BRITT
On a scale between one and shitty, I've felt better.

JOE
Have you called the doctor?

BRITT
It's just a cold.

JOE
Let's go back to the house. I'll make you chicken soup.

BRITT
You don't know how to make chicken soup.

JOE
You got a can opener, right?

BRITT
You just don't want to stay here, which isn't fair, because I
picked it.

JOE
I do! But, if you're sick, I'd make the sacrifice for you.

BRITT
Sacrifice is a strong word.

JOE
I meant I enjoy spending the time with you.

BRITT
It's not so bad, is it? (coughs)

JOE
Come on, let me take care of you.

BRITT
Not yet. We haven't seen the O'Keefe exhibit yet, and that's
why we came. There

(she points to a sign, and they
head upstage)

This way.

BRITT stops, points.

BRITT
There.

JOE
That?

BRITT
That.

JOE
It's just flowers.

BRITT
It is so much more than that. How does it make you feel?

JOE
Like I'm looking at flowers. How does it make you feel?

BRITT
Alive.

JOE
It's just a picture.

BRITT
It's so full of... She never painted a single person, not even a single living creature, but there's just this unrestrained... life. It can't even be contained in the frame. The flowers are bursting to get out. To grow and live.

JOE
Maybe she just ran out of room on the canvas. Just misjudged and it doesn't mean anything at all.

BRITT
(pointing to the description)
Here, read this.

JOE
Can't you just read it to me?

BRITT
(you're pathetic)
Basically, she could take something small, like this pebble, and make it larger than life. You just can't look at it and be impassive. But always with such starkness and precision. Nobody else has really been able to imitate that. And color. Her flowers... She always denied that they intentionally resembled female genitalia--

JOE

What?

BRITT

You weren't listening.

JOE

Yes, yes, I was. You were talking about... life...

BRITT

There look at that... Do you see it? It's this beautiful, life-affirming flower, but sensual...

JOE

(turning his head)

I guess it does sort of look like--

BRITT

Don't say it. It's better unspoken.

JOE

What good's a secret you don't share?

BRITT

You're missing the point.

JOE

Uh-uh. Here: tell me something only you know. A secret you never shared.

BRITT

Okay.

JOE

You have one already?

BRITT

Sure.

JOE

It comes to you that easily?

BRITT

Yes.

JOE

Well?

BRITT coughs again.

BRITT

I really am sick.

JOE

I'll take you home, after you tell me the secret.

BRITT

It's no big deal. I can look at this
(gestures to the flower
painting)

and write an instant erotica story in my head. Really hot
steamy stuff.

JOE

Yeah?

BRITT

Oh yeah.

JOE

From looking at that?

BRITT

Yep.

JOE

See, that's fun! Tell me a story.

BRITT

I will not.

JOE

You have any written down?

BRITT

No.

JOE

Why not?

BRITT

People might want to read it.

JOE

I want to read it.

BRITT

If I wanted people to read it, I would write it down.

JOE

I bet you told Biscotti Boy.

BRITT

Why can't you call him Gerald?

JOE

Why can't he just call it a cookie?

BRITT

Because it's not just a cookie. Just like this is not just a... an image of female genitalia.

JOE

So you did tell him.

BRITT

No talking about exes. So look over here. Later, after her husband died--he was married when they met and it was a scandalous affair. But they loved each other, and he took hundreds of photographs of her, sensual, serious, even nudes.

JOE

Where are those?

BRITT

I thought you would like this. You just have to look and experience.

JOE

Why does it matter if I like it? I'm okay with you liking it.

BRITT

Because... what if you wanted to bring the boys here some day? Because they showed an interest in art and wanted to come. Or because they should know something about art, just to be well-rounded.

JOE

Then you could bring them.

BRITT

What if I couldn't? I mean, I take them to Pop Warner practice and watch games with them sometimes. You have to stop thinking that just because something's not on your "approved list," it's worthless.

JOE

I don't do that.

BRITT

So Matt can quit baseball and take gymnastics?

JOE

(touche)

If I promise that in some imaginary world where Zane decides he can't live without looking at paintings of soup cans, I will take him and try not act like I'd rather be eating toenails, can we not turn this into a thing?

BRITT

Yes.

JOE

Then I promise.

BRITT

Thank you. I'm giving you a quarter for that.

(beat)

Can I tell you the rest?

JOE

[I have a choice?]

BRITT

So after he died, she moved to New Mexico, and she got into painting bones. These bleached out animal bones--here, like this one--but still, see behind it, just these radiant bursts of color. Life after death.

BRITT gets teary.

JOE

Tears? Seriously?

BRITT

I'm sorry. Their relationship was so romantic, and to be able to express it like that, to have it affect her work so profoundly...

JOE

Hey, here's a secret... I have been having trouble concentrating at work all week because... I start thinking about you, sitting all alone in my cubicle, and it's all I can do--

BRITT

I really don't feel well at all.

JOE

I knew it. All this walking around isn't good for you. I'm taking you home and getting you in bed.

BRITT

Joe--

JOE

To bed. I'll send the sitter home and stay with the boys, and you get some rest.

BRITT

Thank you.

JOE moves to kiss BRITT on the lips.

BRITT

Sick.

JOE

Oh, right.

JOE kisses BRITT on the forehead, puts his arm around her, and they walk out. Transition: BRITT dumps her scarf and jacket, and pulls her hair back. JOE gets rid of his jacket, and puts on a ballcap, as they approach the table. They flip the tablecloth, which is a different color on the reverse side. Stage manager places a bowl of peanuts.

SCENE 5

ONE WEEK LATER. A CASUAL BAR, SIMILAR TO MO'S, BUT WITH SMALL DIFFERENCES, LIKE A DIFFERENT COLORED TABLECLOTH. A GAME IS ON. THERE IS LIGHT NOISE OF A GAME IN THE BACKGROUND, GLASSES AND DISHES CLINKING AS IT IS FAIRLY CROWDED.

BRITT and JOE enter. JOE motions to
□unseen wait staff.

JOE

Can we take this one?

He gets the affirmative, and they take seats at a table that has a bowl of peanuts. There are shells on the table, and Joe sweeps them onto the floor. Throughout the scene, JOE throws his shells on the floor, while BRITT stacks them neatly in front of her.

BRITT

Why are we here?

JOE

You wanted different.

BRITT

It doesn't feel much different.

JOE

They have a good vegetarian menu.

BRITT

At a sports bar? Mozzarella sticks and french fries are not-- Oh my god, there's a game on. You picked this place because there's a game on.

JOE

We're one game from the series!

BRITT

That's what all those car flags are! I kept thinking it was a busy week for funerals.

JOE

The boys should be watching this. Have they seen any of the games?

BRITT

You're not taking this seriously.

JOE

It was my turn to pick. We can still talk and I'll just sneak a look every once in a while. Let me just-- He was safe! He was safe!

(turns to Britt)

He was safe.

BRITT

Why does it matter?

JOE

That could be a pivotal play!

BRITT

One bad call.

JOE

What if it's a one-run game? What if it's that close? What if not being ahead that one run means they tie it up in the eighth with a sacrifice fly? And then nobody scores in the ninth. And then it goes into extra innings. And we score a run but now the other team is up, and our pitcher is tired and they tie it up on a wild pitch. And then on a full count, their batter hits a grounder that goes between the first baseman's legs, and the winning run is scored. Game over.

BRITT

That would never happen.

JOE

That did happen! And when you're on the right side of it, there's nothing like the rush. And when you're not... It's life. Just like your art.

BRITT

The way I see it, no matter how the game turns out, our lives haven't changed and those players still get paid. Too much.

JOE

You don't get it.

BRITT

At least I'm not one of those women who's all about hot asses in tight baseball pants.

JOE

If you were, you'd watch with me. You could at least watch with me.

BRITT

All right. Go get me a drink.

JOE goes to the bar. While he's gone, BRITT pulls out and checks her phone, looks disappointed. JOE comes back with two bottled beers.

JOE

What'd I miss?

BRITT

There are seven TVs in here.

JOE

It was a trick question. You weren't watching!

BRITT

You weren't here. I can't watch with you if you're not here.

JOE

Technicality.

BRITT

Technicalities are important. When a plane crashes, it's very often because of a technicality.

JOE

On CSI, criminals always get caught because of technicalities.

BRITT

See?

JOE

There's no such thing as a perfect crime.

BRITT

The accidents. Those are the perfect crimes.

JOE

If you watched CSI, you'd know that it's getting harder and harder to plan a good accident.

BRITT

Plotting against your boss again?

JOE

It passes the days. But seriously, you know... When things were bad, really bad, didn't you ever... think about that... Like if there was an accident?

BRITT

You were going to hire someone to kill me?

JOE

No! Like a plane, or a car. A horse.

BRITT

A horse. Here.

JOE

Sure. In the middle of the day, it tears through your office trampling everyone on the way to the vending machine.

BRITT

Including me.

JOE

Your daily M&Ms.

BRITT

And that's exactly when the horse would come trotting through.

JOE

Galloping. Trotting prob'ly wouldn't do the job.

BRITT

The jo-- You really thought about that?

JOE

What, you didn't?

BRITT

(shrugs)

Maybe.

JOE

How?

BRITT

Autoerotic asphyxiation, but what would I tell the kids?

JOE

Telling the kids would be the hard part.

□

BRITT

We shouldn't be talking about this.

JOE

Yeah. How was work today?

BRITT

Worked from home. Took my laptop into the sunroom, opened all the windows... And fell asleep.

JOE

And you get paid for that.

BRITT

The cardinals are back. New ones. The old ones must have...
They mate for life, you know, but in the wild that's only
about three years.

JOE

Piece a cake.

BRITT

Right?

JOE

But I guess I'd still rather live longer and take the risk.

BRITT

Me, too.

JOE

And who knows? I'm trying for both here.

BRITT

(holds up her bottle to toast)

We just might do it.

JOE

(clinks his bottle)

Let's dance.

BRITT

This isn't a dance place.

JOE

So what?

BRITT

Joe, even under good circumstances, and by good I mean I've
had at least four vodkas and they're playing "I Wanna Be
Sedated" somewhere where there is an actual dance floor, I
rarely dance.

JOE

Make an exception. I wanna hold you.

BRITT

I'll feel silly.

JOE

Stop thinking about it, and just do it.

BRITT looks reluctant, and JOE gives her a woeful look that makes her laugh. She stands up but is hesitant.

BRITT

There are so many people here, I feel--
□ (grabs Joe's arm)
Oh my god, Joe.

JOE

Shit, my arm.

BRITT

Look over there.

JOE

Where?

BRITT

At the bar. At the bar!

JOE

What?

BRITT

Look!

JOE

I'm looking!

BRITT

Oh my god.

JOE

What the fuck?

BRITT

Sh!

JOE

Don't shush me.

BRITT

You'll attract attention.

JOE

Okay, okay. Can you loosen the death grip?

BRITT

Sit down. Be casual.

JOE

Is this because you don't want to dance?

BRITT

No! Don't be obvious. Just look... I said, don't be obvious! Just look over at the bar, in the corner. The guy with the Yankees cap.

JOE

The guy with the Yankees cap pulled down over his face?

BRITT

YES! See him?

JOE

No, 'cause he's got a Yankees cap pulled down over his face.

BRITT

Wait until he looks up to talk to the bartender. Just keep--

JOE grabs BRITT's arm; she lets out a yelp.

JOE

Oh my god!

BRITT

I know!

JOE

That's Bruce.

BRITT

I KNOW!

JOE

What do we do?

BRITT

Nothing.

JOE

Bruce Springsteen is sitting right there and we're not going to do anything? We're not going to shake his hand or ask him a question or get an autograph or ask him why he never responded to our wedding invitation?

BRITT

If he's sitting right there with his hat pulled down, he doesn't want to be bothered.

JOE

I'll be casual. Low-key.

BRITT

You have no idea how to do that.

JOE

I can't not go over there. Do you know how long I've wanted to just meet the man, say hello? I can't not go over there.

BRITT

I'm not going over there.

JOE

You'll be sorry.

BRITT

It's not like he's going to write a song about you, or become your best friend.

JOE

So what? It'll be fun. Come with me.

BRITT

No, you go.

JOE

Come on.

BRITT

What are you going to say?

JOE

I'll figure it out when I get there.

BRITT

Go now, while we're at bat.

JOE

I'm going.

BRITT

So go.

JOE

Last chance.

BRITT

Go!

JOE

Give me a pen.

BRITT gets one from her purse, JOE grabs a napkin from the table and exits into the audience, where he chooses someone to act as "Bruce." They chat quietly, and he tells the man to wave at BRITT. BRITT waves back excitedly.

"BRUCE" signs the napkin. BRITT is dying, JOE and "BRUCE" shake hands and JOE returns to the stage.

BRITT

What did he say?

JOE

Thirty years I've been waiting for that moment.

BRITT

What did he say?

JOE

Thirty years.

BRITT

Joe!

JOE

So I went up and I said, "My name is Joe Roberts."

BRITT

Oh my God.

JOE

And he looked at me and said "I wrote a song about you."

BRITT

Not really you.

JOE

No, but it's still my name in the song, isn't it? So I told him that my wife/

BRITT

/Wife?/

JOE

/And I are huge fans, seen him like hundreds of times, and that's when he waved at you.

BRITT

That was cool.

JOE

And I told him that I wanted "Should I Fall Behind" for our wedding but/

BRITT

/We didn't use that because everybody uses that./

JOE

/that the church wouldn't allow it. And I told him that, you know, things were kind of rough between us and that we were trying to work things out and--

BRITT

Oh god, you told him our life story.

JOE

No, it was cool because I told him things were going okay and there was hope, you know, and--

BRITT

What did he say?

JOE

He said "That's good."

BRITT

Really?

JOE

Yeah.

BRITT and JOE look back over and wave.

BRITT

Did you ask him about the wedding invitation?

JOE

That would have been embarrassing.

(hands her the autograph, which
has been made out to her)

This is for you. It's no handshake, but--

BRITT

"To Britt... Hang on to this guy. Bruce." Oh my God, we're friends with Bruce Springsteen!

BRITT and JOE wave in Bruce's
direction.

JOE

No complaints about this place now?

BRITT

Nobody's going to believe this.

In his excitement, JOE grabs BRITT for a dance and she's ready to go along. JOE kisses BRITT, and she kisses him back excitedly. JOE seizes the moment.

JOE

You had enough of this place?

BRITT

You don't want to stay with Bruce?

JOE

Nah. Let's get out of here.

JOE and BRITT exit, excited and with sexual tension, can't keep their hands off each other. Transition: They stop abruptly. Joe removes his ballcap, and Britt puts on a vest over her shirt. They pull chairs from the side of the stage and sit. They are in a theater.

SCENE 6

ONE WEEK LATER. A SMALL THEATER. JOE AND BRITT IN SEATS FACING AUDIENCE. BRITT IS SLEEPING AS JOE WATCHES THE FINAL SCENE OF *CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF*.

MAGGIE (PRE-RECORDED)

Oh, you weak, beautiful people who give up with such grace. What you need is someone to take hold of you--gently, with love, and hand your life back to you, like something gold you let go of--I do love you, Brick, I do.

BRICK (PRE-RECORDED)

Wouldn't it be funny if that were true?

Music plays as play ends. JOE looks slightly puzzled, and claps as actors presumably take their bows in front of him. JOE notices that Britt is not clapping, and turns to see that she is asleep.

JOE

Britt?

BRITT doesn't budge.

JOE

Britt, wake up.

BRITT

I fell asleep?

JOE

You fell asleep at your own thing! Ha! I have never fallen asleep at a baseball game.

BRITT

You win.

JOE

How much did you miss?

BRITT

I don't know. But it's okay. I know how it ends.

JOE

So he was like gay, right?

BRITT

They never really spell that out.

JOE

But that's why he wouldn't sleep with her, right?

BRITT

It's more complicated than that.

JOE

But that makes sense, if he was gay.

BRITT

So complicated that the play has had three different endings. Oh, which one was this?

JOE

They were gonna sleep together.

BRITT

But did it seem like they had genuine affection for each other, or like they were maybe just tolerating each other?

JOE

They seemed... I don't know. They were gonna do it.

BRITT

They always are going to do it, but-- Never mind.

(looks around as if to see

people leaving)

We should get out of here.

BRITT and JOE stand up, grab their coats, and exit to stage left, which is outside. The walk across the stage slowly through dialogue, as if to a parking lot, stopping at some point. BRITT reaches into her bag for her keys, and holds them until the end of the scene.

JOE

So why would he do it if he didn't want to?

BRITT

We don't have to talk about it.

JOE

No, really. I want to understand.

BRITT

I don't know.

JOE

Yes, you do. Tell me.

BRITT

He feels... defeated. He wants--

JOE

Defeated by what?

BRITT

The circumstances. His father is dying. He's a drunk. He wants something he can't have, I guess.

JOE

He's giving up.

BRITT

Giving in, more like.

JOE

...Is that what you did the other night?

BRITT

What? It wasn't great, I know but I--

JOE

No but. You didn't want the babysitter to see me, and you didn't want the boys to hear me, and you didn't want me in your bed so we had to do it on the couch, and then... you didn't want me.

BRITT

I did, I--

JOE

I know what it feels like to be wanted. That wasn't it.

BRITT

I'm sorry.

JOE

We were there, Britt. On the way home... We couldn't wait.
□And it felt right, you know it did.

BRITT

It did. And then it didn't.

JOE

Why? We were there. But then I touched you, and it was like a switch flipped. Where'd you go?

BRITT

Nowhere. I went nowhere.

JOE

Maybe to that place where all you can think about is me with-- what went wrong between us. I don't want you to think about that.

BRITT

I wasn't. I promise.

JOE

Then what?

BRITT

It was the first time. It just felt a little strange.

JOE

Strange like I'm not Jasper.

BRITT

Gerald! His name is Gerald!

(beat)

And... and we can't expect to get right back into our old groove.

JOE

It was a good groove. Hell, a great groove. But the other night... we couldn't find it.

BRITT

We will. I just... lost the feeling.

JOE

So you just went along.

BRITT

It seemed like the right thing to do.

JOE

A service call seemed right.

BRITT

...

JOE

I want more than that.

BRITT

I want this to work.

JOE

(beat)

I saw the whole thing in my head. It was gonna be like when we were so close, when it was so intense that we wanted more even while we were doing it. And then I was going to hold you all night, tucked into my chest like we used to. And when the kids came in in the morning, we were going to tell them, and then I was gonna make pancakes for everybody and--

BRITT

Joe, come on. I've been tired.

JOE

Maybe you just can't stand for me to touch you because you're still angry.

BRITT

Okay, I am angry. I'm angry because you called the cops on the neighbor's kid.

JOE

He shot a BB gun at Zane! And you're changing the subject.

BRITT

It was a pellet gun, and Zane was fine.

JOE

He could've taken his eye out.

BRITT

I was very upset, but I talked to Susan, and we agreed the boys wouldn't play together anymore.

JOE

That kid's a menace. I was protecting my son.

BRITT

But I still live on that street.

JOE

I don't care. I'd do it again. What kind of message do we send if we don't, that violence is okay?

BRITT

You want to talk about behavior that sends messages? About looking the other way?

JOE

See. You are still angry.

BRITT

We shouldn't be talking about this outside of his office.

JOE

We're adults. We can talk things out without him sticking his nose into it all. Maybe there are things I don't want to say in there.

BRITT

What things?

JOE

I don't know.

BRITT

Then why are we arguing about it?

JOE

Because I'm frustrated.

BRITT

You would like things to move more quickly.

JOE

Now you sound like him.

BRITT

We can't force it. Even if we can picture it, the future, us, a family, there's healing that has--

JOE

Healing. That's his word for forgiveness.

BRITT

It's his word for healing.

JOE

Okay, okay, yes! I would like things to move along. I would like to feel like you're looking ahead instead of back. I would like your heart to tell your brain to shut the fuck up, because I deserve more than a damned service call. I want my life back.

BRITT

I thought this was about our life.

JOE

My life with you. The kids. Our life.

BRITT

Oh my god, Joe, it was one night! I was tired. It's not easy sometimes with the boys. And then after a full day, I get them to bed and I have my own work to do.

JOE

So it's about me again. I'm not doing enough.

BRITT

That's not where I was going--

JOE

And you know how you know I'm not doing enough? Because you've got me on a fucking reward chart.

JOE (cont'd)

You've got Matt's and Zane's hanging there on the refrigerator, and mine is right there next to them.

BRITT

There is nothing--

JOE

It may as well be. It's in your head. Only instead of getting points off for not putting the toilet seat down, I get docked if you find a mac and cheese box in the garbage or if I let them watch too much TV. And if I help with homework or take them to the library--gold star!

BRITT

I... I just want you to see what it's like to be a father.

JOE

I am a father! I know what it's like!

BRITT

When you want to. Not all the way. Not enough to know whose fingernails need to be cut while he's sleeping, or who worries that gravity's going to disappear--

JOE

So tell me.

BRITT

I shouldn't have to.

JOE

No, no, no, no. You don't get to dismiss me like that. If I don't know every little detail, it's because you kicked me out and you don't tell me. But I've driven them to the emergency room, and cleaned up piles of puke when you were gagging too much to do it yourself, and I got in that second grade bully's face last year, didn't I? Like it or not, I am their father, and you can't measure how much I love them by my score on some... trivia quiz.

BRITT

Should I measure it by the number of nights you didn't come home?

JOE

That-- Has nothing to do with the boys.

BRITT

You're right. I'm sorry. But you have to admit you weren't around much.

JOE

I'll be around. I will.

BRITT

Words.

JOE

What the hell do you want from me? Is it gonna take a freaking contract? Signed in blood that I will never disappoint you. That you can kick me out if I don't what? Teach them one new vocabulary word each day? Is that the healing you need? What about me?

(beat)

Surprise, Britt. I'm still just a regular guy. I like burgers and baseball and beer, and at the end of a long day at the cube farm, I like to have dinner with my family, maybe throw the ball around with my sons a little, watch some TV, and fall asleep next to the woman I love. Because I do love you, and I love those kids, and fuck you if you don't like the way I do it.

BRITT

That's it? All you've got is "you're doing the best you can"? Having children is a huge responsibility. I don't think I realized how much until I started doing it practically alone.

JOE

You know I'm always here if you need me.

BRITT

If I need you? You want to be the backup parent? What if you were always needed? I mean what if-- What if?

JOE

That could have happened when we were married. We could have both been killed in a car crash. And they would have been with your sister... ah, which would have been okay, because she's in a book club. I thought this was about us, Britt, you trusting me with you, not the kids.

BRITT

You're worried I don't trust you?

JOE

Of course.

BRITT

Oh, Joe. I trust you. I have to. And... I forgive you.

JOE

You-- Forgive me for--

BRITT

All of it.

JOE
You just don't fucking quit, do you?

BRITT
I thought you would like it.

JOE
What are we doing?

BRITT
It's a gift.

JOE
You should go. I'll watch until you get to your car.

BRITT
Joe, please--

JOE
Don't.

BRITT starts to walk toward her car,
goes back and gives JOE a kiss on the
lips. BRITT exits. Transition: JOE
pulls a park bench onstage, puts his
ballcap and jacket back on, sits.

This is a portion of the play. To obtain a complete reading copy or to arrange performance rights, please see [the Flowers In The Desert information page.](#)